

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**11 September 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 local business support initiatives as discussed at the previous meeting of the Board.**

**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 The purpose of this report to provide an update on the various business support initiatives which were discussed in detail at the previous meeting of this Board. A new bid for funding submitted by the West Kent Partnership has also been made recently and an update on this initiative is also provided.

**1.2 Accelerator Plus**

1.2.1 This is the KCC loan fund aimed at small businesses with growth potential with a value of £150,000 set up as a precursor to the Escalate Fund described below. A initial bidding window for loan funding of one month was initially set up. A number of preliminary enquiries were received but some interested parties indicated that they needed more time to prepare an initial bid. The deadline was therefore extended for a further month to allow those interested to submit a formal expression of interest. Three submissions were made by the revised deadline (none from Tonbridge and Malling) and two of these are going forward to the detailed stage. One did not meet the criteria.

**1.3 Escalate**

1.3.1 This is the major Regional Growth Fund Loan Fund scheme for our area of a value of £5.5M. Work has progressing on the development of application forms, guidance and criteria and due diligence issues with a view to a formal launch of the Fund in November. In addition, whilst the overall administration costs of the loan scheme have been kept to a minimum, there was a possible need for partners, including the three West Kent districts, to make a contribution to these costs.

- 1.3.2 A detailed Delivery Plan for the programme is still being prepared and a draft of this is unlikely to be available in time for this Board meeting. On that basis, it is suggested that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, to submit any appropriate comments and observations on behalf of the Borough Council when the draft is available. A recommendation to this effect is included at the end of this report.
- 1.3.3 Further analysis of the administration costs of the programme has now been undertaken. At the current time, the County Council now believes that these costs can be covered without the need for local partners, including the Borough Council, to have to make any financial contribution. We will be required, however, to help with the promotion of the programme although any costs associated with this can be met from existing budgets.

#### **1.4 1-2-1 Business Support and Business Seminars**

- 1.4.1 The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC) was successful in obtaining this contract, part of the package of enhanced business support services for West Kent funded by a grant from the County Council's Regeneration Fund. A delivery plan for the new programme is being produced with the aim that the new services commence in early September. Two 1-2-1 support sessions per month will be held in Tonbridge and Malling, one at the Kings Hill Offices and the other at the Riverside Business Centre, Tonbridge. Sessions will be bookable via the KICC website.
- 1.4.2 Business seminars on a range of different topics will be held twice every four weeks in various locations across the West Kent area. These will also be bookable on-line. A detailed programme including topics to be covered and the proposed location is being drawn up.
- 1.4.3 For both of these programmes, the Borough Council will assist with the publicity campaign to ensure a good local take-up is achieved. The Chamber will be required to submit quarterly reports to the West Kent Partnership setting out statistics relating to attendees, outcomes etc.

#### **1.5 Specialist Business Support**

- 1.5.1 As part of the above package of initiatives, further specialist support was commissioned to promote self-employment to people who were currently workless, to support home-based businesses, and to provide targeted advice for the rural and land-based sectors.
- 1.5.2 The programme promoting self employment is being launched shortly. Both this and the home-based business programme will be delivered by the Centre for Micro Business, an organisation based in Tonbridge and supported by K College. Entrepreneurship programmes will be organised in the wards of Trench, Snodland and East Malling (the areas of highest levels of worklessness in the Borough).

Referrals to the programme will be sought from Job Centre Plus and local community workers operating in the three communities. An initial pilot programme will be undertaken in East Malling. The home-based business support programme will focus on 'business survival' issues to complement other existing programmes which are focusing on businesses with growth potential. A series of local engagement activities across groups of parishes throughout West Kent will be undertaken to establish interest from home-based businesses with a view to creating a series of business clubs through which on-going support will be offered.

- 1.5.3 The contract for special rural/land-based business has yet to be awarded. We are currently discussing a possible joint approach involving Produced In Kent, based at Hadlow, supported by the Invicta Chamber (to cover rural business) and for the land-based sector to be handled by the West Kent Leader team based at Sevenoaks District Council.

## **1.6 West Kent Sustainable Business Growth**

- 1.6.1 In addition to the above initiatives, a new funding bid has recently been submitted to secure funding from Round 6 of the European Regional Development Fund jointly by the West Kent Partnership and Business Support Kent. The bid encompasses further funding for the business support initiatives as described above and additionally provides funding for advice and grants to be offered to local businesses with regard to the management of their energy costs to achieve enhanced environmental sustainability. This part of the programme will be offered by Business Support Kent. A final decision on the bid, which is seeking in excess of £400k from the ERDF, will be available in the Autumn.

## **1.7 Legal Implications**

- 1.7.1 None

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

- 1.8.1 Funding for these programmes have been provided by external sources. The Borough Council will need to help promote these programmes, an activity which can be funded from existing budgets.

## **1.9 Risk Assessment**

- 1.9.1 Will be addressed in relation to individual programmes.

## **1.10 Equality Impact Assessment**

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

## 1.11 Recommendations

1.11.1 That this update report **BE NOTED** and that authority **BE DELEGATED** to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, to respond to a draft of the Escalate Delivery Plan when available.

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 programmes mentioned are open to all on a equal basis.
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.*