

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

17 July 2013

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 – UPDATE

To provide an update on the commissioning of enhanced business support services for West Kent.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A report was made to the former Communities Advisory Board in March 2013 regarding the commissioning of new business support services for West Kent. Previously the Borough Council has commissioned a business counselling service aimed at those wishing to start up in business and existing small businesses wishing to grow. Following a successful bid by the West Kent Partnership to the County Council's Regeneration Fund, funding is now available to commission additional services on a consistent basis across the three West Kent districts. The new services consist of the following activities:

- Additional 1-2-1 business counselling sessions provided in a number of locations across West Kent to ensure support is accessible and convenient for the businesses that need such advice;
- A new programme of business workshops, similarly delivered in different locations across the West Kent area covering a variety of business topics;
- Specialist support for home-based businesses, rural and land-based businesses and support for those who are currently workless and could, with encouragement, enter into self employment.

1.1.2 This report now provides an update with regard to the commissioning of the above services and further details of their proposed delivery.

1.2 Commissioning Process

1.2.1 A project specification was drawn up separately for each of the three project elements described above and a number of providers currently active in the

County were invited to submit quotations. Following an assessment panel led by officers from Kent County Council and the three West Kent districts, the Kent Invicta Chamber was successful in securing the commissions for both the 1-2-1 support service and the business seminar programme. The Chamber was selected on the basis of costs, the quality and range of the proposed services being offered and their local track record of delivery in these areas. Discussions are now in hand with the Chamber to bring forward those new services as quickly as possible under the direction of an adopted service level agreement.

- 1.2.2 For this Borough, both services are to be provided in both the Malling and Tonbridge areas to ensure good access for local businesses. The new services will be formally launched at the meeting of the West Kent Partnership in 19th July 2013 and additional marketing and publicity will then follow on from this. The intention is to start delivery of these new services by 1st September 2013. I will circulate further details of the new services to Members of the Board when these become available. The Borough Council will assist with the marketing of these via our website and other local publicity.

1.3 Specialist Services

- 1.3.1 Although a number of providers submitted quotations to deliver the group of more specialist services described above at paragraph 1.1.1, the decision made by the commissioning group was that none of these sufficiently met the requirements to enable an offer of contract to be made. A review of the adopted approach was therefore undertaken and it was agreed that these services should be split into two separate groups (rural support and home-based business/entrepreneurship) and for these to be commissioned separately focusing on providers with more specific expertise in these specialist areas. Revised bid documents have now been prepared and quotations are being sought from a wider range of local providers but including those who were involved in the initial round. I will provide a verbal update to the Board on the outcome of this second round of bidding.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 Sevenoaks District Council is the accountable body for the West Kent Partnership and all legal issues concerning the commissioning of these services are dealt with by them.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 Commissioning new business support services on a West Kent basis has enabled better value for money to be achieved compared to the Borough Council working in isolation. The West Kent Partnership has also enabled external funding from the County Council to be secured to expand our local business support services.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 The first round of enhanced business support services will be a pilot of one year. Future services will be based on the outcome of that pilot and revisions made in the light of experience and performance against the service level agreements.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

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

1.8 Recommendation

- 1.8.1 That the West Kent Business Support Programme, as set out in this report, **BE ENDORSED** and that such services now **BE PROMOTED** locally to ensure a good take up of such services within the Borough.

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

Julie Beilby
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	All business support services will be accessible to all parts of the community.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The entrepreneurship programme is specifically aimed at those who are workless and disadvantaged.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		n/a

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.