

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL



EXECUTIVE SERVICES

Chief Executive

Julie Beilby BSc (Hons) MBA

Gibson Building
Gibson Drive
Kings Hill, West Malling
Kent ME19 4LZ
West Malling (01732) 844522

NB - This agenda contains proposals, recommendations and options. These do not represent Council policy or decisions until they have received proper consideration through the full decision making process.

Contact: Democratic Services
committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk

25 October 2021

To: MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD
(Copies to all Members of the Council)

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board to be held in the Council Chamber, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill on Tuesday, 2nd November, 2021 commencing at 7.30 pm.

Members of the Committee are required to attend in person. Other Members are encouraged to participate online via MS Teams.

Information on how to observe the meeting will be published on the Council's website.

Yours faithfully

JULIE BEILBY

Chief Executive

A G E N D A

PART 1 - PUBLIC

1. Apologies for absence

5 - 6

2. Declarations of interest 7 - 8
- Members in any doubt about such declarations are advised to contact Legal or Democratic Services in advance of the meeting*
3. Minutes 9 - 12
- To confirm as a correct record the Notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 1 September 2021
4. Presentation: The Economic Impact of Covid-19 13 - 14
- An update on the continuing impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the local economy and information on support for local businesses will be provided.*

Matters for Recommendation to the Cabinet

5. Jobs and Training Fairs - Analysis 15 - 20
- The report provides 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 also provides proposals for an analysis of the jobs and training fairs to help identify lessons learnt and to gain an appreciation of their economic impact.*
6. Welcome Back Fund 21 - 32
- This report provides an update on progress on the Welcome Back Fund and seeks Members' support for the plan and the progress made so far.*
7. Apprenticeships 33 - 38
- Over the past decade apprenticeships have played an increasing role in the jobs market and have become a central part of national policy to address the skills crisis. Much work has been undertaken in recent years to help address worklessness and improve skills attainment, including the employment of apprentices at the Council, and this report looks at additional measures the Council could take to increase the availability of apprenticeship opportunities in the borough.*
8. Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership 39 - 42
- This report sets out a proposed £8,000 contribution towards the purchase of much needed new equipment that will ensure that the partnership remains an effective mechanism through which crime against Tonbridge town centre businesses is prevented. This contribution would use up the remaining Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve funding that was earmarked for 'Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives'.*

9. Urgent Items 43 - 44

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

Matters for consideration in Private

10. Exclusion of Press and Public 45 - 46

The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

PART 2 - PRIVATE

11. Urgent Items 47 - 48

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

MEMBERSHIP

Cllr F G Tombolis (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs R F Lettington (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Mrs J A Anderson
Cllr G C Bridge
Cllr R I B Cannon
Cllr Mrs T Dean
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
Cllr W E Palmer
Cllr J L Sergison
Cllr C J Williams

Apologies for absence

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Declarations of interest

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TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 1st September, 2021

Present: Cllr F G Tombolis (Chairman), Cllr Mrs R F Lettington (Vice-Chairman), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr Mrs T Dean, Cllr N Foyle, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr J R S Lark, Cllr B J Luker and Cllr L J O'Toole

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, W E Palmer, V M C Branson, M D Boughton, M A Coffin, D Keers, M R Rhodes and Williams participated via MS Teams and joined the discussion when invited to do so by the Chairman in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(Note: As Councillors Mrs Anderson, Palmer and Williams were unable to attend in person and participated via MS Teams they were unable to vote on any matters)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R I B Cannon, N J Heslop and F A Hoskins

ERG 21/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

ERG 21/16 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 18 May 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ERG 21/17 PRESENTATION: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Members received a comprehensive update on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the national and local economy.

It was reported that although the rate of unemployment in Tonbridge and Malling had levelled at 3.4% this was higher than pre-pandemic levels. Claimants for Universal Credit had also levelled at around 9.5% in the borough compared to 15% nationally. The number of people on furlough had reduced steadily since Spring 2021 and was now at 5%.

The Borough Council would now focus on supporting local economy and business recovery and future prosperity by developing a new programme of initiatives and engagement.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**ERG 21/18 SHOPFRONT IMPROVEMENTS SCHEME - ANALYSIS**

(Decision Notice D210083MEM)

The report provided an update on the current Shopfront Improvement Scheme which was due to end on 30 September 2021. Proposals for an analysis of the Scheme to identify lessons learnt and to gain an appreciation of its economic impact were also set out.

It was proposed that the analysis focused on the three key areas of:

- (a) the process of applying for a shopfront improvement grant
- (b) support and advice during the delivery of the shopfront projects
- (c) the overall economic impact of the scheme

RECOMMENDED: That:

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the proposed approach to analysing the Shopfront Improvement Scheme, as detailed in 1.2 of the report and summarised above, be agreed.

