

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**02 November 2021**

**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 JOBS AND TRAINING FAIRS - ANALYSIS**

**For a number of years, the Borough Council has delivered jobs and training fair to help support local employers with their recruitment needs, whilst also helping our residents to find new job opportunities and training courses. The covid-19 pandemic caused considerable disruption to this programme of events, but they are now starting up again. This report provides a brief update on these events and provides proposals for an analysis of our jobs and training fairs to help identify lessons learnt and to gain an appreciation of their economic impact.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 Until the considerable disruption caused by the covid-19 pandemic, the delivery of jobs and training fairs had been a central part of our approach to tackling unemployment and skills-related issues in the borough. Typically, these fairs comprise a four-hour event, with a number of local employers and training providers in attendance, offering jobs, volunteering opportunities, and training courses to local residents. They also include a series of practical workshops covering a range of work-related topics, such as how to search for jobs online, CV writing, performing well at interviews or how to start up a business.

1.1.2 These events have been very well received over the years, offering local businesses and training providers a different way to promote themselves and the opportunities they provide, and giving local residents the unique opportunity to talk face-to-face informally in a world where most recruitment is now done on-line. It is also important to note that whilst the economy is recovering from a period of restrictions, the level of unemployment in the borough is still comparatively high at 3.1% (August 2021), even though it has dropped by nearly 30% in the last year. In addition, approximately 7% of the local workforce have no qualifications. As such, this is clearly an area where we need to continue to provide support.

1.1.3 With the jobs and training fairs now starting up again, it is important that these events are analysed and reviewed in order to ensure that they are as beneficial as possible.

## **1.2 Recent Jobs and Training Fairs**

1.2.1 On 06 October 2021, the first jobs fair for nearly 2 years took place again. The jointly-run Aylesford Jobs Market saw 23 businesses meet just over 100 job seekers at the Capel Morris Centre in the RBLI Village. Due to restrictions on venue capacity, the event could not accommodate greater numbers during the 4-hour event. However, anecdotally there was plenty of positive feedback and a number of examples of people being offered jobs and interviews at the event.

1.2.2 This event was followed up by the West Kent Jobs Fair on 13 October 2021 at the Assembly Halls in Tunbridge Wells. This was a slightly larger event, with 30 businesses meeting just under 150 job seekers. Some initial interviews were undertaken with both businesses and job seekers in order to gain feedback from this particular event, a summary of which is bullet-pointed below:

- Positive event that is welcoming and friendly, and gives people an opportunity to informally speak to employers.
- A number of examples of jobs and interviews being offered at the event.
- One key area of improvement would be to undertake more promotion of the event ahead of the day – for example, through social media, providing flyers at shopping centres, churches, and sending information to social housing providers.
- Some employers highlighted that people don't travel far for jobs and others are reluctant to work for a small business, and as such support on breaking down these barriers would be helpful.

1.2.3 Although social media was undertaken for these last two events, the promotion of the event was tempered slightly as there was a requirement to keep numbers under the maximum capacities set out by the venue providers. However, for future events, greater promotion would seem an extremely worthwhile investment, especially if unemployment numbers remain high.

1.2.4 The Department for Work and Pensions will also be engaged around breaking down barriers relating to travel and working for smaller businesses (see 1.3.5).

## **1.3 Proposed Analysis of the Jobs and Training Fairs**

1.3.1 In carrying out analysis of the jobs and training fairs, it is proposed that the following approach could be undertaken which builds upon the initial analysis work that has been undertaken on the day of the events themselves (set out in 1.2.2).

1.3.2 For the further analysis, it should be recognised that there are essentially three groups that will need to provide input in order for this work to be as comprehensive as possible. They are:

- a) Businesses and training providers that look to recruit through the events.
- b) Attendees at the events – mostly local job seekers or people interested in training opportunities.
- c) Partnership organisations – those organisations that the Borough Council works with to deliver the events – most notably the Department for Work and Pensions, Local Housing Associations, and the West Kent Partnership.

1.3.3 **Businesses and training providers:** the main line of questioning to this group (via questionnaire) would be specifically related to the running of the event and the level of success in securing new leads or potential new recruits:

- Did you have all the information you needed to help you prepare for the event?
- What barriers to recruitment does your business/sector currently face?
- How many job opportunities do you have available?
- Has this event helped to identify potential new staff? If so, please elaborate with any positive outcomes you have had directly from this event.
- What would you change or improve about the event?
- Overall, how would you rate the event?

1.3.4 **Attendees at the events:** the proposed questioning to people that have attended the events will be geared towards identifying any positive outcomes, and these can range from attendees gaining confidence or new information, to securing an interview and receiving a job offer depending on where the individual attendee is on their journey towards employment. The questioning will also seek constructive feedback about any cost-effective changes that could be made to the event to help increase these positive outcomes.

- How did you hear about the event?
- What do you feel is making it difficult for you to move into work/new training opportunities?
- How useful has the event been in your job search/search for a new training opportunity?
- What positive outcomes have you had from the event?
- What would you change or improve about the event?
- Overall, how would you rate the event?

1.3.5 **Partnership Organisations:** the line of questioning to this group would be focused on the planning of the events and any improvements that could be made:

- What are your experiences of working with the Borough Council on the jobs and training fairs?

- Do you think jobs and training fairs continue to be needed?
- Are there any improvements to the planning of these events that you would like to see?
- Are there any ways we can break down barriers around travel to work, or working for smaller firms?
- Do you think there are any ways we could improve the event itself? If so, please provide details?

1.3.6 It is proposed that the information sought from the businesses, training providers and attendees (jobs seekers and people looking for new training opportunities) be undertaken by questionnaire, with an informal meeting of partner organisations being set up to gather information and thoughts from them on questions set out in 1.3.5.

## 1.4 Next Steps

1.4.1 With initial analysis of recent events having been undertaken, it is proposed that the remaining analysis will take place at the end of 2021. Once completed, the outcome of the complete analysis will come back to the advisory board in early Spring 2022 with a view to implementing any improvements at future jobs fairs.

## 1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 £10,000 has been set aside from the Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve to cover the cost of 'economic initiatives and events'. The majority of this funding will cover the business engagement activities set out in the report to the advisory board in September 2021, however some of this budget will also be used to contribute towards any low-cost improvements to the jobs and training fairs as required.

## 1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 There is a negligible level of risk associated with the analysis work.

## 1.8 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.

## 1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.

1.9.2 That the initial findings set out in 1.2.2, and the actions to improve promotion and tackling barriers to employment **BE ENDORSED**.

1.9.3 That the proposed approach to analysing the Jobs and Training Fairs as set out in section 1.3, and the timeframe as set out in section 1.4 **BE AGREED.**

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:

Nil

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