

Subject:	REOPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND
Date:	15 July 2020
Decision to be taken by:	Councillor Trevor Bartlett, Leader of The Council
Report of:	Dave Robinson, Growth and Business Development Manager
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Trevor Bartlett, Leader of the Council
Decision Type:	Executive Non-Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted
Authority:	By virtue of Section 9(E) (2) (a) of the Local Government Act 2000 (Discharge of functions by senior executive member)
Purpose of the report:	To inform Members of the Government's Reopening the High Streets Safely (RHSS) fund, and to delegate authority for the negotiation and approval of schemes that meet the criteria of the fund.
Recommendation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the guidelines for the allocation of RHSS funding and approve up to £105,000 of advance expenditure. 2. Delegate authority to the Growth and Business Development Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Licensing, to enter into negotiations with representative groups for the proposals eligible for RHSS funding and ensure that the funding criteria are met. 3. Approve an initial allocation of £25,000 each for schemes in Dover, Deal and Sandwich, with the remaining expenditure to be allocated based on the requirements of individual plans.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Government has notified the Council of its allocation of RHSS funding of £105,000 from a total national fund of £50m. The link to the guidance is at the end of this report.
- 1.2 The Council does not receive this by way of a grant, but a retrospective claim of eligible expenditure. Consequently, procedures need to be in place to ensure that the criteria for the allocation of funding is met.
- 1.3 The lockdown eased from 15 June 2020 for non-essential businesses, with further easing from 4 July.
- 1.4 The fund can meet expenditure up until March 2021, but the Government suggests expenditure is made in 2020.

1.5 Town Councils and business groups are already in consultation with the Council to propose schemes that meet the needs of their local businesses. These range in scope and timescale and some will be dependant on the agreement of statutory bodies (e.g. Kent Highways).

1.6 This report puts a framework in place to ensure proposals can be reviewed and approved as soon as possible.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The economic impact on local businesses of the pandemic and lockdown is significant. Loss of income and increased expenditure has also impacted on Council finances. Both challenge the recovery of the high street.

2.2 The Government has secured ERDF funding to support high street recovery. The Council's allocation is £105,000 and the Council is the accountable body. The four main areas for the funding are:

- (a) Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen its local economies.
- (b) Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- (c) Business-facing awareness-raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- (d) Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

2.3 The Council has identified that the three 'high streets' to prioritise are Dover, Deal and Sandwich, and will be working closely with the Town Councils and business representatives to review their proposals.

2.4 It is possible that proposals may require consents from statutory bodies and approval of expenditure will be subject to those consents being in place.

2.5 The criteria for expenditure are narrow and still subject to continuing clarification by the Government.

2.6 The Council has identified an initial allocation of expenditure to each of the three main high streets – Dover, Deal and Sandwich. This is to give confidence that there is time to carefully review plans that are put forward. It is not 'first-come, first-served'.

2.7 The remaining expenditure will be allocated based on the requirements of proposals going forward.

3. Identification of Options

3.1 Approve the recommendations and manage the RHSS funding in accordance with Government guidance.

3.2 Reject the recommendations.

Evaluation of Options

- 3.3 Although the full criteria of the funding allocation are still emerging, it provides financial support for business recovery that is locally led. The risk to the Council is low, providing that the governance for funding is carefully managed. It also provides an opportunity for the Council to work collaboratively with Town Councils and business groups on their recovery from the lockdown.
- 3.4 By not participating in the fund, significant financial support is lost and this could make locally-led plans unviable. This will only have a negative effect on business recovery.
- 3.5 The recommendation is to approve the recommendations in this report.

4. **Resource Implications**

The funding itself is met by the Government/ERDF. Given the narrow criteria of the fund, the Council's internal resources to support schemes (primarily staff costs) may not be eligible.

5. **Corporate Implications**

- 5.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer: The Head of Finance and Housing has been consulted on this report and has no further comments to add.
- 5.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.
- Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>
- 5.3 Other Officers (as appropriate): None.

6. **Background Papers**

Government Guidance on the High Street Recovery Fund

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/888818/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance_-_Final_v2.pdf

Contact Officer: Dave Robinson - 01304 872121