ERG 21/19 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

(Decision Notice D210084MEM)

The report presented a proposal to develop new networking events and business engagement activity to further support and strengthen the resilience of the local economy.

Three key strands were presented for consideration:

- (a) a programme of networking events be created for 2021/22;
- (b) work be undertaken on refreshing the e-bulletin with a view to commencing the quarterly bulletin from October 2021; and
- (c) further research be undertaken to look into opportunities for delivering an awards event during 2022

RECOMMENDED: That:

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the next steps, as detailed in 1.3 of the report and summarised above, be agreed

ERG 21/20 ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT POLICY

(Decision Notice D210085MEM)

Following the successful distribution of its initial Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) allocation ahead of the 31 July 2021 deadline, the Borough Council received an additional £1.054 million of ARG funding from Government to use to support local businesses as the economy moved towards a period of recovery.

An amended policy (attached at Annex 1) was presented for consideration and aimed to establish a focus on supporting those in the entertainment, leisure, activity, travel and tourism, events businesses and wraparound care sector by providing a small additional grant to businesses that had previously applied to rounds 1 and 2 of the ARG (Discretionary) Restart Grant or the Mandatory Restart Grant.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the proposed amended Additional Restrictions Grant Policy, set out at Annex 1, be agreed; and
- (3) the timescale for applications be opened as soon as possible (late September 2021)

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**ERG 21/21 WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP**

The report presented details of the key matters discussed at the meetings of the West Kent Partnership held on 23 April and 16 July 2021.

Members noted that the Borough Council's responses in relation to a number of Gatwick airport consultations would be considered by the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board in due course.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**ERG 21/22 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

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Agenda Item 4

Presentation: The economic impact of Covid-19

An update on the continuing impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the local economy and information on support for local businesses will be provided.

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

02 November 2021

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 JOBS AND TRAINING FAIRS - ANALYSIS

For a number of years, the Borough Council has delivered jobs and training fair to help support local employers with their recruitment needs, whilst also helping our residents to find new job opportunities and training courses. The covid-19 pandemic caused considerable disruption to this programme of events, but they are now starting up again. This report provides a brief update on these events and provides proposals for an analysis of our jobs and training fairs to help identify lessons learnt and to gain an appreciation of their economic impact.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Until the considerable disruption caused by the covid-19 pandemic, the delivery of jobs and training fairs had been a central part of our approach to tackling unemployment and skills-related issues in the borough. Typically, these fairs comprise a four-hour event, with a number of local employers and training providers in attendance, offering jobs, volunteering opportunities, and training courses to local residents. They also include a series of practical workshops covering a range of work-related topics, such as how to search for jobs online, CV writing, performing well at interviews or how to start up a business.

1.1.2 These events have been very well received over the years, offering local businesses and training providers a different way to promote themselves and the opportunities they provide, and giving local residents the unique opportunity to talk face-to-face informally in a world where most recruitment is now done on-line. It is also important to note that whilst the economy is recovering from a period of restrictions, the level of unemployment in the borough is still comparatively high at 3.1% (August 2021), even though it has dropped by nearly 30% in the last year. In addition, approximately 7% of the local workforce have no qualifications. As such, this is clearly an area where we need to continue to provide support.

1.1.3 With the jobs and training fairs now starting up again, it is important that these events are analysed and reviewed in order to ensure that they are as beneficial as possible.

1.2 Recent Jobs and Training Fairs

1.2.1 On 06 October 2021, the first jobs fair for nearly 2 years took place again. The jointly-run Aylesford Jobs Market saw 23 businesses meet just over 100 job seekers at the Capel Morris Centre in the RBLI Village. Due to restrictions on venue capacity, the event could not accommodate greater numbers during the 4-hour event. However, anecdotally there was plenty of positive feedback and a number of examples of people being offered jobs and interviews at the event.

1.2.2 This event was followed up by the West Kent Jobs Fair on 13 October 2021 at the Assembly Halls in Tunbridge Wells. This was a slightly larger event, with 30 businesses meeting just under 150 job seekers. Some initial interviews were undertaken with both businesses and job seekers in order to gain feedback from this particular event, a summary of which is bullet-pointed below:

- Positive event that is welcoming and friendly, and gives people an opportunity to informally speak to employers.
- A number of examples of jobs and interviews being offered at the event.
- One key area of improvement would be to undertake more promotion of the event ahead of the day – for example, through social media, providing flyers at shopping centres, churches, and sending information to social housing providers.
- Some employers highlighted that people don't travel far for jobs and others are reluctant to work for a small business, and as such support on breaking down these barriers would be helpful.

1.2.3 Although social media was undertaken for these last two events, the promotion of the event was tempered slightly as there was a requirement to keep numbers under the maximum capacities set out by the venue providers. However, for future events, greater promotion would seem an extremely worthwhile investment, especially if unemployment numbers remain high.

