

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

06 November 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 BUSINESS RATES RETENTION PILOT SCHEME INITIATIVES – OUTLINE PROGRAMME

This report sets out a programme of delivery for the Business Rates Retention Pilot Initiatives, including consideration of an early draft of the Commercial Frontages Grant Scheme.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 At the last Advisory Board meeting in September 2018, Report ERG 18/20 highlighted the range of proposed economic initiatives to be funded through the Business Rates Retention (BRR) Pilot. One of the initiatives set out in Report ERG 18/20 was to provide grants of up to £5,000 to independent town and district centre businesses or property owners to help renovate and improve their commercial frontages, and a total funding pot of £100,000 was agreed in order to deliver this initiative.
- 1.1.2 An outline programme is proposed with the Town and District Centres Commercial Frontages Grant Scheme representing the first BRR funded initiative to be taken forward. Draft guidance notes have been prepared which identify eligibility criteria and explain the steps needed to be taken by applicants to access the grant funding.

1.2 Outline Programme

- 1.2.1 In considering a programme of delivery it is important to ensure that it acknowledges the level of financial and staff resources required. In addition, both the amount and timing of the Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme funding cannot be known with complete accuracy. As such, it is prudent to build in a degree of flexibility into the programme.
- 1.2.2 The following table sets out a high level programme of delivery for the Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme initiatives:

Initiative	Actions	Timescale
Town and District Commercial Frontages Grant Scheme	Agree Guidance Notes and Processes. Set up small working group.	During the remainder of 2018/19
	Scheme goes live – information sent out to all eligible businesses/property owners.	April 2019
	Scheme up and running – awarding of grants and implementation of improvements.	2019/20 – 2020/21
	Close down of the initiative	End of 2021 (may vary depending on level of take up)
Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives	Pop Up Shop – this is already up and running at Angel Walk and is open up until 19 th December 2018.	2018/19
	Contribution towards Christmas lights	2019/2020
	Pilot Wifi Initiative	2020/2021
Malling Centres Promotion	Specific initiative with Visit Kent to promote the Malling Area to visitors.	To start delivery during 2019.
Flexible Co-Working Space for Start-Ups	Initial work has already been undertaken to scope the access requirements.	2018/19
	Delivery of initiative with private sector partner/tenant.	2019/20
New/Refurbished Business Accommodation Grant Scheme	Grant scheme to encourage increased provision of small business office accommodation in the borough.	Deliver scheme in 2021/2022

1.3 Town and District Centres Commercial Frontages Scheme

1.3.1 The Guidance Notes and Application Form, as provided in Appendix 1, set out the proposed criteria for the scheme. The key elements of the scheme are follows:

- The scheme is to be focused solely on our Town and District Centres, namely key streets within Tonbridge Town Centre, Borough Green, Kings Hill, Martin Square/Larkfield, Snodland and West Malling. The eligible streets are set out within the appendices of the Guidance Notes.
- The scheme will allow for tenants of properties to apply for a grant as well as property owners, as long as the terms of the current lease agreement on the property is appropriate and the lease has a minimum of three years remaining.
- The scheme is not available to national chains, franchises or charity shops.
- Applicants can apply for grants of up to £5,000 towards the external renovation or improvement of ground floor and upper floor commercial premises, and will cover up to 80% of the eligible costs.
- The Guidance Notes set out 'eligible' works as well as those that will not receive funding through the scheme. The aim of setting these out is to highlight that the grant will only contribute towards physical improvements to the frontage of the building in line with the look and feel of the area, i.e. not towards window displays, professional fees or solely for pedestrian access upgrades.
- The scheme will not fund works that have already been undertaken or works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made.

A process has been put in place to ensure that the scheme is robust and does not conflict with any other requirements the applicant has to undertake in delivering their improvement works, and encourages best practice amongst applicants. As such any applicant is encouraged to contact the Planning and Building Control Departments in the first instance to assess whether planning permission, listed building consent, advertising consent or building control approval would be required for their proposal. All grant offers will be conditional on the applicant securing the appropriate consents.

- 1.3.2 The applicant will be required to submit a comprehensive range of information with their application in order to ensure that they have the required permissions, both from the owner of the property and from the borough council, as well as to ensure that the nature and quality of the works proposed meet the criteria for the scheme.
- 1.3.3 As illustrated above, it is envisaged that the scheme will run for a couple of years. However, given that grant applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first served basis and the scheme will close once all the grant funding has been spent, the scheme could well be completed ahead of time, or if take up is slower, the scheme could continue beyond this time period.

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 These initiatives will be funded through the Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

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 proposed outline Business Rates Retention programme, as set out at 1.2.2 of the report, BE **APPROVED**.

1.8.2 That the Town and District Centres Commercial Frontages Grant Scheme, as set out in this report, BE **APPROVED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

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