

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 26th February, 2014

Present: Cllr C P Smith (Chairman), Cllr Miss S O Shrubsole (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M O Davis, Cllr S M King, Cllr Mrs S Luck, Cllr M Parry-Waller, Cllr A G Sayer, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr Mrs E A Simpson and Cllr R Taylor

J A L Balcombe, O C Baldock, M A C Balfour, P F Bolt, D J Cure, N J Heslop, B J Luker, Mrs S Murray and M R Rhodes were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R D Lancaster

ERG 14/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Luck advised that in connection with the item on Local Retail Centres - Engagement she had a business in West Malling and was a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

ERG 14/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 12 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

ERG 14/3 SELEP STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN, KENT AND MEDWAY UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL AND WEST KENT PRIORITIES FOR GROWTH

The report provided an update on the development of growth plans for the South East, for Kent and Medway and for West Kent. It also set out proposals for the development of a local commissioning plan to draw future funding into Kent and Medway from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to support local economic priorities.

Members were reminded that funding from both Government and European sources for local infrastructure projects and to support economic initiatives was now being channelled via Local Enterprise Partnerships across the country.

In addition, proposals regarding a Kent and Medway Commissioning plan were outlined and specific priorities for Tonbridge and Malling, along with indicative funding, were set out in the report. Further work on the commissioning process would continue over the rest of the year and it remained crucial that West Kent set out a strong case for local

investment over this period to ensure the area received its fair share of support relative to other needs across Kent and Medway. It was noted that there was no guarantee that funding would be allocated to Tonbridge and Malling individually as it was anticipated that distribution would be on a county wide basis.

Members were encouraged by the priorities put forward and were grateful to Kent County Council for their response. However, whilst uncertainty remained regarding funding allocation it was important to maintain appropriate pressure and continue to lobby for important projects to be included. It was also commented that recent events had highlighted the importance of flood protection measures, which should be funded by Government and not Local Enterprise Partnerships.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the comments submitted by the West Kent Partnership on the draft Kent and Medway Growth Plan and the Strategic Economic Plan be endorsed;
- (2) the draft priority list of local economic projects, as set out in paragraph 1.6.3 of the report, be endorsed; and
- (3) the Chairman of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership be informed of the Borough Council's strong support for Government funding to support growth being devolved to the Kent and Medway Partnership.

ERG 14/4 LOCAL RETAIL CENTRES - ENGAGEMENT

The report of the Chief Executive provided an update on the engagement with traders from the Borough's local retail centres and sought agreement for a revised process for approving applications for grant support.

Members were pleased to note that all meetings held to date had resulted in positive and productive discussions. The main issues arising from these meetings were summarised in the report.

In addition, the offer of grant funding had been welcomed by local traders. However, an extension to the original deadline had been requested due to the tight timescales involved for some groups. To enable grant decisions to be made quickly it was proposed that Cabinet grant delegated authority to the Cabinet Members for Economic Regeneration and for Finance, Innovation and Property to determine grant applications and for those decisions to be reported to a further meeting of the Advisory Board for information.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the outcome of discussions with local traders held to date be noted; and
- (2) authority be delegated to the Cabinet Members for Economic Regeneration and for Finance, Innovation and Property to make decisions regarding applications for grant support from local traders groups.

ERG 14/5 DRAFT ECONOMIC REGENERATION ANNUAL ACTION PLAN 2014/15

The report presented for consideration a draft annual action plan for 2014/15. Officers noted the request to include reference to developing better regulatory delivery to promote better business for all under corporate initiatives if it was considered appropriate.

Particular reference was made to a Tonbridge and Malling Peer Challenge review arranged from 28-30 April, which would focus on economic regeneration, together with a number of wider corporate issues. Adoption of a short and concise action plan would assist with the peer review and enable the Borough Council to more clearly articulate what specific actions needed to be undertaken to fulfil its obligations to deliver against one of its key priorities.

RECOMMENDED: That the draft Economic Regeneration Annual Action Plan 2014/15 be endorsed.

ERG 14/6 A LOCAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BUSINESSES, SOUTH EAST LEP (LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP) AND REGULATORY SERVICES

The report considered how local authority regulators in the South East might work with the Local Enterprise Partnership to help regulatory services work more effectively with business, with the aim of supporting economic regeneration, and set out proposals to develop a Better Business for All Partnership model in the South East LEP area.

Members were advised that the Better Business for All Partnership model was intended to promote co-operation between local regulators and businesses to deliver specific support and improvements to assist businesses comply with the law quickly, easily and economically. It was important that through co-ordinated corporate working across the Borough Council the culture of regulatory services adding value to business in a positive way would continue to be developed.

The Borough Council's proposal to the LEP was set out in the report and included a single point of contact that could be developed with their support and the support of local business organisations. An application for grant funding to aid in the delivery of this would be need to be considered.

Members were supportive of the initiative but queried whether charging for advice in some instances would be appropriate. After careful consideration it was felt that charging could impede a business's ability to succeed given the already difficult and costly legal framework they were required to operate in. On balance, this initiative was to help business grow and it met the Borough Council's aspiration on economic strategy.

RECOMMENDED: That the Borough Council's involvement in this initiative and the approach to be taken, as set out in the report, be endorsed.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

ERG 14/7 ESCALATE BUSINESS LOAN FUND - UPDATE

The report of the Chief Executive provided an update on the Escalate loan fund scheme and the level of interest generated to date. A copy of the guidance for the scheme was attached as Annex 1 to the report.

It was reported that the recent launch of the programme at K College had been well attended. Members expressed an interest in seeing similar events in the Malling area of the borough and, although there were no current plans, it would be suggested to Kent County Council.

Members were advised that there appeared to be considerable early interest already generated and it was anticipated that the fund might be taken up very quickly once the approval process started. There was strong evidence of local demand which demonstrated a future need for additional loan funding for West Kent businesses in excess of the £5.5M currently allocated.

ERG 14/8 WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP - MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the West Kent Partnership held on 24 February 2014, which had focused on the SELEP and the various strategies for growth.

The level of public sector attendees at these meetings was noted and Members were advised of a potential reconfiguration of the Partnership to address a lack of business representation.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

ERG 14/9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm