

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

20 February 2019

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON THE BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2018/19

To provide a detailed overview of the progress made in delivering the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan 2015-2019 during 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 Since this time, an annual update report on progress has been provided to the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board to demonstrate the activities undertaken to deliver the Action Plan during that year and to set out key priorities for approval for the following year. On this occasion, as the new Economic Regeneration Strategy 2019-2023 will be presented at the next Advisory Board meeting in Spring 2019, this report solely focusses on the progress made during 2018/2019.

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 2018/19 were agreed following the last update report (ERG 18/3) in February 2018

- 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
- 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 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**.

1.2 Progress to Date

1.2.1 Progress on delivering the Action Plan is set out in Appendix 1. This illustrates that overall good progress has been 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. These include:

- Despite supporting its promotion, the Kent & Medway Business Fund has not seen a significant take up by local businesses. This could in part be due to the greater availability of other funding sources.
- Despite 26 Tonbridge and Malling rural businesses applying for West Kent LEADER funding, the number that have secured funding so far is 15 (against a target of 25). Whilst there are some further projects in the pipeline, there are not sufficient to get to the target. Despite this, the actual level of funding that has been secured for T&M businesses has been high (around 53% of the total allocation so far) due to the size of the bids that have been approved.

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

- Opening of the Castle Lodge Co-working Space in Tonbridge
- Delivery of Pop-up Shop in partnership with Tonbridge Creates at Angel Walk between October and December 2018.
- Continuation of the monthly Tonbridge & Malling Business E-bulletin.

- Expansion of TMBC Business Engagement Events into other parts of the borough with events taking place in Tonbridge, Snodland and Kings Hill.
- Successful expansion of the West Kent Enterprise Advice Network.
- The delivery of a programme of employability events including Jobs and Training Fair (Aylesford), Skills 3030 (Wrotham), Employability Days (Malling School and Aylesford School), Careers Day (Hugh Christie), 'Help me Out' event (Tonbridge) and Skillsfest (Tonbridge Wells – through the West Kent Partnership)

1.2.4 Appendix 2 also shows how the local economy has fared during the period 2011-2017 in comparison to other West Kent authorities, Kent and Great Britain. The key points to note are:

- Overall Tonbridge and Malling has performed well with the economy improving in a number of aspects as the country as a whole made a recovery from the financial crisis in 2008.
- However, the number of VAT de-registrations has increased considerably between 2014 and 2017, a trend that is reflected in other parts of Kent and nationally. There are multiple reasons why this might be the case, such as business failure, the result of sole traders finding alternative employment, or a business down-sizing.
- Although main out of work benefits claimants have dropped significantly since 2011, Employment Support Allowance claimant numbers have remained relatively static.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 There are no financial and value for money considerations arising from this report.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 Not Applicable.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 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.

Background papers:

Nil

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