

TITLE OF REPORT: **Welcome Back Fund – Proposed Spending**

REPORT OF: **Peter Udall, Strategic Director, Economy, Innovation and Growth**

Purpose of the Report

1. The Council has received an allocation of £357,856 from the Welcome Back Fund. This is being provided to help local shopping centres recover from the Covid 19 pandemic. This report sets out proposals for use of the funding.

Background

2. As part of the response to the Covid 19 pandemic the Government has set up the Welcome Back Fund (WBF) for the reason set out above.
3. The WBF is funded from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and as such is subject to onerous requirements, especially around procurement and publicity. In addition, there are a number of restrictions around use of the funding, including:
 - It can only be used for revenue, rather than capital funding;
 - It must provide additionality and not be work that would have been undertaken anyway;
 - It cannot be used to provide grants to specific businesses;
 - All funding must be spent by the end of March 2022.

Proposal

4. It is suggested that measures to be investigated for use of this funding should include:
 - local environmental improvements through tidying up, cleaning etc. in local shopping centres (£100,000);
 - business support to encourage collaboration between traders to help support local centres (£25,000);
 - market research to better understand who is using local centres and what they are being used for (£50,000);
 - footfall monitoring to establish the level of activity in centres (£30,000);
 - event related activity to increase visitor numbers (£25,000).
5. The funding totals outlined above are indicative and do not currently represent a commitment of the full amount. Given the tight rules and short timescales for this spend it is not known yet whether it will be possible to achieve full spend by the end of March 2022. It is proposed that the Service Director, Planning Policy, Climate

Change and Strategic Transport finalises programme spend following consultation with the Cabinet Members for Economy and Environment and Transport.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- (i) approves the proposed elements of spend from the Welcome Back Fund as outlined in paragraph 4 above;
 - (ii) authorises the Service Director, Planning Policy, Climate Change and Strategic Transport to finalise programme spend following consultation with the Cabinet Members for Economy and Environment and Transport.

For the following reason:

To enable the available funding to be put to best use in supporting local shopping centres recover from the Covid 19 pandemic.

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APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. The proposed programmes support the pledges within Gateshead Council's 'Thrive Agenda'. They also support the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan. The indicative programme utilises funding available to the Council through specific government grants.

Consultation

2. The Portfolio holders for the Economy and Environment and Transport have been consulted on the proposals and are supportive of them. Given the limited timeframe for the spend no public consultation has taken place. The Leader and Deputy Leader have also been consulted.

Alternative Options

3. Given the tight timescale for spend the scope to develop alternative options is limited. The programme has been developed with the aim of delivering action that is effective and compliant with the funding scope in the time available.

Implications of Recommended Option

4. Resources:

a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources & Digital confirms that the programme is fully grant funded and has no financial implications for the Council.

b) **Human Resources Implications** – None.

c) **Property Implications** - None.

5. **Risk Management Implication** - the main risk with the spending is that failure to follow the correct processes could lead to grant having to be re-paid. This risk has been minimised by the use of ERDF compliant procurement processes.
6. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - Local centres provide important facilities for those people who rely more on local facilities.
7. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – The proposed environmental improvement activity will include removal of graffiti where possible.
8. **Health Implications** – Local centres provide a good basis for the provision of facilities to which people can walk or cycle.
9. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - Local centres provide a good basis for the provision of facilities, which can be accessed in a sustainable manner, reducing the need to drive.

10. Human Rights Implications - None.

11. Ward Implications - activity will be targeted to support local centres at various locations boroughwide.

Background Information

12. None