

Thursday, 8 July 2021

Joint Report of the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Waste and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure

Welcome Back Fund

Exempt Information

None

Purpose

To seek approval from Cabinet to implement and deliver activities that are eligible under the Governments, European Regional Development Funded, Welcome Back Fund.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet approves the proposed activities that have been developed in line with Government guidance.
2. Cabinet supports the processes and structures put in place to deliver and administer the programme of works.
3. Delegated Authority be given to the Assistant Director Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Economy & Waste and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure, to make any amends to the programme as required during delivery.

Executive Summary

The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) is an extension of the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSS), which launched in May 2020. It is funded through European Regional Development Fund monies and as such comes with strict requirements on what the money can be spent on with highly detailed evidence requirements.

Tamworth Borough Council can claim up to £67,455 from the Welcome Back Fund to deliver specific eligible activities. The Council may also use any underspend from the RHSS, which is still being calculated with Government, expected to be around £4,000.

In the original RHSS there were 4 main types of activity, that can still be delivered through the WBF, as follows:

1. Support to develop an action plan for safe reopening of local economies;
2. Communications and public information;
3. Business-facing awareness raising activities; and
4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

In addition, the Welcome Back Fund will also:

5. Support and promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy; and

6. Allow local areas 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.

The aim of the fund is clear in that it is focused on the following areas:

- Encouraging outdoor activity
- Making town centres more inviting and encouraging people back to them
- Encouraging visitors in innovative ways
- Beautifying spaces that are currently not deemed as attractive.

Options Considered

The focus of the Welcome Back Fund is to encourage visitors back into Town Centres through two main means;

- safety / cleanliness
- Innovative trials around marketing / place-based promotion.

Detailed discussions with Members and officers across the Council have led to the design of a comprehensive package of projects that combine to aim to make more people aware of the offer in the Town Centre, use new technology to attract them and ensure the physical environment is welcoming.

This is broken down as follows:

Item	Detail	Maximum Budget
1	Deep clean of Town Centre and additional temporary bins	£23,000
2	Augmented Reality Trail in Town Centre	£20,000
3	Promotional Campaign – “Coming back after COVID.”	£20,000
4	Town Centre Independent Business Celebration Event	£8,500

Table 1

1. In order to give confidence to customers and businesses in the Town Centre it is proposed to conduct three deep cleans of the Town Centre in July, October 2021 and February 2022, including:
 - Steam clean / jet wash hardstanding areas
 - Cleanse along shop fronts.
 - Cleanse under street furniture.
 - Cleanse fence and barrier lines.
 - Steam clean litter bin's / street furniture.
 - Locate additional bins to reduce littering.
 - Paint and refurbish street furniture where appropriate.
2. In order to attract a different demographic into the Town Centre and link in to existing projects at the Castle, an Augmented Reality (AR) Trail will be developed for the Town Centre, focusing on a mixture of: people of historical interest e.g. Sir Robert Peel doing speech out of Town Hall: former street scene / buildings and relevant historical artefacts / facts. It is envisaged there will be about 10 – 15 AR points throughout of the Town Centre and close proximity.
3. In order to promote the activities above and give people further confidence in coming back into the Town Centre, it is proposed to do the following:

- Improve individual business profiles on Visit Tamworth with interactive Google map
 - Creation of a pub trail and a restaurant trail
 - Create Series of local videos
 - Drone sweep through the town centre
 - Visit Tamworth promotional video
 - Video to support a pub trail and restaurant trail
 - Videos with individual shop owners.
 - General advertising of the Visit Tamworth audience e.g. Birmingham TV, buses, FB advertising.
4. In order to support and promote the diversity of businesses in the Town Centre there will be a Celebration event held to make residents and visitors more aware of the local offer in the Town Centre.

Resource Implications

Programme Delivery

The overall programme will be led and coordinated by the Economic Development and Regeneration Team, who will:

- Be the contact / liaison point with Government
- Collate required evidence from project leads
- Submit and coordinate finance and output claims to Government
- Provide advice on eligible activities to project leads.

Individual Projects will be led by officers from relevant services who will:

- Keep accurate and required records of all spend and activity
- Ensure their component project is delivered in line with Fund requirements and eligibility.
- Provide relevant evidence and information to the EDR team when required.
- Procure services in line with Fund requirements
- Manage all aspects of operational delivery.

