

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 07 June 2021

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Welcome Back Fund</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Planning and Regeneration
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Maintain and extend prosperity Strong, Safe, Inclusive and Healthy Communities. Dynamic, Prudent and Progressive Council.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to agree the Council's approach to spending the Welcome Back Fund.

**Executive summary:**

The Council has been allocated £168,270 from the Government's Welcome Back Fund for projects to help boost the look and feel of high street and coastal areas to support their re-opening as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

This funding is for Council projects to support a safe return and welcome to residents and visitors. The funding builds on the Re-Opening High Streets Safely fund, for which the spend was agreed as part of the Economic Recovery Plan agreed in September 2020. Guidance is available with which the Council's activity plan must match, including on eligible projects, procurement routes and publicity requirements. This additional fund can support activities until March 2022.

Following cross-service discussions, a proposed activity list is included in the report, for Executive consideration and approval. The proposed activity list focusses on events and activities to support the re-opening of high streets and green spaces across the Borough and is intended to fully maximise the funding available.

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) approves the Welcome Back Fund activity plan for submission to Government; and
- (b) agrees that the Director of Planning and Regeneration, following consultation with the Executive Member for Policy and Resources, be authorised to make any necessary changes to the Activity Plan in order to ensure compliance with the funding requirement, and subject to further feasibility work, in relation to confirming the final costs.

**Reason:**

To agree how the Council will spend the £168,270 allocation for the Welcome Back Fund.

**Cost of proposals:**

There will be no additional cost to the Council in undertaking the projects as the costs will be met from the Welcome Back Fund allocated to Fareham.

**Appendices:**                      None

**Reference papers:**            Letter from SoS dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021  
Welcome Back Fund Guidance v1 - 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021  
Welcome Back Fund FAQs v1 – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021

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## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	07 June 2021
<b>Subject:</b>	Welcome Back Fund
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Director of Planning and Regeneration
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Policy and Resources

#### INTRODUCTION

1. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, Robert Jenrick MP as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to all Leaders and Chief Executives of Local Authorities in England announcing a package of support for the high streets and a new 'Welcome Back Fund' to support the safe and successful reopening of high streets as the country moves out of Covid-19 restrictions.
2. The £56 million fund is intended to help Councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and pop-ups giving people more, safer options to reunite with friends and relatives.
3. As part of the Welcome Back Fund, extra funding is provided to Local Authorities in coastal areas to support their reopening as they prepare for the summer season, both for residents and holiday makers.
4. Fareham Borough Council has been allocated £168,270 to spend within the Welcome Back Fund.

#### SCOPE OF FUNDING AND TIMING

5. The guidance from Government includes some suggested types of projects including the following:
  - 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
  - Run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses
  - Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety
  - Improve green space in high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti

6. The funding must be spent by the end of March 2022 which covers both the summer season and Christmas period. The ability to use the funding is aligned with the publication of the guidance in late April, however until the Government unit in charge of this fund approves an 'Activity Plan' any spend is at risk to the Council.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

7. There are four key areas of eligibility, as set out below:
- All activity must be additional beyond what is already underway prior to the grant being received.
  - All activity must be temporary and linked to the impacts of Covid-19 and the release of related restrictions.
  - All activity must be procured and publicised in a manner compliant with the European Regional Development Fund rules, in recognition that under the terms of the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Act, ERDF programmes can continue to provide growth funding for communities and businesses to support economic priorities of places until the programmes end in 2023.
  - Eligible activities should be delivered in a way that does not result in State Aid.
8. The guidance is also clear that capital expenditure is not eligible nor are grants to businesses.
9. In addition, Councils can use up to 4% of the allocated funds for Project Administration and Management to support existing staff resources to manage the additional activity.

## **FAREHAM'S ACTIVITY LIST**

10. Following consultation across service leads in relation to projects and activities that would be beneficial to residents and visitors in Fareham, a list of proposed activity with associated indicative costs has been developed. This 'activity list' is proposed to be that which will be submitted to Government for approval.
11. Further feasibility work will be needed to confirm the specific nature of the projects and the associated costs. The activity plan is also subject to approval by the Government unit. This is likely to mean changes to the activity plan as the project progresses and is the reason behind seeking a delegation for the Director of Planning and Regeneration, following consultation with the Executive Member for Policy and Resources.

<b>Project Outline</b>	<b>Indicative cost</b>
Public and business facing communication campaigns, including social media, to promote a safe re-opening to town and district centres.	£30,000
Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a programme of summer events within high streets and open spaces across the Borough, including at Westbury Manor Museum</li> <li>• Christmas lights switch on and special finale</li> </ul>	£45,000

performance	
Physical improvements to town and district centre such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One off 'spring clean' to improve the look and feel of some areas of the Borough's high streets</li> <li>• Public toilet upgrades at foreshore and district centre locations</li> <li>• Tree planting schemes</li> <li>• Provision of additional litter bins and extra litter picking equipment</li> </ul>	£86,540
Project administration support	£6,730
<b>Total</b>	<b>£168,270</b>

## **NEXT STEPS**

12. Subject to Executive approval, the above activity list will be that which the Council will work to deliver through agreement with the Government unit administering this fund.
13. Work to initiate activity, including appropriate procurement mechanisms, will begin to confirm the specific nature of the projects and the costs. This is likely to mean that the activity plan needs to change as we move through the period of spend. However, all efforts will be made to ensure that the allocated funding can be utilised in full within the constraints and timescale of the funding.

## **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Gayle Wootton, Head of Planning Strategy and Economic Development. (Ext 4328).