

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 JOBS AND TRAINING FAIRS – ANALYSIS AND NEXT STEPS

At the Board meeting in November 2021, a report set out an overview of recent jobs and training fairs and a proposal to undertake an analysis of these fairs to help identify lessons learnt, gain an appreciation of their economic impact and to set out potential improvements that could be made to future events. This report sets out the findings from this analysis and next steps.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Over a number of years, the delivery of jobs and training fairs has been a central part of the Council's approach to helping add value to the efforts of partnership organisations (such as the Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Associations and the West Kent Partnership) in tackling worklessness and skills-related issues in the borough. These events generally last for 4 hours during the day and comprise a number of local businesses and training providers offering jobs, volunteering opportunities and training courses to local residents. They also include a series of practical workshops covering work-related topics, such as CV writing, performing well at interview and how to set up a business.

1.1.2 These events have been well-received over the years, but it is important that they are reviewed to ensure that they offer a worthwhile contribution towards getting local people into job opportunities and new training courses.

1.1.3 Two events – the Aylesford Jobs Market on 06 October 2021 and the West Kent Jobs Fair on 13 October 2021 – have formed the basis of this analysis work.

1.2 Approach to the Analysis

1.2.1 As set out in Report ERG21/26, some initial informal findings were pulled together on the day of the two events, which were broadly positive although did highlight two potential areas for improvement – firstly, building greater awareness through social media and flyer drops, and secondly, finding ways to encourage greater footfall to stands occupied by smaller businesses.

1.2.2 Building on this information, questionnaires were sent to jobs seekers, businesses and training providers that attended the events to gather further views, and informal debrief sessions were undertaken with partnership organisations to discuss the events, their impact and areas for improvement.

1.3 Key Findings:

1.3.1 Overall, the feedback received illustrated that the events were very much welcomed and successful in linking job seekers with employment opportunities.

1.3.2 Both events achieved a high conversion rate of attendees securing a positive outcome – ranging from further discussions with employers or training providers to securing new employment opportunities.

1.3.3 Table 1 sets out some of the headline statistics from the two events. As can be seen from the figures each event was well attended, although it should be noted that restrictions on numbers imposed by the venues did limit the number of people that were able to attend:

Table 1: Figures for the two jobseeker events

	Aylesford Jobs Market	West Kent Jobs Fair
Partners	Jobcentre Plus, Clarion, West Kent Housing, RBLI	WKP (TWBC & SDC), Jobcentre Plus
No. of businesses	23	30
No. of jobseekers	105	167
No. of job applications as a result of the jobs fair	17	30
No. of interviews set up as result of jobs fair	24	53
No. of jobs resulting from the jobs fair	18	29

1.3.4 It is also interesting to note that at both events, the number of people being directly offered an interview was greater than the number being told to submit a job application. This is most likely due to the current labour market conditions and the eagerness of businesses to recruit as quickly as possible.

1.3.5 The questionnaire to job seekers provided a 28% response rate, and generated the following feedback:

- 87% felt the event was well advertised (although this should be taken with a pinch of salt as only those who attended, and therefore knew about the event, were surveyed)
- 67% stated that they found opportunities to develop new work skills.
- 73% stated that they found opportunities for employment support.

- 67% found at least one job opportunity on the day, showing a highly fruitful engagement with local employers. This means 33% didn't find work opportunities on the day, potentially indicating a need for more diversity in job availability.
- 100% found DWP and TMBC staff to be friendly and helpful

1.3.6 The final section of the survey allowed job seekers to provide written feedback. All but one of these responses explained that the event was a good setting for jobseeker/employer interaction and had helped them in their efforts to find employment. The one response with some constructive criticism highlighted that they would like to have had more local employers and fewer generic agencies and training providers.

1.3.7 The feedback from local employers and training providers that attended the events was overwhelmingly positive with all but 2 employers stating that it had benefited their recruitment drive. At both events it was also notable that only one business left the event early and some stayed well past the end of the event to speak to job seekers.

1.3.8 At the informal debrief meetings with partnership organisations, the following feedback was received:

- All the partners were positive about working on these events and felt that they do continue to be needed, especially in light of the current labour market conditions.
- It was agreed that as things returned to some version of normality, then we should return to doing more to promote the events.
- It was highlighted that there were a few smaller firms that didn't 'window dress' their stands (for example, using colourful displays or providing promotional material), and so more could be done to encourage employers to make their stands as interesting as possible.

1.4 Next Steps:

1.4.1 The overall conclusion from this analysis work is that the jobs fairs are an effective tool in helping to reduce worklessness and developing skills amongst local people. They are well received by employers and training providers, job seekers and partner organisations. It is therefore clear that the Borough Council should continue to deliver these events.

1.4.2 However, there are a handful of low or no-cost actions that can be undertaken in order to make the events even better. Ahead of delivering the next jobs fair on 29 March 2022 in Tonbridge, it is proposed that the following be undertaken in response to the finding of this analysis:

- Undertake a greater amount of promotion ahead of the event to ensure a high attendance (on the basis that capacity restrictions will be removed or less constrained by the end of March 2022). Due to budget constraints this will predominantly focus on social media activity.

- The Department for Work and Pensions (Jobcentre Plus) will provide a guide for businesses, setting out some useful tips for making stands attractive and approachable.
- Aim to provide a wide variety of sectors are represented at the event to ensure that there is something for all jobseekers.
- In addition, future events will continue to provide plenty of seating at stands, as this has been shown to encourage jobseekers to spend more time at the event talking to employers.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 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.

1.6 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 key findings of the analysis as set out in 1.3 **BE ENDORSED**.

1.9.3 That the next steps as set out in section 1.42 **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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