

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

4th December 2012

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 WEST KENT LEADER PROGRAMME – UPDATE

To provide an update on the future funding of the West Kent Leader Programme.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 I reported to your Board meeting in July regarding concerns about the funding of the West Kent Leader Programme, an initiative which directs European funding support to local projects that are judged to be of direct benefit to the rural economy. Following budgets cuts to the programme imposed by DEFRA last year, the West Kent Local Action Group (LAG) has now allocated all of its available funding to beneficial local projects. There remains approximately 10-15 projects in the pipeline which now cannot be supported and in addition, those enquiring about possible grants are now being advised that there is no longer any grant support available.

1.1.2 Following discussion at the last meeting of this Board, it was resolved that I should write to the Minister on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Communities to seek additional funding for the programme given that it is known that similar programmes in other parts of the country have surplus funding available and may not be able to spend this prior to the formal end of the programme in 2014/15. A copy of this letter is attached as Annex 1 to this report.

1.2 Update

1.2.1 A reply to the Borough Council's letter was received from Jim Paice MP, Minister for Agriculture and Food, on 23 August 2012. A copy of his reply is attached as Annex 2 to this report. This indicates that the Department will be reviewing the performance of all LAG groups across the country and that some redistribution of funding may be considered as part of that process. At the time of writing this report, no formal notification has been received about the outcome of this process. A verbal update will be given at the meeting. If no further response s forthcoming, it is suggested that the Borough Council seeks a further update form the Minister on this issue.

1.3 Leader Project Tour

- 1.3.1 A tour of rural businesses that have benefitted from financial support from the West Kent Leader programme took place on 17th October. The Borough Council was represented by Cllrs Mrs Holland, Cure and Luker. The itinerary included visits to Mereworth Wood Yard, Weald Granary at Mereworth, The Inn Store at Matfield, Groombridge Farm, Chiddingstone Castle, Westerham Brewery and Winterdale Cheese at Fairseat. Those on the tour were able to readily appreciate the positive impact which the Leader grant has had on those businesses as well as the enthusiasm and commitment of their people that run them.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 As set out above.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 Without further funding being made available, the West Kent Programme will need to be closed a year earlier than originally planned. This will result in a loss of continuity between this programme and any successor programme.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of this report.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That, should no formal reply be received prior to the Board meeting, a further letter **BE SENT** to the Minister for Agriculture and Food seeking an update on the issue of Leader Programme funding.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

David Hughes
Chief Executive

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	Grants are awarded on the basis of economic and social benefit only.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	n/a	
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.