

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

05 September 2018

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

**1 WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP - BUSINESS RATES RETENTION PILOT :
HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL GROWTH FUND**

To seek endorsement of a range of economic development initiatives to be funded by the Business Rates Retention Pilot.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 A report to this Board on the 4th June 2018 set out the potential opportunities arising from the Kent and Medway Business Rates Retention pilot and, in particular, funding being made available from the Housing and Commercial Growth Fund to support investment in local economic initiatives. It was agreed that funding would be distributed across Kent and Medway via three clusters: West Kent (the areas of Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells), North Kent (including Maidstone) and East Kent. Kent County Council is part of each cluster group.
- 1.1.2 The June report initially suggested that the West Kent Cluster would receive funding in the region of £1,055,000. Based on current projections, this has now been revised upwards to circa £1,520,000 subject to ongoing performance in 2018/19. However, a final sum cannot be confirmed until the end of the fiscal year.
- 1.1.3 It was agreed that the West Kent Partnership would receive and administer funding for the West Kent cluster. The Partnership met on the 20th July and a copy of the minutes of that meeting is attached as Appendix 1. The Partnership discussed a paper on the Business Rates Retention opportunities setting out how the funding might be utilised both across the West Kent area as a whole and by the three West Kent districts individually. The proposed projects put forward were as follows:

West Kent-wide projects: a 'Scale Up' West Kent initiative providing support and advice to smaller businesses wishing to grow and expand; and, following the success of the initial West Kent Enterprise Advisor network which links schools together with businesses and promotes work readiness amongst young people,

funding for an additional adviser to ensure all schools across West Kent can be supported. The combined cost of both projects is £104,000.

Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: both wish to invest all of their share of the BRR funding into major regeneration initiatives in Swanley and Tunbridge Wells town centre respectively.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council – a range of projects to foster business growth and support our Town and District Centres as described below.

1.1.4 The proposed initiatives for our Borough are as follows:

- Town and District commercial frontages scheme – grants of up to £5,000 to independent shopkeepers to help renovate and improve their shop fronts, total project funding of £100,000;
- Tonbridge Town Centre - initiatives to increase vitality and viability to include support for pop-up shops, creative start-ups, events and a pilot Wi-Fi scheme: funding of £25,000
- Flexible co-working space for start-up businesses at Kings Hill – making use vacant office accommodation at the Gibson Building, Kings Hill: provisional cost of £75,000
- Business Accommodation - Investment Pot: providing grants of up to £25,000 to encourage and support providers/developers to increase business accommodation in the Borough through refurbishments/conversions etc: Cost: £100,000
- Tourism Promotion Campaign for Malling – working with Visit Kent to develop a promotional campaign to promote the tourism offer in the Malling area: Cost £15000.

1.1.5 The West Kent Partnership has endorsed the proposals put forward by each district and for West Kent as a whole. Kent County Council have yet to formally agree the West Kent proposals.

1.1.6 As set out at paragraph 1.1.2, based on current projections, additional funding in the order of £155,000 may be received by the Council. It is proposed that this additional funding, if and when confirmed, be used to either support some of the projects above that prove to be good value for money or, alternatively, to come forward with new proposals to promote economic growth.

1.2 Legal Implications

1.2.1 Maidstone Borough Council is the lead authority for the pilot as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between all parties. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is the accounting body for the West Kent funding stream.

1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.3.1 As set out above.

1.4 Risk Assessment

1.4.1 Our aim would be to maintain a degree of flexibility regarding the funding of each of these initiatives and be ready to invest additional funding in those that would demonstrate positive outcomes and to meet local needs.

1.5 Equality Impact Assessment

1.5.1 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.

1.6 Recommendations

1.6.1 That the economic projects for West Kent as a whole and those for Tonbridge and Malling, as set out above, **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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