

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

Tuesday, 2nd November, 2021

Present: Cllr F G Tombolis (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr N Foyle, Cllr N J Heslop, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr J R S Lark, Cllr B J Luker, Cllr L J O'Toole and Cllr J L Sergison.

Councillors Mrs S Bell, V M C Branson, D Keers, D Lettington, Mrs A S Oakley, M R Rhodes and K B Tanner were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs R F Lettington and C J Williams.

ERG 21/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made, however for reasons of transparency, Councillor N Heslop advised that he was a paid adviser to the Baker Educational Trust; Chair of South East Councils, a member of the Governing Body of the Tonbridge Federation, and a member of the Kent and Medway Employment Task Force.

ERG 21/24 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 1 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to an amendment to reflect that Councillor J Sergison was present at the meeting.

ERG 21/25 PRESENTATION: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Members received a comprehensive update on the continuing impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the national and local economy, in particular the impact of the budget on Local Government, supply issues, inflation and wage growth.

The Borough had been affected by staffing shortages and supply. Unemployment in Tonbridge and Malling was 3.1% at the end of September, compared to 5% nationally and 4.6% in Kent. Unemployment in the Borough reduced by 30.1% over the last year.

Businesses were suffering from long Covid due to having utilised their reserves and burdened by loans taken during the height of the pandemic

and the reduced financial support previously provided by the furlough scheme and the Additional Restrictions Grant.

In terms of local recovery from Covid, a focus would be on key issues including consumer trends and in particular the move to online retail, working trends, employment and skills and national developments.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

ERG 21/26 JOBS AND TRAINING FAIRS - ANALYSIS

(Decision Notice D210097MEM)

The report provided a brief update on the delivery of jobs and training fairs to support local employers with their recruitment needs and assist residents seeking new job opportunities and training courses. The report outlined proposals for an analysis of the jobs and training fairs to help identify lessons learnt and to gain an appreciation of their economic impact.

Particular attention was brought to the comparatively high percentage of unemployment in the borough whilst the economy was recovering from a period of restrictions. In addition, 7% of the local workforce had no qualifications, half of whom were in the 50-64 year age range, and as such, this was clearly an area where continued support was needed. The next jobs and training fair would be held in Tonbridge during March 2022.

Members requested that for the future analysis, in addition to those groups listed within the report at paragraph 1.3.2, that input also be sought from schools and colleges, the Invicta Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the initial findings, set out at paragraph 1.2.2 of the report, and the actions to improve promotion and tackling barriers to employment be endorsed; and
- (3) the proposed approach to analysing the Jobs and Training Fairs, as set out at section 1.3, and the timeframe set out at section 1.4, be agreed.

ERG 21/27 WELCOME BACK FUND

(Decision Notice D210098MEM)

The report provided an update on progress on the Welcome Back Fund and sought support for the plan and progress made to date.

The Council were allocated a combined total of £235,062 from the Re-Opening of the High Street Safely Fund and Welcome Back Funding. A Grant Action Plan had been submitted and confirmed, attached at Annex 1. The Council were able to claim on a quarterly basis, with the first claim having been submitted for £11,919.70 for the period up to the end of September 2021. The next claim would be submitted in December 2021 and would cover projects such as graffiti removal, the procurement of consultants to help businesses with the medium-term impact of Covid-19 and the promotion of farmers markets across the borough.

RECOMMENDED: That the Welcome Back plan be supported and the progress and spend be noted.

ERG 21/28 APPRENTICESHIPS

(Decision Notice D210099MEM)

The report provided details of work undertaken in recent years to address worklessness and improve skills attainment, including the employment of apprentices at the Council, and outlined additional measures which could be taken to increase the availability of apprenticeship opportunities in the borough.

During discussion, Members supported raising the status of apprenticeships in the borough and recognised a need to avoid any duplication of work.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the options for intervention, as outlined at section 1.3 of the report, be given further consideration; and
- (3) the next steps, as set out at paragraph 1.4.1, be agreed.

ERG 21/29 TONBRIDGE SAFER TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

(Decision Notice D10100MEM)

The report set out details of a proposed contribution from the remaining Business Rates Retention Pilot towards the purchase of new equipment

to ensure that the Safer Towns Partnership remained an effective mechanism through which crime against Tonbridge town centre businesses was prevented.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the proposed £8,000 contribution towards new equipment for the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership and the arrangements set out at section 1.2 of the report be agreed.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ERG 21/30 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.51 pm