

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

5 September 2013

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT INITIATIVES

To outline a number of new services to support local businesses.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Borough Council, in partnership with Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Councils (who with other partners, make up the West Kent Partnership) has recently commissioned a number of new business support services following a recent successful bid to the County Council's Regeneration Fund. So that Parish Councils are aware of these new services and can assist by helping to publicise them to their local businesses, this report sets out a short summary of each new service.

1.2 One-to-One Business Advice and Business Seminars

1.2.1 The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce has been commissioned to provide free business advice sessions and business seminars across West Kent. These are targeted at those wishing to start up a new business or existing local businesses needing advice and support. Advice sessions will be delivered from the Borough Council offices at Kings Hill and at the Riverside Business Centre in Tonbridge.

1.2.2 A range of seminars will be organised covering various business topics in venues across the West Kent area, A programme is currently being developed and the intention is that there will be two seminars per month provided in the Borough.

1.2.3 One-to-one support and business seminars will be bookable via the Kent Invicta Chamber's website: www.kentinvictachamber.co.uk.

1.3 Support for Home-Based Businesses

1.3.1 There are many small businesses in the Borough which operate from home. A recent West Kent survey has shown that such businesses need special support to overcome barriers such as isolation from other business people and problems with IT. The Centre for Micro-Business (CMB) has been commissioned to address such issues and is planning to engage with local Parish Council to help identify

and target those who run their business from home. The aim will be to create new local business clubs at venues such as village halls and local libraries across the West Kent area to allow home-based business operators to meet like-minded people, to network, and to access any support and advice required. They also intend to offer support to any existing business club already operating. The CMB works in partnership with K College who have the ability to provide expertise in a number of areas including marketing and IT services. A website giving further details about the new initiative is currently under development. In the interim, any Parish Council who is interested in getting more involved can contact the director of CMB, Mr Roger House, via email at rof@thecentreformicrobusiness.co.uk.

1.4 Support for Rural Businesses and the Land-Based Sector

- 1.4.1 Although not yet commissioned, the West Kent Partnership intend to develop specialist support services to assist rural business and the land-based sector including local farmers and foresters. This seeks to build on the highly successful LEADER grant programme which provided grants of £1.6m to local businesses across West Kent over the period 2009-2012 and which generated investment of over £3m in value. A new Leader programme for the period 2015-2019 is being developed but is dependent upon further EU funding coming forward. Further details of the new rural support programme will be circulated to Parish Councils when the commissioning process is complete.

1.5 Supporting Local Retail Centres

- 1.5.1 The Borough Council is keen, in addition to the work it undertakes in relation to Tonbridge Town Centre, to engage with local chambers of trade/traders associations across the Borough to explore any issues affecting those centres and what support might be appropriate. The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Cllr John Balcombe, will be offering to meet local organisations over the next 2-3 months to undertake such discussions. Meetings with Snodland, Borough Green and Martin Square are currently being planned.

1.6 The ESCALATE Programme

- 1.6.1 The West Kent Partnership, together with Maidstone, Kent County Council and East Sussex Councils, has recently made a successful bid to the Government's Regional Growth Fund to provide interest free loans to local businesses with high growth potential. The fund awarded totalled £5.5M.
- 1.6.2 Work is now underway to develop the bidding documentation and criteria for the scheme with the intention that the new Fund will be available to businesses from October of this year. The fund will be available for an 18 month period and needs to be spent by the end of 2014/15. Considerable local publicity will be required to ensure local businesses are made fully aware of this time-limited opportunity. Further details of the programme and of the eligibility criteria will be available on the business pages of the Borough Council's website in due course.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

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