

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

17 June 2019

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY 2019-2023

This report sets out the proposed changes to the draft strategy in light of the feedback received during the consultation exercise which was undertaken in October - November 2018, and recommends adoption of the strategy as amended.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A report was made to the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board on 05 September 2018 setting out a draft strategy to guide our work on supporting the local economy for the period 2019-2023.

1.1.2 This strategy will follow on from the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy 2015-2019, for which the final action plan update was delivered at the last Advisory Board meeting in February 2019.

1.1.3 The draft strategy has now been the subject of consultation and the purpose of this report is to present a final draft for approval, amended to take account of the comments received and to reflect views of local businesses on future economic priorities for the local area.

1.2 Results of Consultation

1.2.1 The following measures were undertaken in order to obtain consultation responses from local stakeholders:

- Dedicated webpage inviting people to comment through a short questionnaire.
- Series of Twitter and Facebook messages encouraging feedback.
- Short article in the TMBC Business e-Bulletin which went out to over 600 business and stakeholder contacts.
- Direct email to over 600 business contacts.

1.2.2 A total of 17 formal responses were received from local businesses and business representative organisations (via the questionnaire and email). In addition,

comments were also received from partner organisations, such as the West Kent Partnership and adjoining Borough and District Councils, as well as from officers within Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. This feedback has been extremely helpful in shaping the strategy, and is summarised below:

- Overall respondents were positive about the content, length and presentation of the strategy, which were all rated as ‘good’ on average.
- Need for a clear vision within the document to demonstrate the overall direction that the Borough Council is looking to head towards.
- When asked if any issue had been overlooked or underrepresented in the strategy or the action plan, 5 main items were put forward:
 - i) Greater emphasis on **broadband** access, given the growth in online retail and the expectation of businesses to be able to access superfast broadband provision even in remoter locations.
 - ii) **Retail:**
 - a) Need for a *reduction in business rates* for High Street shops.
 - b) Need to set up a *Retailers Forum* for Tonbridge Town Centre that looks at some of the strategic issues it faces.
 - c) Greater support for *rural service centres*
 - iii) Need to ensure an emphasis on **skills**, as the availability of skilled people continues to be a challenge.
 - iv) Need to strengthen the link between the socio-economic initiatives in the action plan with the ‘pockets of **deprivation**’ within the borough.
 - v) There are many other reasons for business failure than a lack of **business support** that need to be highlighted – these include suitable premises and economic conditions.

1.2.3 These points have all been accommodated within the draft Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy as set out in Appendix 1.

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 The actions set out in the strategy can be delivered using existing Economic Regeneration budgets.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 Not applicable.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 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.

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 That the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 to 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.

Background papers:

None

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