

Scrutiny Briefing Note

The TVE Panel have asked to monitor progress on the following issue. This briefing contains the latest position regarding the Welcome Back Fund, as at 14th July 2021.

Subject:

The Funding

In 2020, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) awarded all Local Authorities in England, Reopening High Street Safely funds (RHSS). In early 2021, MHCLG announced that they would be extending RHSS to include Welcome Back Funds and Coastal Funds. The funds are to help build back better from the pandemic and will allow Local Authorities to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade and tourism, particularly in high streets as their economies reopen. The funding split is as follows:

- **Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSS) = £141,143** (Grant Action Plan and Funding Agreement already in place).
- **Welcome Back Fund (WBF) = £141,143**
- **Coastal Fund = £100,000** (In recognition of being in a coastal area).

The programme uses European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) which require us to use the European Union logo on all materials. The funds, which are claimed in arrears with accompanying evidence required, needs to be defrayed from the Council's bank account by 31 March 2022.

ERDF Criteria

ERDF has a range of criteria requirements which we must adhere to, to ensure that any activity is eligible and we can therefore claim the funds:

- Activity must be additional i.e. it must not substitute planned domestic expenditure.
- It is revenue expenditure, capital is excluded.
- It is not categorised as State Aid (grants cannot be given to businesses and all activities must be carried on either on public land or buildings).
- It is compliant with ERDF programme rules for procurement and branding.

Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Consultation took place with council staff across a range of service areas to develop a list of ideas for activity to be included in the Grant Action Plan. The long list of ideas was then short-listed, and these were shared with Members, the council's Leadership Team and some key external organisations including: The Development & Growth Board; the SME Advisory Group; and the Visitor, Economy & Retail Group. There will be further communication with other external stakeholders as the programme is developed.



Activities and Indicative Budget Allocation

Following consultation, it was agreed that the following activities and indicative budget allocations (for a total of £241,143) would be included in a revised GAP and submitted to MHCLG by the deadline of 14 June, noting that amendments can be made to the GAP if required in the future. The following budget allocations were spread across three key themes to give a varied overall programme of activity:

1. WBF Activities (Indicative Budget Allocation = £101,143)

To put on a programme of activities specifically during the quieter months to extend the traditional tourism season, covering from September through to the end of March 2022, which will create footfall, boost public confidence, and encourage people to buy local. A schedule of activities is therefore currently being developed to focus on the retail and tourism sectors, for example, outdoor themed markets across the borough and 'Spring Into Cleethorpes/Grimsby' retail events, held before Easter to help kickstart the retail and tourism year ahead.

2. Environmental Enhancements (Indicative Budget Allocation = £70,000)

To create an attractive and welcoming environment for our community and visitors, including additional ornamental planting (indicative budget £30K), the removal of chewing gum in key public areas (indicative budget £30K) and other methods to present key COVID safety and 'Welcome Back' messages (indicative budget £10K).

3. Tourism Recovery Plan and Marketing (Indicative Budget Allocation = £70,000)

Support the tourism sector by commissioning a proactive Recovery / Marketing Plan for North East Lincolnshire (indicative budget £50K). Also includes consumer research to investigate business / consumer trends and other data insights, for example, footfall and the number of empty shops in (indicative budget £20K).

Next Steps

As MHCLG has recently confirmed that the activities included in the GAP are approved, we can now commence with the delivery phase. We are currently awaiting a Variation of Contract Agreement which will complete the formalities.

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