

CALDERDALE MBC

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

CABINET

6th AUGUST 2012

ECONOMIC TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. ISSUE

- 1.1** The Economic Task Force was established in January 2009 to react urgently to counteract the effects of the economic downturn on the residents, communities and businesses of the Borough. The Economic Task Force does not have the remit to approve funding allocations in its own right, but can make recommendations to Cabinet for allocations of funding (such as from the Council's Economic Fighting Fund).

2 NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1** At the Economic Task Force (ETF) meeting on the 30th July 2012, recommendations were made to seek Cabinet's approval for allocations of funding from the Economic Fighting Fund (EFF) and to transfer some funding received from the Government into the Economic Fighting Fund. This paper is to ask for Cabinet's approval to transfer £100,000 of High Street Innovation Fund into the Economic Fighting Fund and to make allocations of up to £113,500 EFF funding to support four initiatives.

3 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1** It is recommended that Cabinet approve the following:-

- (a) The transfer of £100,000 received from the Government's High Street Innovation Fund into the Economic Fighting Fund.
- (b) The allocation of up to £100,000 for the coordination of (and support for) a promotion campaign to re-invigorate local economies in areas affected by the floods, culminating in the promotion of trading over the Christmas period (allocation to include a contribution to the costs of Christmas Trees)
- (c) The allocation of £5,500 from EFF to support an "Ambassadorship Scheme"
- (d) The allocation of £2,500 from EFF to support the Calderdale Literary Trail
- (e) After investigation by officers, and if required, further allocation of up to £5,500 from EFF for a Traffic Regulation Order to facilitate coach parking in Hebden Bridge.

4 BACKGROUND

The activities to be supported through this report can be described briefly as follows.

4.1 Transfer of funding

4.1.1 The Council has received £100,000 from the Government's High Street Innovation Fund. The Economic Task Force has previously received other Government funding for an Empty Shops Initiative (£52.6k) and has already considered at the last meeting in March 2012, similar activity as part of the "Next Steps" initiative.

4.1.2 Members of the ETF recommended to Cabinet that the £100,000 High Street Innovation Fund from the Government should be transferred into the Economic Fighting Fund.

4.2 Promotion campaign for businesses affected by floods in the Upper Calder Valley

4.2.1 The floods that occurred in the Calder Valley in June and July of this year have affected approximately 250 businesses, leading to the closure (temporary or permanent) of many businesses, although approximately 70% of businesses are understood to be continuing to trade, at least partially.

4.2.2 Officers from the Regeneration Service have been in contact with over 200 of the businesses affected so far, in order to understand the issues and problems faced by the businesses. Some of the issues raised by businesses include concerns over flood insurance premiums, requests for support for flood barriers or flood defence systems, concerns over cash-flow as a result of loss of trading income and loss of stock as a result of the floods.

4.2.3 There has also been a frequent request for support to encourage people to continue to visit the towns and areas affected by the floods. Businesses are concerned that otherwise even those businesses that continue to trade at the moment, will be badly affected by the loss of income from a reduced footfall in the towns, and may succumb to closure. This could have a devastating effect on local economies, especially in the period up to Christmas, when most retail businesses earn the majority of their income.

4.2.4 The views expressed privately by businesses to Council Officers have also been repeated in several public meetings in Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd.

4.2.5 In response, the Council has introduced the RISE grant, with a fund of £200k from the Economic Fighting Fund to support businesses affected by the floods and also a further £50k for the Calderdale Community Foundation to support local residents affected by the floods.

4.2.6 This coordination would be expected to build on the initiatives already being developed by local businesses and business organisations, and could for example, build on the experience and expertise of the Totally Locally campaign, which was

also funded by the Economic Task Force. The activity would include working with local groups to develop a campaign of events throughout the Upper Calder Valley, culminating in Christmas celebrations.

4.2.7 Last year, Cabinet recommended that £15k of Economic Task Force funding should be allocated to contribute to the cost of Christmas Trees and their lighting in towns in the Borough. It is recommended by Members of the ETF that the same arrangements should apply this year and the £15k contribution should be included in the limit of £100k funding for this activity. The balance of funding required for Christmas Trees and their decoration would come from the remaining Highways and Engineering budget. Highways and Engineering staff will be asked to purchase the trees on behalf of the communities involved.

4.2.8 It is also recommended by members of the ETF that the funding for the promotional campaign would include support to encourage Christmas Trading in the six Market towns of Brighouse, Elland, Halifax, Hebden Bridge, Sowerby Bridge and Todmorden, as well as other areas affected by the floods, such as Mytholmroyd.

4.3 Ambassadorship Training

4.3.1 Members of the ETF also discussed a proposal for an “ambassadorship” scheme, which will target local taxi drivers (Hackney Cabs) who are often the first point of contact for visitors. The aim of the scheme would be to deliver localised training on events and attractions in Calderdale. Taxi drivers can be key ambassadors for their local area, able to give interesting information and advice to visitors to the area.

4.3.2 The project would:-

- Provide awareness raising and encourage local taxi drivers to learn more about their local area and its offer
- Enthuse local people to promote their area and entice visitors to return for a repeat visit and/or longer stay
- Build relationships between local taxi firms, the Visitor Information Centres and accommodation providers to work together to promote the area
- Provide an accredited scheme which will be of benefit to individuals as part of their career development
- Link with the work of the 'Local Distinctiveness' project to maximise the effect of both schemes.