1.2.4 The Department for Work and Pensions will also be engaged around breaking down barriers relating to travel and working for smaller businesses (see 1.3.5).

1.3 Proposed Analysis of the Jobs and Training Fairs

1.3.1 In carrying out analysis of the jobs and training fairs, it is proposed that the following approach could be undertaken which builds upon the initial analysis work that has been undertaken on the day of the events themselves (set out in 1.2.2).

1.3.2 For the further analysis, it should be recognised that there are essentially three groups that will need to provide input in order for this work to be as comprehensive as possible. They are:

- a) Businesses and training providers that look to recruit through the events.
- b) Attendees at the events – mostly local job seekers or people interested in training opportunities.
- c) Partnership organisations – those organisations that the Borough Council works with to deliver the events – most notably the Department for Work and Pensions, Local Housing Associations, and the West Kent Partnership.

1.3.3 **Businesses and training providers:** the main line of questioning to this group (via questionnaire) would be specifically related to the running of the event and the level of success in securing new leads or potential new recruits:

- Did you have all the information you needed to help you prepare for the event?
- What barriers to recruitment does your business/sector currently face?
- How many job opportunities do you have available?
- Has this event helped to identify potential new staff? If so, please elaborate with any positive outcomes you have had directly from this event.
- What would you change or improve about the event?
- Overall, how would you rate the event?

1.3.4 **Attendees at the events:** the proposed questioning to people that have attended the events will be geared towards identifying any positive outcomes, and these can range from attendees gaining confidence or new information, to securing an interview and receiving a job offer depending on where the individual attendee is on their journey towards employment. The questioning will also seek constructive feedback about any cost-effective changes that could be made to the event to help increase these positive outcomes.

- How did you hear about the event?
- What do you feel is making it difficult for you to move into work/new training opportunities?
- How useful has the event been in your job search/search for a new training opportunity?
- What positive outcomes have you had from the event?
- What would you change or improve about the event?
- Overall, how would you rate the event?

1.3.5 **Partnership Organisations:** the line of questioning to this group would be focused on the planning of the events and any improvements that could be made:

- What are your experiences of working with the Borough Council on the jobs and training fairs?

- Do you think jobs and training fairs continue to be needed?
- Are there any improvements to the planning of these events that you would like to see?
- Are there any ways we can break down barriers around travel to work, or working for smaller firms?
- Do you think there are any ways we could improve the event itself? If so, please provide details?

1.3.6 It is proposed that the information sought from the businesses, training providers and attendees (jobs seekers and people looking for new training opportunities) be undertaken by questionnaire, with an informal meeting of partner organisations being set up to gather information and thoughts from them on questions set out in 1.3.5.

1.4 Next Steps

1.4.1 With initial analysis of recent events having been undertaken, it is proposed that the remaining analysis will take place at the end of 2021. Once completed, the outcome of the complete analysis will come back to the advisory board in early Spring 2022 with a view to implementing any improvements at future jobs fairs.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 £10,000 has been set aside from the Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve to cover the cost of 'economic initiatives and events'. The majority of this funding will cover the business engagement activities set out in the report to the advisory board in September 2021, however some of this budget will also be used to contribute towards any low-cost improvements to the jobs and training fairs as required.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 There is a negligible level of risk associated with the analysis work.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.

1.9.2 That the initial findings set out in 1.2.2, and the actions to improve promotion and tackling barriers to employment **BE ENDORSED**.

1.9.3 That the proposed approach to analysing the Jobs and Training Fairs as set out in section 1.3, and the timeframe as set out in section 1.4 **BE AGREED.**

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,
Strategic Economic
Regeneration Manager

James Read, Graduate
Economic Development
Officer

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive

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

02 November 2021

Report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 WELCOME BACK FUND

This report will provide Members with an update on progress on the Welcome Back Fund and will seek Members support for the plan and the progress made so far

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Welcome Back Fund provides councils across England with a share of £56 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the Covid pandemic. This funding builds on the £50 million Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSSF) allocated to councils in 2020 and forms part of the wider support government is providing to communities and businesses.

1.1.2 The fund can be used by local authorities to boost the look and feel of the high streets by investing items such as street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets welcoming. The fund can also be used to run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events, install and refresh signage and floor marking and improve green space on high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti.

1.1.1 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council was allocated a total of £235,062 (the combined total of RHSSF and Welcome Back Funding). In order to claim the funding, we had to submit a Grant Action Plan detailing our proposed spending. The Grant Action Plan set out the projects that we wished to fund and these included enhancements to the pleasure boat moorings, graffiti removal in and around high streets across the borough and a 'shop local' promotional campaign, as well as other items. **Annex 1** gives details of the projects being funded through the Welcome Back Fund. All funding must be spent by the end of March 2022.

