



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
15 JULY 2021**

WELCOME BACK FUND

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members about the Welcome Back Fund.
- 1.2 To agree on the principles by which the Council will engage with local business groups, lower-tier authorities and other relevant stakeholders to ensure maximum local impact and value for money.
- 1.3 To agree on the principles by which the funding will be allocated and defrayed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That Members note the previous and ongoing work to support our High Streets, visitor economy and business community, and the appointment of the Fixed Term post of Lead Specialist Prosperity;
- (ii) That Members endorse the Welcome Back Fund Engagement Approach and Principles;
- (iii) That Members endorse the Welcome Back Prioritisation Principles.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) is from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the pandemic. It builds on the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSS), announced in May 2020.
- 3.2 The scope of the WBF is divided into six strands as set out below (with strands 5 and 6 having been added recently):
 1. Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.
 2. Communications and public information activity to ensure that the reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
 3. Business-facing awareness-raising activities to ensure that the reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
 4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that the reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

5. Support to promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy.
 6. Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of Covid-19 (CV-19) including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.
- 3.3 The guidance is extensive, but the following are explicitly out of scope:
- Activity that provides no additionality;
 - Capital expenditure;
 - Grants to businesses;
 - Activity that directly generates revenue to the Council.
- 3.4 Local authorities are encouraged to engage local businesses, business organisations, lower-tier authorities such as Parish Councils, and other relevant stakeholders when considering how to use this award.
- 3.5 Funding is provided retrospectively upon submission of an accepted claim and 3.4% of the fund will be claimed for administration to ensure this is achieved.
- 3.6 All funds must be defrayed by 31 March 2022.
- 3.7 Maldon District Council has been allocated a total of £180,218 from RHSS and WBF. Following work undertaken last year the remaining budget is £145,558.
- 3.8 Approximately £60,000 of the fund has been allocated for the employment of a new Lead Specialist (Recovery and Prosperity) to lead on the Welcome Back Project along with development and delivery of The Maldon District Economic Recovery and Transformation Action Plan (Strand 1 and leading on all other strands).
- 3.9 Approximately £10,000 has been allocated to communications and public information activity to ensure that the reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely (Strand 2).
- 3.10 Approximately £15,000 has been allocated to support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of CV-19 including trialling new ideas, particularly where these relate to the High Street (Strand 6).
- 3.11 Business-facing awareness-raising activities to ensure that the reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely (Strand 3) will be achieved through existing resources and our Partnership with Sense of Place.
- 3.12 The activity and spend plans under these strands will be pro-active as well as responsive to the evolving situation and aligned with our Corporate Plan and Objectives.
- 3.13 The remaining budget of approximately £55,000 has been allocated to strands 4 and 5 and direct engagement with local business groups, lower-tier authorities and other relevant stakeholders to ensure maximum local impact and value for money.
- 3.14 Engagement with stakeholders and prioritisation of proposals will be undertaken in line with the Council's Welcome Back Fund Engagement Approach and Principles and Welcome Back Prioritisation Principles.

- 3.15 In recognition of the compressed programme time scale, this work is being started by the Strategic Theme Lead in advance of the recruitment of the Lead Specialist.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Welcome Back fund presents a significant opportunity to the Council to support our economies, businesses and residents. However, it is a challenging timescale and has high expectations both in terms of engagement and reporting.
- 4.2 Members should support the proposals and empower officers to deliver.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 The Welcome Back fund primary support the Council Prosperity Objectives of Supporting Existing Local Businesses and Enhancing and Promoting the District Visitor Economy.
- 5.2 It also supports the Council's work as part of the Covid-19 Economic Response and Recover Plan.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The proposal will enable residents to engage with the programme and it is hoped will significantly benefit from its outputs.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Spend is at risk and it is vital that programme activity is aligned and adequately reported to the funder to ensure the funding is received.

The programme will reduce the risks to the economy presented by Covid19.

The Council faces increased reputation risk if it fails to deliver to the expectations of stakeholders.

- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Activity if grant funded (paid retrospectively) including £5,000 for administration.

The Fund will only cover nine months of the 12-month Fixed Term Contract (FTC) for the Lead Specialist. The remaining three months' salary is a commitment of the Corporate Delivery Fund.

- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – It is hoped that the bulk of the work will be undertaken by the new Lead Specialist, however, inevitably there may be additional work to enhance efforts of existing staff (within existing establishment) as well as the need to start work which is being led by the Strategic Theme Lead.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None anticipated.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** - None anticipated.

Background Papers:

[Welcome Back Fund Guidance](#)

[Engagement Approach and Principles & Welcome Back Prioritisation Principles](#)

Enquiries to: Jack Ellum, Strategic Theme Lead – Prosperity.