

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

17 July 2013

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 WEST KENT LEADER PROGRAMME – UPDATE

To provide an update on progress with transitional funding for the team who manage the above programme.

1.1 West Kent Leader

1.1.1 The West Kent Leader programme, a DEFRA- funded programme which has provided grant assistance for rural and land-based businesses, is operated by a small team hosted by Sevenoaks District Council. Administration costs are covered from the fund itself and by financial contributions from the three West Kent Authorities as part of their funding for the West Kent Partnership. The team has been successful in securing some £1.6M of external investment into the area's rural economy over the last four years. As reported previously to the Communities Advisory Board, the programme is now closed to bids as all available funding has now been allocated.

1.2 Update

1.2.1 As reported previously, DEFRA has opened a transitional fund to enable the Leader teams to be retained in post so that work on preparing bids for a new Leader programme from 2015 can be undertaken. Progress on this has been slow. An initial submission by the West Kent Leader team has been made and the response from DEFRA to this has been very positive. A more detailed submission now needs to be made but further guidance from DEFRA on this is awaited.

1.2.2 DEFRA funding is, however, unlikely to cover all of the costs involved in retaining the Leader team until the new programme commences in 2015. Sevenoaks District Council, as the responsible authority for the programme, is currently exploring cost options including the use of match funding from partner organisations which could include contributions 'in kind'. A full report on this issue will be made to a future meeting of the Board when there is further clarity.

1.2.3 In addition to staffing costs, partners have been concerned that project funding for the current programme is now fully used. Whilst DEFRA has chosen not to re-

allocate funding from less successful LEADER programmes to those who would be able to spend it, some additional funding from them has recently been made available on an ad-hoc basis which has enabled two additional projects in West Kent to be supported which were 'ready to run'. It is hoped that as the final year of the 5 year programme draws to a close, further ad-hoc opportunities to obtain funding for additional local projects may come forward.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive