

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Thursday, 6th July, 2017

Present: Cllr B J Luker (Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr S M King, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr L J O'Toole and Cllr Miss J L Sergison

Councillors V M C Branson, Mrs J A Anderson, O C Baldock, P F Bolt, N J Heslop, Mrs A S Oakley, M Parry-Waller, M R Rhodes and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M C Base, T I B Cannon and B W Walker

ERG 17/7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

However, with regard to the Business Rates 2017/18 presentation and in the interests of transparency Councillor Mrs Luck reminded Members that she was a small business owner within the Borough. This was not considered to represent either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or an Other Significant Interest and Councillor Mrs Luck remained in the meeting.

ERG 17/8 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 22 February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ERG 17/9 BUSINESS RATES 2017/18 - PRESENTATION

The Principal Revenues Officer provided a presentation setting out the changes to the business rates from 1 April 2017.

In addition, the details regarding Business Rate Revaluation, Transitional Relief, Small Business Relief and Rural Rate Relief and other changes, such as the support for pubs, supporting small businesses, and the discretionary fund announced by the Chancellor were referred to. It was reported that the extra rate reliefs would be funded by Government via s31 grants.

An initial analysis of the business rates accounts in the Borough for the financial year 2017/18, undertaken before the implementation of the

'extra' reliefs announced in the Chancellor's spring budget, showed that for the majority of businesses the position was not as damaging as predicted. Approximately 1,100 (31%) businesses would have no liability at all; approximately 1,000 (28%) would be paying less than last year and approximately 800 (22%) would be paying <10% more than last year.

The implementation of a discretionary fund for hard pressed ratepayers needed development and a scheme would be presented for Member approval in due course. Fortunately, there did not appear to be a significant demand for this currently. However, Members were cautioned that further details and regulations related to the extra rate reliefs were still awaited.

Members expressed a number of concerns around the longer term difficulties that could be experienced by businesses as a result of changes to Business Rates; the implications around the Borough Council's cash flow if Government funding to pay rate reliefs was delayed; the introduction, development and funding of new software to administer the changes and the potential implications around any change to the Business Rates Retention Scheme.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

ERG 17/10 NORTH KENT ENTERPRISE ZONE

Decision Notice D170047MEM

The report provided an update on the progress being made on the North Kent Enterprise Zone initiative, which included a site at Rochester Airfield. Members were also asked to approve the next steps in the delivery of the project.

It was reported that the Accountable Body for the North Kent Enterprise Zone was Maidstone Borough Council and a formal request for contributions towards the cost of this role had recently been received from that authority. It was proposed that a 15% contribution towards legal, financial and administrative costs be made. This equated to £600 per annum and could be met through existing economic development budgets.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the updated information set out in the report be noted;
- (2) the support given to the North Kent Enterprise Zone to date be endorsed; and
- (3) the proposal to contribute £600 per annum towards the Accountable Body function be agreed.

ERG 17/11 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS WITH VISIT KENT AND TOURISM SOUTH EAST

Decision Notice D170048MEM

The report provided information on the Service Level Agreements that the Borough Council currently had with two tourism bodies – Visit Kent and Tourism South East – and set out proposals for 2017/18.

It was proposed that the Borough Council did not enter into a new annual agreement with Tourism South East as there was more scope for Tonbridge and Malling to have a higher profile with Visit Kent at a county rather than regional level.

In addition, it was proposed that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Visit Kent was retained but at a reduced level of up to a maximum of £3,500 for 2017/18. However, the SLA would look to retain the activities set out in paragraph 1.4.3 of the report as a minimum.

These proposals offered potential additional savings on existing budgets.

Members recognised the value of promoting the Borough as a tourist destination for the benefit of businesses, leisure facilities and other places of interest.

RECOMMENDED: That:

- (1) the proposal to not renew the Service Level Agreement with Tourism South East in 2017/18 be agreed;
- (2) the proposal to reduce the Service Level Agreement with Visit Kent in 2017/18 to a maximum of £3,500 be agreed; and
- (3) the inclusion of activities set out in paragraph 1.4.3 of the report be agreed.

ERG 17/12 'BUILDING OUR INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY' GREEN PAPER CONSULTATION

Decision Notice D170049MEM

The report set out the Borough Council's response to the 'Building our Industrial Strategy' Green Paper consultation, which was submitted in advance of the deadline of 17 April 2017.

A summary of the main points made were set out in paragraph 1.2.2 of the report, with the full consultation response attached as Annex 1.

Members welcomed the Green Paper and supported the aims and objectives of the strategy in stimulating economic growth and prosperity. However, concern was expressed regarding the requirement for a national infrastructure policy that properly addressed the challenges arising from growth, the delivery of a credible skills and training agenda and the need for clarity regarding the role of the local partnerships and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership in implementing the strategy.

In addition, it was reported that funding had been secured for a Careers and Enterprise Adviser and an individual was expected to be in post by September 2017. The Enterprise Adviser Network, as reported at the last meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board in February 2017, would be launched on 28 July.

RECOMMENDED: That the consultation response to the 'Building our Industrial Strategy' green paper, set out in full in Annex 1 of the report, be endorsed.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

ERG 17/13 WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the West Kent Partnership meeting held on 28 April 2017 were reviewed by Members.

It was noted that the meeting had focused on the needs of the West Kent creative sector and the concerns raised related to the retention of staff, given the fast moving nature of digital technologies, and the demand for suitable premises where small technology businesses could base themselves alongside other such businesses.

Particular reference was made to business hubs and it was reported that a hub facility for small businesses would be set up at the Castle Lodge, Tonbridge. The organisation behind this venture would be The House, based in Tunbridge Wells, and representatives would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board to update on the progress being made.

Finally, the good progress in developing Job Fairs to assist with job creation in the Borough was recognised by Members.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ERG 17/14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.27 pm