Due to the nature of the projects, multiple services will be involved in delivery across all activities. Project leads will be as follows.

Item	Detail	Service Lead	Operational Support
1	Deep clean of Town Centre and additional temporary bins	Street Scene	Economic Development and Regeneration
2	Augmented Reality Trail in Town Centre	Economic Development & Regeneration	Communications
3	Promotional Campaign – “Coming back after COVID.”	Communications	Economic Development & Regeneration
4	Town Centre Independent Business Celebration Event	Arts and Events	Economic Development & Regeneration / Communications

Table 2

It is intended that all of the activity will be procured externally rather than using internal staff, due to capacity and the added complexity of claiming back staff time. This will require an element of resource from Procurement, though all efforts will be made to minimise resource requirements due to known limitations on existing capacity. This will be done by using existing frameworks; breaking down work into smaller contracts that can be purchased without the need for an open tender; using previous similar tenders / quick quotes as basis for work e.g. Castle AR tender documents as basis for Town Centre AR tender to reduce workload.

A detailed table found on page 6 of appendix one details intended procurement routes.

Finance

Grant funding is only claimable in arrears after the correct evidence has been sent to Government and approved. As such, all activity must be funded up front from within current budgets. Each service lead is aware they are responsible for ensuring it has money available in relevant budgets to cover expenditure until a claim is paid. Claims can be submitted to Government on a quarterly basis but it is unlikely any claims will be made until quarters three and four of the current financial year. Claims can take up to three months to be paid so in some cases budgets may not be reimbursed until quarter two of financial year 2022 / 2023.

Item 2, 3 & 4 in the table 2, above, will be funded from the town centre retained fund, until expenditure is claimed back from the welcome back fund. Item 1 will be funded from a combination of supplies & services budgets on GW1801, until relevant claims are made.

Legal/Risk Implications Background

As the source of the monies for the WBF is ERDF, there are strict constraints on how the money can be spent. If the criteria of the fund are not strictly adhered to, process around procurement are not followed and the correct evidence is not provided, the Council will not be able to claim back the money it will spend upfront. Appendix Two gives full details of the eligibility criteria of the fund.

The Economic Development and Regeneration Team has been involved in a number of ERDF funded projects over the last ten years and is comfortable with all fund requirements and ensuring delivery is compliant.

The Fund has the following high-level constraints that has helped shape activity:

- It is revenue expenditure and as such cannot be spent on capital items.
- Activities delivered cannot be Permanent changes; they must be an immediate response to covid-19 crisis.
- All activity must be state aid compliant.
- Must be additional, new activity - cannot substitute planned / current expenditure.
- Must adhere to ERDF procurement and programme rules.
- Must adhere to ERDF / government branding guidelines.
- Cannot be used to support specific businesses.
- Activity doesn't have to be focused directly on areas adjacent to commercial properties but must be in town centres.
- No internal Council recharges are eligible
- All activity needs to be linked to an action plan or part of the current strategy.
- This is not a grant scheme, so grants cannot be given to anyone else unless done strictly under a service level agreement only to established BIDs and parish / town councils.

The Council had to submit an outline plan to Government in the form of an activity form by the end of May. The high level content of this, which mirrors all of the outlined in this paper was discussed and agreed by Cabinet Members. The activities proposed have now been signed off by the Government Welcome Back Fund team as eligible expenditure, removing any risk of proposed activity not meeting Fund criteria and therefore ensuring that as long as wider processes are adhered to, the Council will be able to claim all monies back for the cost of agreed activities.

Equalities Implications

None

Sustainability Implications

None

Background Information

From June to November 2020 the Council used the majority of its Reopening High Streets Safely monies to fund the following activities:

- 3 x temporary Business Advisors to support business and the public in reopening
- Creation of a Reopening action plan
- Temporary signage and hand sanitisers in designated retail areas.

This project successfully supported the public and business in designated retail areas adapt to regularly changing guidelines by providing face-to-face advice guidance and support when most needed.

Report Author

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List of Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix One - Welcome Back Fund Activity Form

Appendix Two – Welcome Back Fund – National Guidance - [Welcome Back Fund - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/welcome-back-fund-national-guidance)

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