

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

25 February 2015

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 CONSULTANT'S REPORT – THE CASE FOR WEST KENT

To set out the key findings of a report into the importance of the West Kent economy which has been commissioned by the West Kent Partnership.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 As Members will be aware from previous reports to this Board, the creation of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, covering Essex, Kent and East Sussex, has meant that external funding to support growth and enterprise is now being channelled from Government to that Partnership. Given the wide area that it covers, a 'federated' model has been adopted where by separate partnerships exist for different county areas. The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) is the relevant federated partnership for Tonbridge and Malling. The Borough Council has a seat on that Partnership which is alternated with Sevenoaks District Council.
- 1.1.2 Competition for funding is therefore at two levels: first we must seek to secure a high priority for our local projects with the Kent and Medway Partnership and then, help seek to secure a priority for Kent and Medway projects at the SELEP level. There remains strong competition for funding both across Kent and Medway and across the wider SELEP area.
- 1.1.3 Local projects and funding bids are mainly led by the West Kent Partnership. As a relatively affluent area with a strong local economy, compared to East Kent, for example, the needs of our area can sometimes be regarded by some to be less significant and our subsequent ability to attract funding for important local projects can be challenging.
- 1.1.4 For this reason, the West Kent Partnership agreed to commission a study of the West Kent economy to help demonstrate its benefits to Kent as a whole and how on-going investment in the West Kent economy was needed to sustain local growth. The consultants were also asked to report on ways in which the West Kent Partnership could best secure additional LEP funding in the future.

1.1.5 Wessex Economics Ltd were commissioned to undertake that study and a copy of the executive summary and recommendations are attached as Appendix 1. A full copy of the study can be circulated on request.

1.2 Key Findings

1.2.1 Whilst the study highlights a number of existing strengths of the West Kent economy , it recommends that West Kent partners should not be complacent about the future and that action is now needed to address a number of issues including:

- A need to demonstrate and promote the positive contribution that the West Kent economy makes to the Kent economy as a whole
- More to be done to attract and retain inward investment from higher value, knowledged-based businesses
- Better promotion of the West Kent area to inward investors is required as other parts of Kent appear to be more favourably regarded
- A need to address a relative lack of choice of new sites for business use across West Kent (although this is perhaps less so for Tonbridge and Malling)
- A need to re-assess the bids for funding that have recently been made to SELEP by West Kent with a view to developing a pipeline of projects which are then ready to take forward when new funding becomes available
- A need to engage the local business community to help promote the West Kent area and its economic benefits
- The current membership and structure of the West Kent Partnership needs to be refreshed.
- District Local Plans need to make adequate future provision for both local employment and housing needs.

1.2.2 At the district level, the publication of this report has also been timely in relation to the publication of the draft Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy which is dealt with elsewhere on this agenda. Where relevant, actions have been included in the draft to address the consultant's recommendations, for example, the need to more actively promote opportunities to attract additional inward investment.

1.2.3 The consultant's study also draws attention to the need for local councils to invest additional resources in economic regeneration. As reported recently to General Purposes Committee, savings made elsewhere via changes to the Council's establishment are being re-invested in the creation of a new post of economic

regeneration officer to support the delivery of actions as set out in draft Strategy with a particular focus on increased engagement with our local business community. An appointment to this new post will be made shortly.

1.3 Next Steps

- 1.3.1 The West Kent Partnership has agreed to assess, in detail, the recommendations of the study and to prepare an action plan to take these forward. A review of the structure and membership of the Partnership is also to be undertaken with a view to attracting greater representation from local businesses. The report is also being shared with MPs, SELEP, KCC and other key partners to explore how we can jointly address some of the issues which have been highlighted. A further report relating to the adopted West Kent action plan will therefore be made to a future meeting of this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 As addressed within this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 n/a

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 Case for West Kent report **BE NOTED** and that further report to this Board **BE MADE** on actions arising.

The 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:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive