

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

16 February 2022

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 progress made so far

1.1 The Welcome Back Fund

1.1.1 Members will remember from a previous report to this Board that the Council was allocated funding from the Welcome Back Fund (from the European Regional Development Fund) which could be spent on boosting 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 total amount allocated to Tonbridge & Malling was £235,062.

1.1.2 Although there are strict criteria which restricts what the funding can be spent on, we developed a Grant Action Plan which detailed our proposed spending and over the past few months we have been progressing on spending the funding.

1.1.3 Members should note that all spend must be complete (and the money should have left our bank account) by the end of March 2022. At present, there is no extension to the fund.

1.2 Progress made so far

1.2.1 Claims to the fund must be made in arrears on a quarterly basis. Our first claim for £11,698.21 for the period June to September 2021 was submitted and we have now received this money. The second claim for £48,485.32 for the period October to December 2021 has recently been submitted. We may be required to provide evidence of our spend, adherence to procurement rules and defrayal information before we will receive any money, so it could be up to two months before we receive this money. Our cumulative spend so far is £60,183.53.

- 1.2.2 The third, and final, claim must be submitted by 30 April 2022. There is currently no extension to the funding so it will cease from 31 March 2022. All spend (and defrayal) must have taken place by 31 March.
- 1.2.3 Officers are now working on all outstanding projects to ensure that we can claim as much of the funding as possible before the end of March. Outstanding projects include graffiti removal across the borough, repairs to benches across the borough, finishing the 'shop local' campaign and improvements to Martin Square and Twisden Road shops.
- 1.2.4 We have also been able to procure some consultants who are looking into identifying the level of demand for business support amongst our high street businesses, and the type of support required and identifying any gaps in provision that may need to be addressed. They will also identify through 'health checks' the small-scale interventions required to improve the performance of our high streets and identify the funding opportunities that exist to support their delivery. It is anticipated that this will help with the longer-term survival of the high streets.
- 1.2.5 We are also working with our Delivery Partners (organisations outside of the Borough Council who can utilise the funding available). A number of these, including West Malling Parish Council, East Peckham Parish Council and Snodland Town Council still have outstanding projects and will be encouraged to submit their claims before the end of March.
- 1.2.6 Whilst I think it is unlikely that we will be able to spend the total amount of funding available to us (due to resource and time restrictions), I estimate that we should be able to claim in the region of £130,000 for our last claim. This would make our total claim approximately £190,000.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 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.

1.4 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 progress and spend on the Welcome Back Fund so far **BE NOTED**

The Director of Central Services 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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