

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 21st February, 2018

Present: Cllr B J Luker (Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr L J O'Toole, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr C P Smith and Cllr T C Walker

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, M A Coffin, O C Baldock, P F Bolt, N J Heslop and M R Rhodes were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M C Base, J L Botten, S R J Jessel, S M King, R D Lancaster, Mrs S L Luck and B W Walker

ERG 18/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Coffin declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest on the Update on the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan for 2017/18 and Priorities for 2018/19 on the grounds that his business had applied for LEADER funding which was referenced in the report. He withdrew from the meeting during discussion of this item to avoid any potential conflict.

ERG 18/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 6 September 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

ERG 18/3 UPDATE ON THE BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2017/18 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19

Decision Notice D180018MEM

A detailed overview of the progress made in delivering the Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan during 2017/18 was provided in the report of the Chief Executive. It was reported that overall good progress was being made across a wide range of initiatives.

A number of targets had proved challenging and particular reference was made to the Kent and Medway Business Fund where only four Tonbridge and Malling businesses had accessed loans to date. It was

hoped that further promotion would encourage more businesses to apply for funding.

It was reported that four local rural businesses had secured West Kent LEADER funding, with a further eight pending. There was still time to meet the target of 25 local rural businesses before the closure of the programme, which was now anticipated at the end of 2019. However, Members indicated that it was important to retain flexibility regarding the process to ensure that businesses were viable and were able to pay back loans. It was felt that targets should not be rigorously adhered to where it was not appropriate to do so.

Finally, the potential reasons for the increase in the number of VAT de-registrations would be explored further. It was noted that this trend was reflected in other parts of Kent and nationally.

The proposed priorities for 2018/19 were also set out and these were influenced by progress made in specific areas, as well as the level of future financial resources. Actions key to the effective delivery of the Economic Regeneration Strategy were detailed at 1.3.1 of the report.

Members asked whether the new Cannon Lane shop development in Tonbridge had affected trade in the High Street. It was noted that at the planning application stage no negative impact had been identified and there was no awareness of reduced footfall in the town centre.

In addition, Members referred to the value of social media as a promotional tool and suggested that consideration be given to developing the use of LinkedIn and targeted hashtags on Twitter aimed specifically at businesses.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be endorsed; and
- (2) the priorities for 2018/19, as set out at paragraph 1.3.1 of the report, be agreed.

ERG 18/4 SKILLS AND WORK READINESS UPDATE

Decision Notice D180019MEM

The report provided an update on added value activities that the Borough Council had been delivering under the 'skills and work readiness' agenda and proposed future activity for 2018/19.

Members were pleased to note the good progress being made in a number of areas and particularly welcomed the positive outcomes related to the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network. It was suggested

that a future meeting of the Advisory Board should focus on this initiative and consideration be given to inviting the local co-ordinator, employers, the Federation of Small Businesses, West Kent College and users of the course to share their experiences.

A Jobs and Training Fair had been held in Aylesford in November 2017 and the event had been well attended by employers, training providers and job seekers.

The Employment Street Pilot was an intensive one-week course focused on eight residents with challenging barriers to employment and included confidence building, lifestyle advice and practical support. Members welcomed this partnership approach between the Borough Council, Royal British Legion Industries and 360 Recruitment in delivering an excellent project. It was hoped that projects of this kind continued as they offered support and encouragement to hard to reach people.

Finally, Members recognised the importance of creating links between education, skills and job development and many of the initiatives identified in the report supported this ambition.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposals for 2018/19, as detailed in paragraph 1.4.1 of the report, be endorsed

ERG 18/5 TONBRIDGE FAIRTRADE TOWN - PROPOSAL

Decision Notice D180020MEM

The report set out proposals aimed at making Tonbridge a Fairtrade town and the Borough Council's support of the initiative was sought. In addition, a local Fairtrade Steering Group, with a nominated Borough Council representative, was required to ensure continued development and support.

A draft resolution in support of the Fairtrade town initiative was set out at paragraph 1.4.1 of the report. For clarity, whilst the draft resolution encouraged the supply of Fairtrade products in the Borough Council offices it was noted that the organisation no longer had canteen facilities on site.

Members were supportive of the proposals for a Fairtrade Town and strongly encouraged balanced representation of the business community on the Steering Group. It was important that local businesses and products were not disadvantaged as a result of the proposals.

In addition, Members recognised the local and national benefits related to Fairtrade and hoped that the Borough Council could offer Fairtrade products where possible. It was also suggested that consideration be given to supporting 'Direct Trade' which was often viewed as complementary to Fairtrade certification.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the resolution set out in paragraph 1.4.1 of the report be supported; and
- (2) a representative from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council be appointed to the Tonbridge Fairtrade Steering Group.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**ERG 18/6 INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY WHITE PAPER**

The report of the Chief Executive set out an overview of the Government's Industrial Strategy White Paper, launched in November 2017, and aimed to boost productivity and competitiveness.

Key policies highlighted within the Industrial Strategy were detailed in paragraph 1.3.1 of the report.

Particular reference was made to local industrial strategies and, in the case of Tonbridge and Malling this would be led by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. These local strategies required strong public and private partnerships if the aims and objectives set out in the Industrial Strategy were to be met. The involvement of universities, colleges and local institutions would be important to identify priorities to improve skills, increase innovation and enhance infrastructure and business growth.

ERG 18/7 WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP

The Minutes of the West Kent Partnership held on 18 January 2018 were presented for information and these were noted by Members.

Of particular reference for Tonbridge and Malling was the recently issued invitation to tender for the new South East Rail franchise. This had indicated that current fast speed services via Snodland station could be reduced to two peak hour trains instead of three or, as an alternative, the entire fast speed service from Maidstone West could be removed entirely and replaced by a non-high speed service from Maidstone West to Abbey Wood.

The West Kent Partnership had expressed concern regarding the potential diminution of important services which served many settlements in the Medway Valley. It was also noted that new housing developments at Holborough and Peters Village, along with potential new development in the areas arising from the Local Plan, would mean demand for these services would significantly increase in the near future. These concerns had been raised with the three bidders for the franchise and other partners, including MPs.

In addition, the new Maidstone East train service to Blackfriars had been delayed until 2019 to the detriment of residents and businesses.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration advised Members that both cases outlined above would be robustly challenged and lobbied against.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ERG 18/8 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm