

Government Covid Grant Funding Scheme – Welcome Back Fund

Report of the Community and Leisure Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the Head of Community and Leisure, in consultation with the Head of Finance and Revenues, be authorised to allocate Test Valley Borough Council’s allocation of the “Welcome Back Fund” as described in paragraph 6.2 of the report.

SUMMARY:

In recent months, the government has introduced the Welcome Back Fund to enable local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade and tourism, particularly in High Streets, as their economies reopen and recover from the pandemic.

This report seeks authority to allocate the £112,403 funding available for Test Valley.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Throughout the pandemic the government has made funding available to local authorities to help fight the impacts it has had on our communities.
- 1.2 Some of this funding is ring-fenced, and must be spent on specific activities. Some comes directly to Test Valley Borough Council, whereas some is allocated via Hampshire County Council.
- 1.3 Where funding is provided for specific purposes, there is government guidance attached as to what it can (and cannot) be used for, along with a requirement to submit returns to government confirming how the funding has been allocated and spent (on allowable expenditure).
- 1.4 This report provides an update on one of the government’s more recent funding streams, the Welcome Back Fund, and proposals as to how it will be used.

2 Background

- 2.1 The council has received an allocation of £112,403 of Welcome Back Funding. The fund is intended to allow and enable local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade, tourism, particularly in the High Streets, as their economies reopen.

- 2.2 Grant conditions include details of what this allocation can (and cannot) be used for;
 - 2.2.1 Funding can be used by local authorities to;
 - (a) Boost the look and feel of an area (eg parks, green spaces– to make High Streets welcoming)
 - (b) Publicity campaigns to encourage visitors
 - (c) Preparing / holding events that will boost footfall and encourage people back into their High Streets (thereby supporting local businesses)
 - (d) Installing / refreshing signage or markings to encourage safety / social distancing
 - (e) Improving green spaces on High Streets
 - 2.2.2 The supporting guidance notes state funding can be used for ‘support to promote a safe public environment for a local area’s visitor economy.’ This includes, but is not limited to;
 - (a) Place-based marketing (for example, supporting safe celebration events on High Streets and local towns)
 - (b) Marshals
 - (c) Public space maintenance
 - (d) Maintenance of public conveniences including new temporary facilities
 - (e) Beautification activities (inc graffiti removal)
 - (f) Non-permanent public realm adaptations
 - (g) Activities that future proof the High Street
 - (h) Improvement of green spaces and provision of outdoor seating areas.
 - 2.2.3 The guidance also stipulates what the funding cannot be used for, such as;
 - (a) Activities that provide no additionality
 - (b) Capital expenditure
 - (c) Grants to businesses
 - (d) To replace funding already committed in other projects
- 2.3 The guidance notes includes reference to working with key stakeholders in scoping and agreeing what the funding allocation is to be used for, and seeks assurance that it is committed within the 2021/22 financial year.
- 2.4 There is a High Street in each of Test Valley’s towns of Andover, Stockbridge and Romsey, and so it is recommended to allocate a proportion of funding to each.
 - 2.4.1 The proposals contained within this report have been put forward with the support and endorsement of both Romsey Future and Andover Vision boards.

2.4.2 Temporary infrastructure enhancements in Stockbridge have been led by both the Parish Council and Hampshire County Council, and so any proposed allocation of funding for continuation or enhancement in Stockbridge, would be made with their full agreement.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

3.1 All options contribute to prime corporate objectives to enhance our town centres.

3.2 Growing the potential of town centres to adapt and be attractive, vibrant and prosperous places.

- (a) future proofing our town centres to be accessible places where people live, shop, work and spend their leisure time.
- (b) Enhancing public realm and improving the appearance and environment of our town centres.
- (c) Making our town centres attractive places for inward investment to attract more jobs and increase footfall.
- (d) Working with Andover Vision and Romsey Future to ensure that growth within our town centres benefits all of our communities.

4 Consultations/Communications

4.1 The proposals contained within this report have been put forward with the support and endorsement of both Romsey Future and Andover Vision boards. Both Andover Vision and Romsey Future partnerships are made up of a broad mix of statutory, local and charitable stakeholders for their respective towns.

4.2 Proposals for Stockbridge will be agreed in partnership with the Parish Council and Hampshire County Council, both of whom have led on projects for the High St during the pandemic.

5 Options

5.1 Do nothing.

5.2 Propose to allocate the funding as follows:

5.2.1 Andover - £62,403 towards an extended programme of diverse cultural events and activities, in keeping with the direction of travel for regeneration, and aspirations set for the town centre masterplan.

