

CABINET

DATE OF MEETING: 6 JANUARY 2022

TITLE OF REPORT: WELCOME BACK FUND

Report of: Joint Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Leader of the Council

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the approved Welcome Back Fund application by Fleet BID as well as introducing a new application.
- 1.2 This report also provides an amendment to one of Yateley Town Council's approved Welcome Back Fund applications.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet:
 - 1. Approves Fleet BID's new application for promotional videos for Fleet town centre to progress to the next stage of the Welcome Back Fund process.
 - 2. Approves Yateley Town Council's amended application to purchase addition wildflower turf to progress to the next stage of the Welcome Back Fund process.

3 BACKGROUND AND UPDATE

- 3.1 The Government's Welcome Back Fund has provided councils across England a share of £56 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the pandemic.
- 3.2 Businesses benefit from high volumes of customers, by ensuring safe public spaces there should be an increase in customers. The Welcome Back Fund helps Councils boost tourism by improving green spaces and provide increased outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups – providing people safer options to reunite with friends and relatives.
- 3.3 The funding can be used to:
 - 1. Boost the look and feel of their high streets by investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible

2. Run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses
3. Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety
4. Improve high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti

3.4 The fund cannot be used to support:

- Activity that provides no additionality. This funding needs to create additional activity and should not be replacing the income for already committed expenditure.
- Capital expenditure – This is a revenue funding project intended to help local authorities address the longer-term impact of Covid-19 on local economies. This can include activities that last as long as restrictive measures are in place as well as activities that help future proof high streets. Permanent changes are not permitted. The cost of purchasing items should be reasonable and demonstrate value for money and not result in ‘assets’ or ‘major assets’.
- Grants to businesses – Funding cannot provide direct financial support to businesses to make adaptations to premises, purchase PPE, purchase goods or equipment or off set wages or other operating costs.

It should also be noted that support for privately owned spaces is not within scope of the Welcome Back Fund.

3.5 Parish and Town Councils, Business Improvement District (BID) or other relevant stakeholders have been given the opportunity to identify projects, which would meet the Welcome Bank fund criteria listed above. Suggested projects should focus on the centres within the district with shops and a clear public realm, such as in Fleet, Hook, Hartley Wintney, Yateley, Blackwater and Odiham. Proposals from any parishes which meet the Governments requirements are welcomed.

3.6 The Council was allocated **£86,003** from the Welcome Back Fund.

3.7 In July and October, Cabinet approved the following applications to progress to the next stage of the Welcome Back Fund process:

	Applicant	Proposal	Cost
1	Fleet BID with the backing of Fleet Town Council	The temporary installation of up to three parklets on wider pavement sections of Fleet Road.	£15-16,000 each Total cost requested up to £57,600 including VAT
2-3	Odiham Parish Council	- Production of a two-sided leaflet promoting local businesses - Creation of picnic areas - Hiring 10 picnic benches	£1,908 £3,898.80

		from June to September, the provision of bins, bin emptying and associated wayfinding signage and promotion	
4-8	Yateley Town Council	- Large Lit Christmas Character	£2,400
		- Picnic Tables	£2,994
		- Wildflower Turf	£5,221
		- Heavy-Duty Gazebo for community events	£1,215.95
		- Larger capacity dual litter/recycling bins	£3,265
		Maximum Total (excluding VAT)	£78,502.75

- 3.8 Since approval in July, Fleet BID have been trying to progress its application for the temporary installation of up to three parklets on wider pavement sections of Fleet Road. Unfortunately, they have experienced a number of challenges and have now decided to withdraw the application for the parklets.
- 3.9 In accordance with their first application, Yateley Town Council have sought to secure a Christmas character. The preferred supplier is now unable to provide it and they have been unable to source a Christmas character from any other suppliers. The Town Council have decided therefore to withdraw this application.
- 3.10 The withdrawal of these two applications returns £60,000 to the fund to be reallocated to other projects.

