

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

14 November 2023

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023-2027

This report sets out the proposed changes to the draft strategy in light of the feedback received during the consultation exercise which was undertaken in September-October 2023, and recommends the adoption of the strategy as amended.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A report setting out a draft Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 was presented to the committee on 25 July 2023. The committee recommended approval of the document, and this was subsequently signed off by Cabinet on 05 September 2023.

1.1.2 The consultation commenced on 15 September and ran until 13 October 2023. Having now been the subject of consultation, the purpose of this report is to present a final draft for approval. The strategy has been amended to take account of the comments received and to reflect views of local businesses and key partner organisations on our economic priorities and actions for the borough.

1.2 Results of Consultation

1.2.1 The following measures were undertaken in order to obtain consultation responses from local stakeholders:

- Dedicated webpage inviting people to comment through a short questionnaire.
- Direct email to database of key economic partner contacts.
- Programme of social media messaging – Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Inclusion of an article in two editions of the Tonbridge and Malling Business e-bulletin, which goes out to over 900 business contacts.

1.2.2 A total of 23 formal responses were received from local businesses and business representative organisations, partner organisations (such as the West Kent Partnership and adjoining Borough and District Councils), as well as from Officers

and Members within the council (22 responses via the questionnaire and one written email). Whilst the number of responses was lower than hoped for, the quality of the feedback from those that did respond was high and as such extremely helpful in shaping the final draft of the strategy. A summary of the responses is provided below:

- 91% of respondents agreed with the vision set out in the strategy, with 0% disagreeing with the vision.
- Of the priorities set out in the strategy, the highest ranked priorities are:
 - Supporting local business
 - A greener more productive economy
 - Vibrant town centres
 - A thriving rural economy
- 0% disagreed with the indicators on the dashboard – 62% agreed with them and 38% were unsure.
- When asked if there was anything missing in the strategy, the following were suggested:
 - Ensuring the Unique Selling Points (USPs) of the borough are covered.
 - A greater emphasis on tackling empty commercial premises and town centre eyesore sites/premises.
 - More on harnessing volunteers and their skills and experience.
 - More business networking opportunities.
 - Ensuring new developments support biodiversity/tree planting.
 - Issues of housing affordability for local people.

1.2.3 In addition, comments were also shared about the presentation of the strategy – making it more visually appealing and ensuring that the information is as easily digestible as possible.

1.3 Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027

1.3.1 Following the feedback from the consultation, the draft Economic Development Strategy 2023/2027 has been amended. The revised document is set out in **Appendix 1**.

1.3.2 The amendments include:

- Inclusion of more imagery from across the borough that help to reference the strengths of the local economy.
- Further information on the shopfront and vacant unit improvement grant scheme in the action plan to emphasise the role of the council in helping to support our town centres.
- Reference to housing affordability for local people as a key challenge.
- Inclusion of more detail in the action plan – relating to funding and timescales.

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 The actions set out in the strategy can be delivered using existing Economic Regeneration budgets.

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 to low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Policy Considerations

1.8.1 Economic Development

1.8.2 Skills and Employability

1.8.3 Inward Investment

1.8.4 Tourism Development

1.8.5 Climate Change

1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.

1.9.2 That the Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 as set out in Appendix 1 **BE RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet for approval.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property 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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