

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

**21 February 2018**

**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 UPDATE ON THE BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2017/18 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19**

**To provide a detailed overview of the progress made in delivering the Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan during 2017/18 and set out priorities for 2018/19.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 At the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board on 23 June 2015, Report ERG 15/13 presented the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan. It was recommended that the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy be approved subject to a minor amendment to the 'success measure' for securing high speed broadband services across the Borough to reflect the Government's ambition of 95% by 2017.

1.1.2 This report provides the Board with information on progress regarding the actions set out under Chapter 8 of the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy, covering the following topics:

- Business Advice and Support
- Loan Funding to Local Businesses
- Skills Development
- Work Readiness
- Infrastructure Projects
- Town and Retail Centres
- LEADER Programme
- Better Business for All
- Broadband
- Inward Investment
- Tourism
- Tonbridge & Malling Local Plan

1.1.3 More specifically, the following priorities for 2017/18 were agreed following the last update report (ERG 17/4) in February 2017

- To work with Kent County Council to effectively market and promote the Kent & Medway Business Fund Programme in the Borough now that it has become operational.
- To continue to promote the new LEADER Programme to Tonbridge & Malling businesses and to co-ordinate business advice for prospective applicants.

- To work with the Kent & Medway Growth Hub and business support providers to help start-up businesses and aim to increase the 3 year survival rate.
- To deliver skills development and work readiness initiatives that support our young people and local businesses (dealt with as a separate item on this agenda)
- To increase communication with the local business community through the development of the Tonbridge & Malling Business Bulletin, the regular updating of the TMBC business pages and regular social media activity.
- To support the Tonbridge Town Team and other local traders groups with initiatives and events that support our town and retail centres.
- To work with Kent County Council in addressing remaining broadband issues and mobile blackspots in the Borough.
- To provide support, information and guidance on the local economic impact of key infrastructure projects, including the Leigh Flood Storage Area.
- To work closely with NIAB EMR on accessing government funding for the proposed Bio-tech Hub at East Malling.

## 1.2 Progress to Date

1.2.1 Progress on delivering the Action Plan is set out in Appendix 1. This illustrates that overall good progress is being made across a wide range of initiatives.

1.2.2 By using a RAG analysis of the actions set out in the Strategy, one can see that there are no projects that have a 'red' status. There are, however, some actions that are progressing more slowly than originally envisaged, and some targets which are proving challenging. These include:

- Whilst the total amount of loan funding secured is higher than expected (around £1 million), only 4 Tonbridge and Malling businesses have accessed loans from the Kent & Medway Business Fund.
- Although main out of work benefits claimants have dropped by nearly 10% since February 2015, Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefits claimant numbers have remained relatively static.
- Despite 15 local rural businesses so far having applied for West Kent LEADER funding, the number that have secured funding so far is only 4 (with 8 in the pipeline). There is still time to meet the target of 25 local rural businesses, although the closure of the programme is likely to happen sooner than originally envisaged (possibly end of 2019).
- The number of VAT de-registrations has increased considerably over the past two years, a trend that is reflected in other parts of Kent and nationally.

1.2.3 There have, however, also been a number of achievements over this period, including:

- The District and Local Centres Programme has been substantially completed.
- The establishment of a monthly Tonbridge & Malling Business E-bulletin.
- The setting up of new Business Engagement Events.
- The launch of the West Kent Enterprise Advice Network.
- The delivery of 2 Jobs and Training Fairs in the Borough (Tonbridge and Aylesford).

### 1.3 Proposed Priorities for 2018/19

1.3.1 The priorities for 2018/19 are to some extent influenced by progress made in specific areas as well as the level of future financial resources, however the following actions are key to the effective delivery of the Economic Regeneration Strategy:

- To work with business representative organisations to effectively promote and build awareness of the free support, advice and funding available to local businesses. This includes the **Kent & Medway Growth Hub, South East Business Boost, Kent & Medway Business Fund, the West Kent LEADER Programme** and the **West Kent Business Support Programme**.
- To deliver **skills development and work readiness initiatives** that support our young people and local businesses (as set out in a separate report)
- To increase communication with the local business community through the development of the monthly **Tonbridge & Malling Business Bulletin**, the establishment of a regular **programme of business engagement events**, the regular updating of the **TMBC business pages** and ongoing social media activity.
- To support the Tonbridge Town Team and other local traders groups with initiatives and events that **support our town and retail centres**.
- To work with Kent County Council in addressing remaining **broadband** issues and mobile blackspots in the Borough.
- To provide support, information and guidance on the local economic impact of **key infrastructure projects**, including the Leigh Flood Storage Area.
- To work closely with NIAB EMR on supporting plans for the proposed **Bio-tech Hub at East Malling**.

### 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 priorities as set out above can be dealt with within existing Economic Development budgets.

### 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 Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan update, as set out in Appendix 1, **BE ENDORSED**.

1.8.2 That the priorities for 2018/19 as set out under 1.3.1 **BE AGREED**.

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

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,  
Economic Regeneration  
Officer

Julie Beilby  
Chief Executive