1.1.2 Whilst many of the projects are being led and undertaken by the Borough Council, we were also able to make some Parish Council's and other organisations 'Delivery Partners' meaning that they can deliver projects themselves, through a

Service Level Agreement with them. We have seven Delivery Partners who are delivering projects for us. They also have to adhere to the requirements and provide evidence as required in order to submit quarterly claims.

- 1.1.3 The Grant Action Plan has now been confirmed by the MHCLG and we can claim our eligible activities in arrears on a quarterly basis. In order to submit our claims, we need to provide evidence of spend (including bank statements, details of every transaction and a progress form for that quarter).
- 1.1.4 It should be noted that there were a number of caveats to the funding which restricted how we could allocate it. We were not able to use the funding for capital expenditure, as grants to businesses and any funding had to show additionality (e.g. the funding should not replace committed expenditure).
- 1.1.5 We also have to ensure that we adhere to all ERDF requirements around branding, publicity and procurement rules. Failure to adhere to these may mean that our claims are not accepted.

1.2 Progress made so far

- 1.2.1 We have recently submitted our first claim (for the period up to the end of September) and we will be looking to claim £14,037.85. Due to the requirements around procurement, it has taken time to progress some items and we will be looking to submit a larger claim at the end of the next quarter.
- 1.2.2 So far work has been undertaken to clean a number of car parks within the borough including those in Tonbridge, West Malling and Borough Green. We have also been able to proceed with the Memorial gardens tablet cleaning and the whole wall along the boat mooring area in Tonbridge has now been re-rendered, making a real improvement to the area. A 'shop local' campaign is also progressing with filming of some of the projects underway so that this can be used to promote shopping within Tonbridge & Malling. A video produced as part of this campaign can be viewed at <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/homepage/20/support-for-business>
- 1.2.3 Photographs attached to **Annex 2** show some of the work that has been completed so far.
- 1.2.4 There are a number of projects which should be starting shortly including graffiti removal in key hot spot locations and the procurement of consultants to start looking at the functioning of our high streets, considering potential small-scale initiatives and adapting to the new/emerging funding landscape. This will aim to complement, rather than duplicate any work that is currently already being undertaken.
- 1.2.5 Looking further ahead we will also be progressing with quotations for the bench works in and around the High Streets. Most of these works are in the more rural areas away from Tonbridge and these will be delivered in early spring 2022,

before the end of the spend criteria. This will hopefully provide nicer weather to carry out this sort of works (painting and staining) and we will have the benches ready for summer 2022.

- 1.2.6 We are also working to install new posts in Barons Walk (river path adjacent to castle wall) to promote events in our town. However, these works still need Historic Monument consent and probably planning permission. It is still anticipated that these works will be completed before end of March 2022.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 The Welcome Back Fund is additional money that the Council receives and is only able to be used to fund certain projects.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 All appropriate risk assessments will be undertaken

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Business Continuity/Resilience

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That the Welcome Back plan **BE SUPPORTED** and that the progress and spend so far **BE NOTED**

The Central Services Director and Deputy 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:

Nil

contact: Alison Finch
Safer & Stronger Communities
Manager

Adrian Stanfield
Central Services Director and Deputy Chief Executive

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Annex 1 – Welcome Back Fund Allocated projects

Support and promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy	Enhancements to Tonbridge Town Centre including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busking licences for certain spots in the town 	These activities are in addition to the Council's normal activities.	£1,000
	Additional planters/flower displays in various locations across the borough, in high footfall areas.		£5,000
	Improvements to parades of shops across the borough including (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • York Parade, Tonbridge, • Martin Square, Larkfield, • Twisden Road, East Malling May include additional planting, cleansing etc.		£20,000
	Improvements to High Street Benches throughout the Borough		£9,500
	Improvements to bespoke High Street Bench/ Artwork in Botany area		£1,500
	Additional deep clean and small works in main Town centre street car parks and assets within (P&D Machines & Bins) across Tonbridge & Malling borough		£13,700
	High street car park temporary lamp post advertising flags		£3,700

	Temporary posts for event advertising flags in Barons Walk, Tonbridge	£4,500
	Enhancement to the pleasure boat moorings (Big Bridge), Tonbridge	£5,000
	Raised flowerbeds at the Castle, Tonbridge	£11,000
	Additional deep clean and small works in Memorial gardens, Tonbridge (Benches, bins & access repairs)	£5,000
	Graffiti removal in and around High Streets throughout the borough	£2,000
	Promote Tonbridge Town Centre through temporary improvements to the Railway Approach (temporary artwork and additional planting around this area and Barden Road)	£3,000
	‘Shop local’ promotional campaign: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To include radio advertising • Social media campaign • Promoting events across the borough 	£24,999
	Enhancing the look and feel of Snodland Town Centre	£22,000