5.2.2 Stockbridge – up to £20,000 towards extending interim measures to manage safe / social distancing.

5.2.3 Romsey - £30,000 towards urban realm improvement projects between Dukes Mill, fishlake stream and Stirling Walk.

5.3 Consider some other scheme for funding.

6 Option Appraisal

6.1 Do nothing.

6.1.1 The Council could choose not to draw down Welcome Back Funding and return the allocation, but on the basis there are a number of positive and potentially viable options for use of the funding, this is not the recommended option.

6.2 Propose to allocate the funding as follows:

6.2.1 Andover - £62,403 towards an extended programme of diverse cultural events and activities in keeping with the direction of travel for regeneration, and aspirations set for the town centre masterplan.

- (a) The Council, BID, Chantry Centre and the Lights are already working together on a programme of events for the town throughout the summer of 2021.
- (b) In line with the direction of the town centre masterplan, Welcome Back Funding provides an ideal opportunity to extensively enhance our cultural events and activities programme (as a catalyst for change and regeneration).
- (c) In doing so it is intended to set out a plan for a more diverse programme of cultural events, activities and 'meanwhile uses', for and across the town centre.
- (d) This will require a dedicated curatorial and event coordination resource, as well as scoping the events, initiatives and activities themselves.
- (e) The detail and resource plan for this work is still being prepared, and it will be the subject of a future and more detailed report to Council.

6.2.2 Stockbridge – up to £20,000 towards extending interim measures to manage safe / social distancing.

- (a) Stockbridge Parish Council and Hampshire County Council have led on the development of temporary measures to enable safe and socially responsible use of their High Street. It would therefore only seem appropriate for any extension / enhancement of this scheme to be determined in consultation with these partners.
- (b) Discussions as to the specific detail are ongoing but a provisional allocation of up to £20,000 is recommended (with any underspend being reallocated to Andover and/or Romsey).

6.2.3 Romsey - £30,000 towards urban realm improvement projects between Dukes Mill, fishlake stream and Stirling Walk.

- (a) Ambition to enhance this section of the town is already articulated as part of the South of Town Centre Masterplan.
- (b) It is proposed that a £30,000 allocation is made toward this project (subject to eligibility and funds being spent this financial year).

- (c) If this is ultimately not possible, and in consultation with Romsey Future and its stakeholders, it is proposed that the funding allocation instead be directed to an alternate Romsey Future scheme – such as the ‘virtual High Street / Smart Town’ project (currently also being scoped), or to promote events and activities that support or promote recovery (with any underspend being reallocated).

6.2.4 This is the recommended option, and it is proposed that details of each project would be reported to Members as they progress.

6.3 Consider some other scheme for funding

6.3.1 A number of good ideas have been put forward and discussed with partners. It would be possible to consider other schemes, but it would seem prudent to pursue those agreed above before considering others. There is a risk that no further viable scheme or options would emerge, and / or time would run out for its use whilst further options are explored (and the funding could be lost). For this reason, this is not the recommended option.

7 Risk Management

7.1 An evaluation of the risks indicate that the existing controls in place mean that no significant risks have been identified at this time.

8 Resource Implications

8.1 This report seeks authority for the allocation of the Welcome Back Funding, as set out in section 6.2 of this report. This is a government grant allocation and there are no net budgetary implications.

8.2 A further report will be prepared for a future Cabinet meeting to present a more detailed proposal for an extended programme of cultural events, activities and ‘meanwhile uses’ for Andover town centre.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The funds must be spend in accordance with the specified criteria – a link to which is provided in ‘background papers’ section below.

10 Equality Issues

10.1 All / any schemes will be required to complete individual EQIAs as appropriate as proposal crystallise.

11 Other Issues

11.1 **Community Safety** – for all / any projects and activities on our High Streets and/or in public places, a ‘covid-safe’ risk assessment will be carried out in addition to existing and statutory risk assessments and risk management measures.

11.2 **Property Issues** – land owners, statutory consultees and stakeholders will be consulted as appropriate.

11.3 **Wards/Communities Affected** – all town centre wards though all wards likely to be impacted.

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

12.1 To enable local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade, tourism – particularly in High Streets, as their economies reopen – it is proposed that Welcome Back Funding be allocated as set out in section 6.2 of this report.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993397/Welcome_Back_Fund_Guidance_v2.pdf

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	0	File Ref:	N/A
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	18 August 2021