

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

23 June 2015

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 BUSINESS SUPPORT AND ADVICE

To provide an overview of the current business support and advice programme and give consideration to the make-up of future business support activity.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Statistics on the survival rates of local businesses in the Borough have shown a steady decrease between 2009 and 2012, with a sharp up-turn in 2013. As illustrated in Table 1 below, 3 year business survival rates went as low as 59% in 2012 before recovering to 77.6% in 2013 (the most recent figure). Whilst the period of decline was heavily influenced by the economic downturn and there has been a recovery since, the fact that survival rates did drop below the County average in 2012 suggests the need for greater support and advice for our local businesses to help them succeed and ensure that the area continues to perform above the Kent average.

Year	Tonbridge and Malling	Kent
2007	69.5%	68.3%
2008	66.4%	63.4%
2009	70.4%	65.1%
2010	67.4%	63.8%
2011	65.0%	60.5%
2012	59.0%	60.3%
2013	77.6%	69.3%

Table 1: 3 year business survival rates

1.1.2 The Borough Council, through the West Kent Partnership, works with training providers to help provide support and advice to our business community. The costs of this have been met through existing budgets but recently further funding support has been made available by the County Council.

1.1.3 This report therefore sets out proposals to further develop the business support programme to meet local business needs.

1.2 Current Business Support Programme

1.2.1 The current programme of support can be broken down into three key areas:

a) **One-to-One Business Advice:** this free service is funded via the West Kent Partnership and provided by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. This is an important element of business support as it allows an individual business to access information and advice that is specific to their needs, and helps build a strong relationship between advisor and business.

Over the past year, this service has supported 55 pre-start-ups and small businesses from Tonbridge and Malling, along with 52 based within Tunbridge Wells and 21 in Sevenoaks, as well as 50 Maidstone based businesses.

The overall satisfaction levels of people that have used the service have been in excess of 98%.

b) **Business Workshops:** a strong working relationship has been developed between the West Kent Councils and business support providers, Pro-Actions. To date, Pro-Actions have delivered the following free workshops:

- Improve Your Sales and Win More Business (Aylesford, 29th April 2015)
- How to Market your Business Successfully (including Using Social Media) (Sevenoaks, 19th March 2015)
- Improve Your Sales and Win More Business (Tonbridge, 27th January 2015)
- Take your Business to the Next Level (Swanley, 30 September 2014)
- Do I Really Need Social Media for my Business? (Kings Hill, 22nd September 2014)

Attendance to these sessions has been generally good, with the three sessions in the Borough being attended by 48 people.

c) **Sector Specific Support:** in addition to the above, the West Kent Partnership has also given funding to the Centre for Micro-Business to deliver a package of support to home-based businesses. This includes:

- Telephone Support – 0300 030 9660
- A website for home based businesses – www.homedbasedkent.biz
- A programme of events at County libraries, which has resulted in consultation with 21 home-based businesses.

- One-to-One clinics for Home Based Businesses at West Kent College in Tonbridge which have been attended by 90 individuals (30% of whom have been on multiple occasions).

1.3 Future Business Support Activity

1.3.1 As part of the Kent and Medway Growth Hub programme, Kent County Council has allocated £10,000 to each district and borough in the County and £20,000 to Medway to deliver business support at a localised level. KCC have encouraged districts and boroughs to work together to deliver programmes, and as such the council is looking to continue the delivery of business support through the West Kent Partnership.

1.3.2 In order to access this funding allocation, KCC have produced a proforma requesting information on our business support proposals which is to be submitted by 30 June 2015. Although the proforma is still being finalised, the key proposals are:

- Continuation of One-to-One sessions
- Development of Business Workshops across West Kent – with a focus on sales and marketing (which have historically worked well)
- Sector Specific Support – covering the following areas: home-based businesses, rural businesses (to tie in with the new LEADER programme), and retail businesses (to tie in with town centre regeneration initiatives)
- Web-based support – through the use of a web chat facility, provide support and advice to businesses that are unable to attend clinics and seminars.

1.3.3 In addition, the West Kent partners are aiming to improve their database of business contacts to help improve build awareness of the support available to local businesses.

1.3.4 A combination of the improved database and extra funding from the County Council will ensure that this programme of support will continue beyond Spring 2016 and be accessed by a larger number of businesses.

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 The externally funded business support activity builds upon an existing programme which has been well-received by local businesses.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not applicable.

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 proposed approach to future business support activity, as detailed in this report, **BE APPROVED.**

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:

Nil

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