	<p>Promotional 'package' to support the Farmers Markets within Tonbridge & Malling</p> <p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x 'Farmers Market' feather banners. These will be located at the entrance of a market (erected on the day of the market). These banners will be the common per market. • 2 x Banners highlighting opening times of the market (erected 2 days before a market and then taken down after the market) • 2 months local Radio advertising by market • Upgrade of our web site to expand it's reach by additional iPhone display facilities. • 150 Non plastic, reusable bags printed with market information 		£3,984
	<p>Planter(s) and plants – mainly for the piece of grass area on the corner as you turn into Aylesford Village, just past the Bailey Bridge Car Parks</p>		£2,500
	<p>Hanging baskets – to be put around Aylesford Village to brighten it up and it make it look more attractive to people.</p>		£1,000

	Benches – refurbishment of two broken ones in Aylesford Village	£1,000
	Enhance the look and feel of East Peckham by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planting in the Village Centre Tidying up the site surrounding the East Peckham Public Conveniences, land Enhancing the seating areas 	£4,500
	Enhance the look and feel of West Malling to include additional planting	£10,000
	Enhance the look and feel of Borough Green: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New flower baskets/enhancing the appearance of existing planters along the High Street and Western Road and adjacent areas of land - £3000. New flower planters along the High Street and Western Road - £3000. 	£6,000
	Collaboration between Borough Green Parish Council and Borough Green Village Hall. This is aimed at improving the appearance / refurbishment and use of the carpark by consumers, which is adjacent to the High Street. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refurbishment of car park inc parking lines / barriers 	£10,000

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbish the noticeboard on the village hall wall with local and consumer information 		
Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of CV-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.	Procurement of consultants to help businesses with the medium-term impact of Covid-19. Their scope will include support opportunities to further develop businesses, identify potential pilot projects and strategic responses to address and reverse the long-term impacts of covid-19 on local economies	This activity is in addition to the Council's normal activities.	£24,500
Total requested			£195,383

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**Annex 2 – Welcome Back Fund
Photographs of some completed projects**

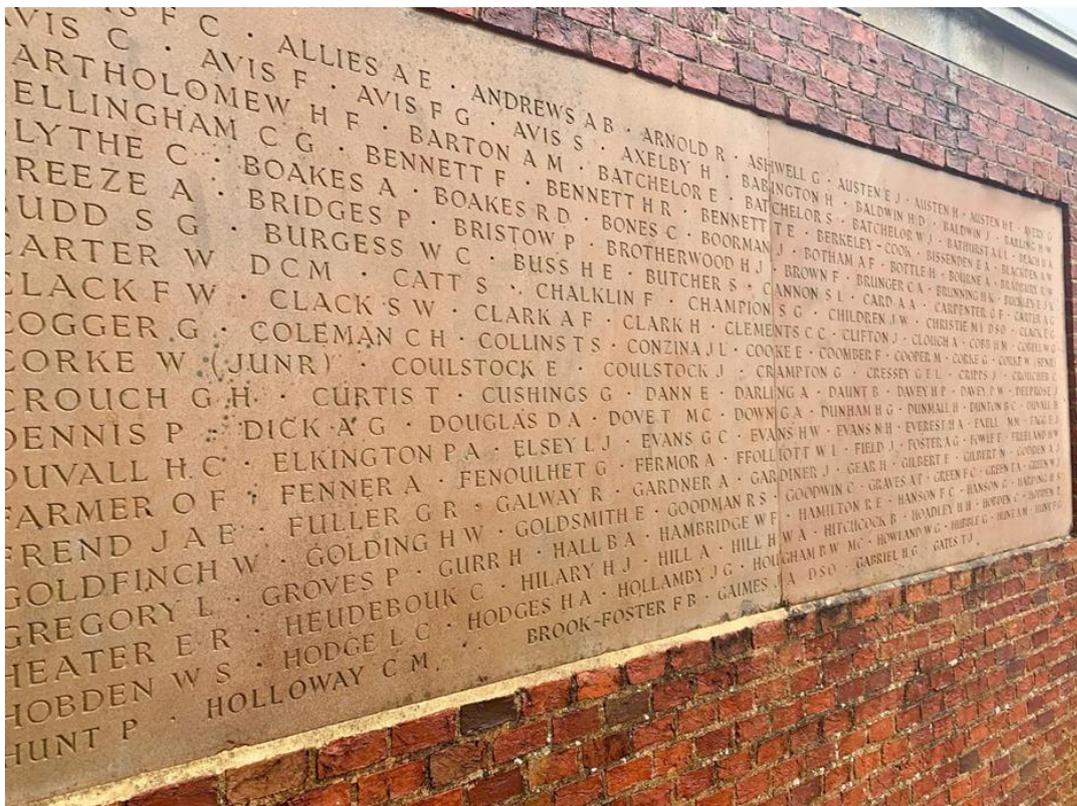
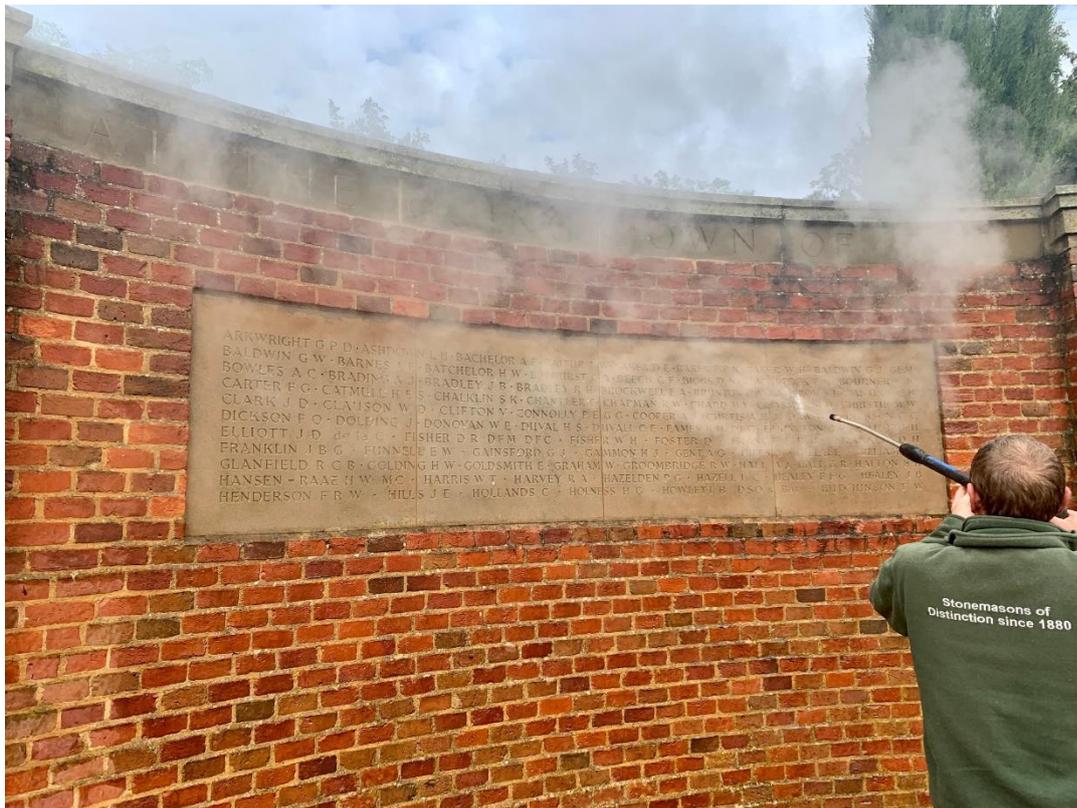
Deep cleaning of car parks



