

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

**02 November 2021**

**Report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 WELCOME BACK FUND**

**This report will provide Members with an update on progress on the Welcome Back Fund and will seek Members support for the plan and the progress made so far**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 The Welcome Back Fund provides councils across England with a share of £56 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the Covid pandemic. This funding builds on the £50 million Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSSF) allocated to councils in 2020 and forms part of the wider support government is providing to communities and businesses.

1.1.2 The fund can be used by local authorities to boost the look and feel of the high streets by investing items such as street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets welcoming. The fund can also be used to run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events, install and refresh signage and floor marking and improve green space on high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti.

1.1.1 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council was allocated a total of £235,062 (the combined total of RHSSF and Welcome Back Funding). In order to claim the funding, we had to submit a Grant Action Plan detailing our proposed spending. The Grant Action Plan set out the projects that we wished to fund and these included enhancements to the pleasure boat moorings, graffiti removal in and around high streets across the borough and a 'shop local' promotional campaign, as well as other items. **Annex 1** gives details of the projects being funded through the Welcome Back Fund. All funding must be spent by the end of March 2022.

1.1.2 Whilst many of the projects are being led and undertaken by the Borough Council, we were also able to make some Parish Council's and other organisations 'Delivery Partners' meaning that they can deliver projects themselves, through a

Service Level Agreement with them. We have seven Delivery Partners who are delivering projects for us. They also have to adhere to the requirements and provide evidence as required in order to submit quarterly claims.

- 1.1.3 The Grant Action Plan has now been confirmed by the MHCLG and we can claim our eligible activities in arrears on a quarterly basis. In order to submit our claims, we need to provide evidence of spend (including bank statements, details of every transaction and a progress form for that quarter).
- 1.1.4 It should be noted that there were a number of caveats to the funding which restricted how we could allocate it. We were not able to use the funding for capital expenditure, as grants to businesses and any funding had to show additionality (e.g. the funding should not replace committed expenditure).
- 1.1.5 We also have to ensure that we adhere to all ERDF requirements around branding, publicity and procurement rules. Failure to adhere to these may mean that our claims are not accepted.

## 1.2 Progress made so far

- 1.2.1 We have recently submitted our first claim (for the period up to the end of September) and we will be looking to claim £14,037.85. Due to the requirements around procurement, it has taken time to progress some items and we will be looking to submit a larger claim at the end of the next quarter.
- 1.2.2 So far work has been undertaken to clean a number of car parks within the borough including those in Tonbridge, West Malling and Borough Green. We have also been able to proceed with the Memorial gardens tablet cleaning and the whole wall along the boat mooring area in Tonbridge has now been re-rendered, making a real improvement to the area. A 'shop local' campaign is also progressing with filming of some of the projects underway so that this can be used to promote shopping within Tonbridge & Malling. A video produced as part of this campaign can be viewed at <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/homepage/20/support-for-business>
- 1.2.3 Photographs attached to **Annex 2** show some of the work that has been completed so far.
- 1.2.4 There are a number of projects which should be starting shortly including graffiti removal in key hot spot locations and the procurement of consultants to start looking at the functioning of our high streets, considering potential small-scale initiatives and adapting to the new/emerging funding landscape. This will aim to complement, rather than duplicate any work that is currently already being undertaken.
- 1.2.5 Looking further ahead we will also be progressing with quotations for the bench works in and around the High Streets. Most of these works are in the more rural areas away from Tonbridge and these will be delivered in early spring 2022,

before the end of the spend criteria. This will hopefully provide nicer weather to carry out this sort of works (painting and staining) and we will have the benches ready for summer 2022.

- 1.2.6 We are also working to install new posts in Barons Walk (river path adjacent to castle wall) to promote events in our town. However, these works still need Historic Monument consent and probably planning permission. It is still anticipated that these works will be completed before end of March 2022.

### **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 Welcome Back Fund is additional money that the Council receives and is only able to be used to fund certain projects.

### **1.5 Risk Assessment**

- 1.5.1 All appropriate risk assessments will be undertaken

### **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.

### **1.7 Policy Considerations**

- 1.7.1 Business Continuity/Resilience

### **1.8 Recommendations**

- 1.8.1 That the Welcome Back plan **BE SUPPORTED** and that the progress and spend so far **BE NOTED**

The Central Services Director and Deputy Chief Executive confirms 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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