

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**4 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 BUSINESS SUPPORT INITIATIVES**

**To outline a proposed pilot programme of business seminars to take place in the period to April 2013.**

**1.1 Business Support**

1.1.1 The Borough Council offers a number of business support initiatives which are funded from a small budget held by the Chief Executive. Primarily, this funds:

- Provision of an on-line grants database to assist businesses and social enterprise
- One to one business support for start-up or recently formed businesses which are provided by Enterprise First and The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Occasional business training seminars on topics such as marketing, business survival and increasing business turnover.

1.1.2 The West Kent Partnership also plays a role in supporting business through initiatives such as sponsorship of the West Kent Business Awards, the West Kent Leader Programme and business engagement events including an annual West Kent Partnership conference.

1.1.3 Given the ongoing challenging economic situation for our local businesses, our collective ambition for 2013/14 is to pool the limited economic development resources available to the three West Kent districts and the West Kent Partnership to promote a single and clear business support 'offer' for West Kent businesses. This will require a review of what we currently provide individually and the development of a limited commissioning process to secure the business support services that are most effective and needed locally from the best provider or providers. That joint process will commence in early 2013.

**1.2 West Kent Pilot Programme – Business Seminars**

- 1.2.1 Funding has recently been made available from Kent County Council to assist with the delivery of business support initiatives in West Kent for the remainder of this financial year. This is a welcome contribution, in recognition of the need to support West Kent businesses as well as those already supported by KCC in north and east Kent. It is anticipated that further funding might then be available from the County Council in 2013/14. Whilst the County Council has contributed in the past to the general budget of the West Kent Partnership, this is the first time that significant business support funding from the County Council has been made available to the West Kent area.
- 1.2.2 In order to inform the commissioning of new services, the West Kent districts have decided that, via the West Kent Partnership, a series of West Kent business support seminars will be commissioned for the period January to April 2013. There will be at least five seminars organised on different business topics, held in different locations across the West Kent area, and organised by different providers. An evaluation of the success of these seminars, in terms of numbers engaged and the quality of feedback from participants, will be used to inform a wider support programme for 2013/14.
- 1.2.3 It is anticipated that, in addition to a series of business support seminars, the wider West Kent programme for 2013/14 could involve an enhanced business counselling service for start-up and recently formed small businesses, a web-based West Kent business support portal and a programme (to be developed) specifically to support home-based businesses which are numerous in the West Kent area.
- 1.2.4 I will report to the next meeting of this Board in March 2013 on the outcome of the pilot programme and on the commissioning intentions for 2013/14 as set out above.

### **1.3 Legal Implications**

- 1.3.1 None

### **1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.4.1 As set out above.

### **1.5 Risk Assessment**

- 1.5.1 N/A

### **1.6 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.6.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

### **1.7 Recommendation**

1.7.1 That the West Kent pilot business support programme **BE ENDORSED** and a further report on outcomes **BE MADE** to the next meeting of this Board.

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

<b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation of impacts</b>
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	Business support initiatives of the kind described in this report are open to all sections of the community.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	Specific support to social enterprises is to be considered.
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.*