Improvements to boat moorings, Tonbridge



Memorial Gardens Tablet cleaning



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

02 November 2021

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 APPRENTICESHIPS

Over the past decade, apprenticeships have played an increasing role in the jobs market, and have become a central part of national policy to address the skills crisis. Whilst much work has been undertaken by the Council in recent years to help address worklessness and improve skills attainment (including the employment of apprentices at the Council), this report takes a look at additional measures that the Council could take to increase the availability of apprenticeship opportunities in the borough.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Since the revitalisation of apprenticeships over ten years ago, they have become a well-established route into the world of work. There is now considerable variety not only in the number of apprenticeship frameworks (now called standards) that exist (growing from 64 in 2015 to 600 in 2020), but also in the levels of these apprenticeships. Indeed, there are now apprenticeships that range from Intermediate (equivalent to 5 GCSE passes) all the way to Degree (equivalent to a Bachelors or even Masters degree in some cases).
- 1.1.2 In 2021, there were just over a quarter of a million new apprenticeship starters, with almost half undertaking an Advanced apprenticeship (equivalent to two A-level passes). This overall figure reflects a reduction in the number of new starts in recent years as the country has battled the covid-19 pandemic and more young people have looked to the Kickstart Programme of placements to enter the world of work.
- 1.1.3 However, aside from the pandemic, there are still wider issues that hamper apprenticeship take-up. These issues range from the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017, which has led to a drop in new apprenticeship opportunities to the low levels of apprenticeship pay generally offered by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), which is one of the main reasons for high drop-out rates (especially amongst those from less privileged backgrounds). This is particularly unfortunate given that former apprentices can earn on average

£100,000 more than other employees during their lifetime should they complete their training.

- 1.1.4 With the above issues in mind, the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board agreed an allocation of £30,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to go towards support for apprenticeships in the Borough. This report considers the measures that could be put in place to help support this agenda.

