

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

09 September 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 WEST KENT LEADER PROGRAMME

To provide an update on the new programme and to set out proposals to assist with promotion of the available grant support.

1.1 The West Kent Leader Grant Programme

1.1.1 An initial report was made to this Board in September 2014 regarding the development of a new West Kent LEADER programme. In summary, the previous report outlined the following:

- LEADER is an EU grant programme which provides grants of up to £50,000 aimed at supporting capital investment and job creation in rural businesses, including farming and forestry enterprises.
- An initial West Kent programme ran from 2007 to 2013, drawing down £1.25M of grant funding which supported 62 projects with a total value of £3.4M.
- The programme is administered by staff employed by Sevenoaks District Council. This Council acts as the Accountable Body for the programme and each West Kent Authority contributes to the costs of administration (£5K each per annum).
- Individual grant applications are determined by a Local Action Group (LAG) for West Kent made up of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors including rural businesses and landowners.
- The national LEADER programme is now administered by the Rural Payments Agency which provides guidance and support to the Local Action Groups.

1.1.2 Development of the new LEADER programme was originally intended to commence in early 2015. However, due to delays in the EU sign-off for the whole UK programme, it is now intended to launch the new West Kent programme in the

Autumn with the first grants being made available at the beginning of 2016. The West Kent LEADER programme has now been formally approved and the total allocation of funding has been set at €2,266,000 (approximately £1,603,000). The final stage in the process is the submission of a local delivery plan for the LEADER programme setting out how the programme will be run locally and setting priorities for local funding. The West Kent LEADER programme, based on the experience gained from the former programme, intend to set the following funding priorities:

Support for Increasing Farm Productivity	- 20% of funds
Support for Micro and Small Enterprises	- 40% of funds
Support for Rural Tourism	- 15% of funds
Support for Culture and Heritage	- 5% of funds
Provision of Rural Services	- 5% of funds
Support for Forestry Productivity	- 15% of funds

- 1.1.3 As with the former programme, there will be a two stage application process involving an initial draft application to test eligibility followed by a full application for those which are found to meet the scheme criteria. Grants of up to £50,000 are to be offered and the likely intervention rate is 40% grant/60% match funding (subject to the formal agreement of the West Kent LAG).

1.2 Encouraging Local Take Up

- 1.2.1 The key issue for the Council is to encourage as many applicants as possible from within the Borough to take up this grant opportunity. The recently adopted Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy sets a target of 25 local awards over the 5 year period. A significant amount of promotion across West Kent will be undertaken by the West Kent LEADER team based at Sevenoaks. We believe this could be further supplemented by the Borough Council via the following:

- produce a simple flier and seek the support of our rural Parish Councils and Borough Council ward members to distribute these to relevant local contacts
- direct e-mail alerts to selected rural-based businesses in the Borough
- messages about the scheme to be disseminated via the Council's social media channels and via press releases
- information and advice about the scheme to be made available on the Council's website

- promotion of the grant scheme via attendance at local business liaison meetings (including local Chambers, Federation of Small Businesses, Produced in Kent, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership etc)
- Information to be sent out with business rates bills to be issued in 2016.
- Making use of the Council's regulatory service contacts to promote grants to relevant businesses.

1.2.2 An annual update report on the progress being achieved with the programme will be made to this Board.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 Dealt with by the Accountable Body (SDC)

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 Significant levels of investment into the local rural economy can be achieved at a low cost to the Council (annual contribution of £5K agreed previously).

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 n/a

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 Recommendations

1.7.1 That the above proposed actions to promote take up of LEADER grants within the Borough **BE ENDORSED.**

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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