

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

09 September 2015

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

To provide a more detailed overview of the West Kent Business Support Programme following further discussion with Kent County Council and West Kent partners.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 At the previous Economic Regeneration Advisory Board on 23 June 2015, Report ERG 15/14 provided an outline proposal for future business support activity across West Kent. These outline proposals were:

- Continuation of One-to-One sessions
- Development of business workshops across West Kent – with a focus on sales and marketing
- Sector Specific Support – covering home-based businesses, rural businesses and retail businesses
- Web-based Support – through the use of a web chat facility.
- Improvements to the database of business contacts.

1.1.2 This outline was submitted by the West Kent Partners to Kent County Council on 30 June and subsequently approved. Since this approval the West Kent Partners have been adding more detail to the programme, and working with partner organisations to make the activities even more comprehensive. Delivery will commence at the end of September 2015.

1.2 Progress to Date

1.2.1 Following further information from Kent County Council and additional working group meetings involving the Economic Regeneration teams across West Kent, the programme has been refined further. The following gives a more detailed programme of activity:

a) Generic Workshops:

These workshops will be delivered by Pro-actions on a regular basis, covering issues such as sales, marketing, and business planning. The next three sessions are scheduled for September in Sevenoaks (how to run a successful business), October in Tonbridge (sales event) and November in Aylesford (business planning). Further events will then be delivered in the New Year.

b) Specific Workshops:

Starting in September 2015, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales will deliver a series of workshops on financial planning across venues in West Kent.

The Kent Foundation have been approached to provide workshops for young entrepreneurs (people under 30 years of age who are setting up their own business) to help support them through the early stages in the development of their new enterprise.

Produced in Kent will deliver sessions specifically on promoting and exporting Kent produce – helping to encourage more small businesses in West Kent to expand their market.

A programme of support for rural businesses is to be developed through members of the West Kent Leader Executive Local Action Group.

Over the past 10 years, the number of rural pubs in West Kent has decreased considerably as illustrated by the loss of pubs such as The Red Lion (Borough Green, 2007), The Little Gem (Aylesford, 2009), The Three Postboys (Wrotham, 2009) and The Walnut Tree (Eccles, 2010) in Tonbridge and Malling. However, the rural pub is often the hub of the community and its loss can be devastating to a village. As such, a series of informal workshops run by The Pub Marketing Circle (headed up by a successful rural pub landlord) will be advertised to our rural pubs to help them gain extra tips to increase their turnover and profit margins.

To complement the improvements work that the local authorities are delivering in town and village centres in West Kent, workshops for retail businesses will be delivered by the Let's Do Business Group. This will focus on working with groups of independent retailers to enhance their offer in their communities.

c) Events:

In addition to the workshops, which are generally attended by around 10 people, the new programme also offers up the opportunity to include or incorporate larger events and initiatives. These include:

- Better Business for All Sessions – to help raise awareness of the initiative amongst the business community and to encourage information exchange and a positive relationship between regulators and local businesses.
- West Kent Export Conference – delivered by the Kent International Business in partnership with the West Kent Partners this event will provide local businesses with information and support on how to improve sales overseas. This event is scheduled to take place in November 2015
- West Kent Procurement Exchange Programme – co-ordinated by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, this event will highlight procurement opportunities in the area and provide potential local suppliers with the chance to meet buyers. It is scheduled to take place in February 2016.
- West Kent Business 2 Business Event – building upon the B2B at the River Centre in March 2015, this event will provide an opportunity for businesses across West Kent to network with each other and to get up to speed on a range of business topics through a series of seminars. This event is scheduled to take place at the Hop Farm in March 2016.
- West Kent Business Excellence Awards – these will be launched in March 2016 with the awards ceremony taking place in October 2016. There are 9 different award categories, with sponsors still being sought for 4 of these.

d) One-to-One (Face to Face) Sessions:

The workshops and events will both act as referral points for one-to-one sessions where required. As part of the agreement with KCC, providers of the specific themed workshops will also offer a limited number of hours of free one-to-one support on their specialised area. In addition to this, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce will continue to deliver generic one-to-one advice to pre-starts, start-ups and small businesses across West Kent through their network of business advisors.

On top of this, a one-to-one offer tailored towards the needs of home-based businesses will continue to be provided by the National Centre for Micro-Business, who will also provide a more intense level of one-to-one support for people that are unemployed but looking to set up their own business.

e) One-to-One (Web Chat) Sessions:

For those start-ups or small businesses that do not have the opportunity or inclination to attend a workshop, event or obtain face-to-face support, the web chat facility offered through this programme will help businesses access support from their own business premises. The web chat facility will be delivered by 'My Incubator Ventures'- <https://miventures.co.uk/>.

1.3 Promotion and Awareness Raising

1.3.1 In order to raise awareness of the free support available to local businesses, a handful of actions are currently being developed. These are:

- a) Improved contact details for business- through updating existing databases and building up business contacts through increased promotion of business support activity.
- b) Campaign Organisation (through www.socialadvisors.co.uk) – will help to programme promotion and marketing activity at the beginning of the programme, ensuring social media, email, website updates and press releases are carried out in a timely fashion.

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.

Background papers:

Nil

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