1.2 Apprenticeships in Tonbridge and Malling

- 1.2.1 According to data from the Department of Education, the number of new apprentices in Tonbridge and Malling borough has remained relatively consistent since 2015/16, fluctuating between 650-750 starts per annum. However, the number of starts did drop off slightly in 2019/20 (650) and the existing data for the first half of 2020/21 indicates a possible further drop. As highlighted in paragraph 1.1.2, this pattern is very much reflected in the national picture.
- 1.2.2 As such, whilst numbers have reduced in recent times, it is important that the Borough Council looks at what it can do, even in a small way, to support prospective apprentices and local businesses in bringing forward apprenticeship opportunities.

1.3 Potential Areas of Intervention

- 1.3.1 There are a handful of ways in which the Council could support the promotion of apprenticeships as a viable route towards upskilling and accessing the jobs market. These interventions essentially relate to potential funding support to businesses to help towards the costs of taking on apprentices, possible funding for apprentices to help get them prepared for an apprenticeship or to help bolster their wages; and help in promoting apprenticeships and navigating the often complicated and confusing advice and support that already exists.
- 1.3.2 Current incentives of £3,000 per apprentice are a key weapon in Central Government's armoury to fight the UK skills crisis. However, whilst the window for these incentives has been extended until the end of January 2022, this still leaves a relatively short window for businesses to access this incentive - something that is of concern given that recent research conducted by the HomeServe Foundation indicated that 80% of firms surveyed stated that these grant incentives had been a deciding factor in taking on an apprentice.
- 1.3.3 The Local Government Association has lobbied for these incentives to be extended until at least 31 March 2022, especially in light of the stubbornly high national youth unemployment rates (although people of any age can do an apprenticeship, most are undertaken by people in the 16-24 age bracket).

1.3.4 In Tonbridge and Malling, the youth unemployment rate was 5.8% in August 2021, slightly lower than the 7.5% national average, but still above the 3.4% covering the overall Tonbridge and Malling workforce.

Business Incentive Option:

1.3.5 One option could be to establish a scheme that provides a local supplement to mitigate against the withdrawal of this national incentive should it not be extended beyond January 2022. Obviously with an allocated budget of around £30,000, the scheme would not be able to directly replace the level of support previously provided, but by offering support to certain types of apprenticeships at specific sectors, this fund could be able to make a meaningful difference to businesses looking to take on an apprentice. The issues to consider when pulling together any scheme such as this would be:

- Which partner organisations are needed to run an effective scheme?
- How best to promote the scheme?
- What level of grant incentive should be offered?
- The extent to which the location of the business and the apprentice should influence eligibility (i.e., whether both would need to be Tonbridge and Malling based; and whether we have any focus areas for businesses).
- Ensuring the accreditation of the training provider
- Giving careful consideration should be given to the nature of the apprenticeship – minimum number of hours per week, length of apprenticeship and wage level – and to priority business sectors.

Apprentice Support:

1.3.6 As mentioned above, as the level of funding available to pull together a scheme is limited, it is important to consider which apprentices could be targeted for support if this was a route worth pursuing. However, it would seem logical to focus on people that are hardest to get into the workplace and need someone to give them a chance.

1.3.7 This help could take the form of support towards travel costs or acquiring work clothing, as both of these issues have been flagged up in the past as barriers to potential apprentices accessing the opportunities that are available. Alternatively, given the higher drop-out rate amongst people from less privileged backgrounds due to low pay, a small wage supplement could be considered.

Promoting Apprenticeships:

1.3.8 In addition to funded support, the Economic Regeneration Team could also do more work to actively promote apprenticeships and signpost to specialist advice and support. This could be done by raising the profile of apprenticeships through our social media feeds, as well as using our existing business contacts and working

through the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network to take part in activities in local secondary schools.

1.4 Next Steps

1.4.1 It is proposed that the Economic Regeneration Team talks with some of the key organisations (such as the West Kent Partnership) that have an expertise in apprenticeships, so that thorough consideration is given to the issues highlighted in the report. Once this has been undertaken, then a more detailed proposal will come back to the advisory board at the earliest opportunity.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 £30,000 has been allocated from the Business Rates Retention Pilot Reserve towards supporting apprenticeships.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 There is a negligible level of risk associated with the analysis work.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.

1.8.2 That the options for intervention **BE CONSIDERED**.

1.8.3 That the next steps as set out in paragraph 4.1 **BE AGREED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,
Strategic Economic
Regeneration Manager

James Read, Graduate
Economic Development
Officer

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive

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

02 November 2021

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 TONBRIDGE SAFER TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

This report sets out a proposed £8,000 contribution towards the purchase of much needed new equipment that will ensure that the partnership remains an effective mechanism through which crime against Tonbridge town centre businesses is prevented. This contribution would use up the remaining Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve funding that was earmarked for ‘Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives’.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership (also known as a Business Crime Reduction Partnership) is a constituted partnership made up from members of the local business community, working together to reduce and prevent crime in their premises and to protect staff from acts of physical violence and verbal abuse.