4 APPLICATIONS TO THE WELCOME BACK FUND

Fleet BID's Application

- 4.1 Following the withdrawal of its first application, Fleet BID have subsequently submitted a second application to the Welcome Back Fund. This application seeks to produce promotional videos for Fleet town centre and requests **£9,545** (copy of Fleet BID application attached at Appendix 1).
- 4.2 The BID propose to showcase Fleet's many strengths and to welcome shoppers back. The promotional videos will be aimed at encouraging visitors to the town and supporting the economic recovery of local businesses.
- 4.3 The promotional videos would:
- Showcase Fleet as a welcoming, desirable and safe destination and encourage people, especially younger visitors, to visit the town
 - Use a modern and accessible media that will appeal to a younger audience
 - Foster a sense of pride, interest and excitement by demonstrating all that Fleet town has to offer

- Demonstrate the strength of the community
- Focus on different aspects of the town, e.g. community, leisure facilities, retail, services
- Capture the range of businesses and facilities available to residents and visitors

4.4 The videos would highlight Fleet's many strengths including:

- Unique independent businesses offering a broad range of products from clothing to food, hobbies, hair and beauty, wellbeing and "zero-waste"
- Many "essential" services from an excellent library to banks, building societies and supermarkets
- Extensive food offerings from cafes to restaurants and gastro pubs
- A vibrant night time economy from pubs and bars to night clubs
- A multi-purpose community centre offering facilities for local community groups, as well as high quality live performances from top quality artists
- A warm welcome and high-level service from the businesses in the town centre
- Strong community focus with events including a 10K run, a Half Marathon, Fireworks Display, Christmas Festival and Summer Carnival
- A "green" town with summer flowers provided annually by Fleet Town Council
- A Business Improvement District (BID) which actively supports the local businesses, runs a Pop Up Shop to encourage entrepreneurship and organises events to encourage visitors into the town
- Being set in beautiful surroundings with Fleet Pond, the Basingstoke Canal, five Fleet town parks, open countryside and nature reserves

4.5 Three quotes have been sought for the promotional videos, with options ranging between £5,635 to £23,125. The BID have selected the 'story-telling' option with drone footage, the cheapest quote for this option being **£9,545**.

4.6 In terms of monitoring and evaluating the scheme, Fleet BID will undertake a survey to ask both businesses and members of the public to comment on the effectiveness of the videos.

Yateley Town Council's Amended Application 3

4.7 Following the withdrawal of its first application, Yateley Town Council is seeking to amend its third application to the Welcome Back Fund for the wildflower turf to include installation, in addition to purchasing, the wildflower turf (details of the additional elements of the scheme that Yateley Town Council would like to include attached at **Appendix 2**).

4.8 Three quotes have been sought for the installation ranging between £2,730 to £3,400. The Town Council has selected the cheapest quote being **£2,730**.

4.9 In terms of monitoring and evaluating the wildflower scheme, two surveys are proposed before and/or after installation:

- Local residents and

- Local businesses, to measure the impact on footfall;
- 4.10 It is also proposed to keep a comments box/e-survey card with local businesses to capture comments from customers.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Subject to the decision of Cabinet, the Council will work with the successful applicant(s) to submit a detailed Action Plan for consideration by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). If the application(s) are approved by DLUHC, then the proposed scheme(s) can commence.

6 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCING IMPACT

- 6.1 Funding has been provided by Government. The Council must provide officer support, which is not identified as part of the Service Planning Process but does form part of our Recovery Activity. No increase in revenue budgeted is anticipated.

7 LEGAL AND EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1 Applicants will need to adhere to the rules of the Welcome Back Fund which are available on the Government's website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welcome-back-fund>
- 7.2 Successful applicants may need to carry out equality impact assessments for any successful schemes.

8 ACTION

- 8.1 Subject to the decision by Cabinet, Officers will administrate the fund on behalf of the applicants.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Fleet BID's application

Appendix 2: Yateley Town Council's application (additional information)