4.3.3 Research indicates that the ambassadorship scheme has worked well in areas such as London and Liverpool and this initiative could be replicated in Calderdale. Calderdale MBC Licensing Department has identified that the scheme would be feasible and would complement other training. The scheme would be delivered by an external training provider working closely with the Tourism Team and selected local businesses and community representatives.

4.3.4 Members of the ETF recommended to Cabinet that the scheme should be supported and that a budget of £5,500 from the Economic Fighting Fund should be allocated to the project.

4.4 Calderdale Literary Trail

- 4.4.1 The Tourism Delivery Plan highlights the importance of tourism to the local economy in Calderdale, estimating the annual value of tourism to be in the region of £250m, supporting 4,200 FTE jobs.
- 4.4.2 In order to promote a positive and contemporary image of the area, the borough must celebrate and raise the profile of its unique selling points. Calderdale has a wealth of literary links, which could be combined to promote Calderdale as a visitor destination with a distinctive literary theme.
- 4.4.3 Local consultation with members of the “Upper Calder Valley Renaissance Heritage Open Days” working party and the Calderdale Tourism Board has identified a desire to develop a detailed literary trail throughout Calderdale to promote the work of historical and current literary experts. This will complement the work already being done to promote heritage and culture on the tourism Destination Management System, www.visitcalderdale.com and also the hard copy snapshot literary trail produced by Welcome to Yorkshire that references famous poets, playwrights and authors across the region.
- 4.4.4 To develop the content of the trail, work would be done with local third sector experts. The trail would be complemented by timetabling a series of guided walks at set locations, starting and finishing at local businesses to support the economy. This would also include and profile existing literary Festivals, such as the Ted Hughes Festival which takes place annually each autumn.
- 4.4.5 Members of the ETF agreed to support this proposal and recommend that Cabinet should allocate £2,500 from the Economic Fighting Fund for the project.

4.5 Traffic Regulation Order in Hebden Bridge

- 4.5.1 The local economies in Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd all rely heavily on the tourism industry to sustain and develop the local economy. The floods in the Calder Valley have adversely affected this sector, with a significant reduction in day visitors, as well as reduced levels of overnight accommodation and a reduced footfall of visitors for those businesses that are still trading.
- 4.5.2 In various public meetings that have been held about the impact of the floods, requests have been made for the Council to address parking provision for coaches in Hebden Bridge, to help increase the number of visitors in the area.
- 4.5.3 The current provision is space for one coach to park on a short stay basis. Requests have been made to revise the Traffic Regulation Order in order to create two coach parking spaces, for 3 hours stays. This would increase the opportunity to target more group travel operators and special interest groups (such as walkers).
- 4.5.4 Members of the ETF recognised that this is not the normal use of funding from the Economic Fighting Fund, but understand the very particular circumstances and the

benefit that amending the Traffic Regulation Order could have in helping the area to recover in the medium term.

- 4.5.5 Members of the ETF recommended to Cabinet that an allocation of up to £5,500 from the Economic Fighting Fund should be made to cover the costs of revising the Traffic Regulation Order to create two coach parking spaces for 3 hour stays in Hebden Bridge. Officers are currently looking into parking requirements and provision, and the legal position relating to the Order.

5. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The Economic Task Force has considered the various options and recommended that the ideas should be put forward for Cabinet's consideration.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Members of the Economic Task Force have been consulted on these initiatives.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The paper is asking Cabinet to transfer £100,000 from the High Street Innovation Fund into the Economic Fighting Fund, and to allocate up to £113,500 to various initiatives from the Economic Fighting Fund. If approved the remaining balance on the Economic Fighting Fund to be allocated is £62,717.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 8.1 The paper is recommending allocation of funding to support businesses and residents across Calderdale to overcome the effects of the recession and especially the impact of the recent flooding in the Calder Valley.

9 CONTRIBUTION TO DELIVERING POPULATION OUTCOMES

- 9.1 The proposals in the paper are in line with the Economy and Enterprise Strategy 2010/2020 and the 2011 Fresh Start for Calderdale Programme – as well as the priorities for the current Cabinet for 2012-14 – in particular, “supporting a thriving local economy”.

10 RISK

- 10.1 There are not expected to be any major risks arising from this paper.

11 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are not expected to be any legal implications arising from this paper apart from respecting the appropriate procurement and tendering processes.

12 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The activities suggested are aligned with the 2011 Fresh Start for Calderdale Programme – as well as the priorities for the current Cabinet for 2012-14 – in particular, “supporting a thriving local economy” and with the Economy and Enterprise Strategy 2010/2020.

13 CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The allocation of funding will support the development of initiatives to provide a timely response to the current economic conditions.

Ref: DM/SVM
Date: 06.08.2012

Ian Gray
Group Director Economy and
Environment

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT CONTACT:

David Moore
Ext 392001

DOCUMENTS USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE REPORT:

Economy and Enterprise Strategy 2010/2020

DOCUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION AT:

Regeneration Services, Westgate House, Westgate, Halifax, HX1 1PS