1.1.2 As part of the scheme, businesses can rent a radio which links them to the partnership co-ordinator, the CCTV control room, and the Police. This means that they can alert each other when there are problems or if they see/suspect a shoplifter. The scheme can also exclude those who have caused problems from businesses within the town and can help those involved in the scheme to feel confident in reporting issues. Whilst reported crime levels in Tonbridge are low, there are still incidents of shoplifting, purse thefts and anti-social behaviour and the Safer Towns Partnership can help to lower these types of crime and create a safe and welcoming environment for customers, staff, and the public. In doing so, it contributes towards making Tonbridge an attractive place to work, socialise and shop.

1.1.3 In August 2019, a new co-ordinator for the partnership was appointed. Before the pandemic hit, there were approximately 30 businesses signed up to the scheme, with the new co-ordinator tasked with increasing this number, and ensuring strong links with the Town Centre PCs and PCSOs. Unfortunately, with the restrictions associated with the pandemic, the work of the partnership has been severely

disrupted. However, with the town centre now opening up again, work is now being undertaken to proactively strengthen the partnership.

1.2 Proposed Support for the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership

- 1.2.1 One key area of focus for the partnership is ensuring that existing and new potential members have the equipment and systems they need in order to report instances in a timely and effective manner. With the partnership now having run for over 15 years, the existing analogue radio equipment is coming to the end of its shelf life. With the current level of membership, there is insufficient income being generated in order to purchase new equipment, but without the new equipment, there are limited opportunities to recruit new members and increase income.
- 1.2.2 If the funding is approved this would be used to upgrade to a digital radio network which would improve communication between current members and also ensure that the scheme can expand to the outlying business districts within Tonbridge (e.g., the Cannon Lane Retail Park, York Parade and other areas as required).
- 1.2.3 The equipment to be purchased will include a new digital base station, digital aerial, repeater units and replacement control equipment. It will also include ascertaining the most appropriate siting of aerials and installation costs. The initial outlay has already been significantly reduced by the compatibility of the majority of existing radio handsets, which will not require replacement, the existence of the current internet link with CCTV control and use of an existing (redundant) aerial situated on Tonbridge police station.
- 1.2.4 Future and ongoing costs of maintenance (radio handsets and aerials) and licensing will be borne by the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership. They will also continue to seek additional funding as appropriate.
- 1.2.5 The work of the Safer Towns Partnership links in well with the aims of the Borough Council to make Tonbridge a thriving and vibrant town centre, encouraging growth and inward investment. It also links in with the work of the Community Safety Partnership to ensure that Tonbridge is a safe place to live, work and visit.
- 1.2.6 The Safer Towns Partnership is overseen by a Board of Management who provide direction to the scheme. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council is represented on the Board by Laura Mason, Gateway Manager (Tonbridge Castle also has access to a radio). Other Board members consist of representatives from some of the businesses within the scheme. The Safer Towns Co-ordinator is also a member of the Community Safety Unit and regularly meets with the Safer & Stronger Communities Manager to ensure good partnership links.
- 1.2.7 The Safer Towns Partnership is also proposing to establish a Strategic Advisory Group which would sit alongside the Board of Management. This Group would consist of representatives from the Police, Borough Council and other relevant organisations. If appropriate local Members could also be invited to sit on this

Group. This will ensure additional links and strategic direction could be provided to the Partnership on wider issues within the town centre.

1.3 Next steps

- 1.3.1 A site visit and feasibility study of the current aerial and proposed locations for repeater units has already taken place and a quotation is being prepared. Initial indications suggest that the works will fall within budget and will significantly improve the signal and range of the current system.
- 1.3.2 A Board of Management meeting has recently been held where the current situation was noted. The next phase will be to establish the Strategic Advisory Group with the aim that this will be set up within the next few months.
- 1.3.3 Once the digital system is in place the Safer Towns Co-ordinator will be looking to widen membership and promote the scheme across Tonbridge.
- 1.3.4 A report on the progress of the scheme will be brought back to a future meeting of this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 £25,000 was set aside from the Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve to support 'Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives'. To date, this funding has supported a pop-up shop (£2,000), Christmas lights (£2,000) and improvement works to units at Railway Approach (£13,000). There is therefore £8,000 remaining from this pot that could be used to support the Tonbridge Safer Town Partnership.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 There is a negligible level of risk associated with this work.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.
- 1.8.2 That the proposed £8,000 contribution towards new equipment for the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership, and the arrangements set out in 1.2 **BE AGREED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,
Strategic Economic
Regeneration Manager

Alison Finch, Safer & Stronger
Communities Manager

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive

Agenda Item 9

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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Agenda Item 10

The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

**ANY REPORTS APPEARING AFTER THIS PAGE CONTAIN EXEMPT
INFORMATION**

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Agenda Item 11

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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