

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

16 February 2022

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 UPDATE ON THE BOROUGH ECONOMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

To provide an overview of the progress made in delivering the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy Action Plan 2021-2023 since its adoption, and to recommend additions and amendments to the action plan.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 At the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board in November 2020, the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy and Action Plan (Report ERG 20/14) were approved. Since this time, and despite the additional work required in managing our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Borough Council has made some good progress in addressing some of the priority actions set out in the strategy.

1.1.2 Having previously provided the Board with an update in May 2021, this report provides information on progress regarding the actions set out in the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy for the period April 2021 – January 2022. This report covers the following ‘five channels’:

- Communications, Confidence and Trust
- Open for Business
- Supporting Business
- People
- Investment

1.1.3 In line with progress undertaken and the arrival of new opportunities since the last update, it is proposed that some amendments are made to the Action Plan to more accurately reflect the work being undertaken by the Economic Regeneration Team.

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, it is apparent that there are a few projects that have an ‘amber’ status. The main reason for this is that the strategies resources over the past year have been continuously focussed on the Covid-19 pandemic response. As the situation moves tentatively from direct grant support to businesses, along with other covid-19 measures, towards support through wider economic initiatives, these actions are being picked up and progressed.

1.2.3 There have, however, also been several achievements recently which have contributed towards the Action Plan, including:

- The high usage rate for the Covid-19 Recovery Helpline (and business adviser support after July 2021), which saw a further 600 business enquiries from T&M based businesses in the period between April 2021 and the end of 2021.
- The successful provision of over £40m of covid-19 business grants during the period April 2020-November 2021, with the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant and the additional ARG (discretionary) grants being made available in January 2022.
- The completion of the Shopfront Improvement Scheme.
- The improvements to Railway Approach in Tonbridge.
- The delivery of the first round of the Green Business Grant Scheme, which supported 19 businesses (amounting to around £79,000).
- The reintroduction of employment events such as the Aylesford Jobs Market and the West Kent Jobs Fair.

1.2.4 In addition to the information above, an update on some key economic indicators is provided in Appendix 2. This is designed to give a broad overview of the local economy, albeit there being a lag in the provision of data (which mostly relates to 2020 and 2021). The most recent data appears to indicate that, as expected, there is a greater churn of businesses (higher births and deaths), and with unemployment levels dropping quite quickly and businesses struggling to recruit, wages are likely to continue to increase.

1.3 Suggested Amendments

1.3.1 In order to better reflect the work of the Economic Regeneration team, it is proposed that the following amendments be made to the Action Plan:

- Replace ‘Develop a new West Kent Retail Support Programme to support our High Streets’ with ‘Develop and implement a High Streets Action Plan’ to greater reflect the work now being delivered through the Welcome Back Fund.
- Replace both ‘Promote and refer businesses to the West Kent Business/Start-up Support Programme’ and ‘Promote and refer to the covid-19 recovery helpline/Kent & Medway Growth Hub’ with ‘Promote and refer

businesses to available business funding and support' to greater reflect the changes to the support on offer.

- Replace 'Support the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network in local secondary schools to ensure young people receive quality careers advice and guidance, and interactions with the workplace' and 'Support the West Kent Kickstart Programme, providing 6-month placements for 18–24-year-olds' with 'Support the establishment of legacy initiatives arising out of the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network and the West Kent Kickstart Programme' in order to greater reflect the changes to the Enterprise Adviser Network and the end of the Kickstart Programme.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The matters raised in this report are considered to be routine, uncontroversial or not legally complex and a legal opinion has not been sought on these proposals.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 There are no financial and value for money considerations arising directly from this report.

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 contents of this report **BE NOTED**.
- 1.8.2 That permission to carry out minor amendments to the action plan, as set out in 1.3.1 **BE APPROVED** so that it can more accurately reflect the future activities of the Council.

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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