

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Allocation of the Welcome Back Fund 2021/22</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>22 July 2021</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Culture</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Mark Croston</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 01273 292571
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021 the government launched a Welcome Back Fund which was merged with the previously announced Reopening High Streets Safely Fund. Both are backed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and aim to ensure that city centres and seaside resorts are ready to welcome back visitors as lockdown restrictions are eased. European funds require all promotional materials produced to carry the EU logo to acknowledge their support.
- 1.2 The Reopening the High Streets Safely Fund (RHSS) was allocated to the city council from 1 June 2020 but was subject to extensive restrictions and a very short timeline for spend, because of ERDF requirements. This type of EU funding is generally used for long-term programmes where procurement for large contracts is possible, not for short-term tactical responses in fast-changing situations.
- 1.3 The Welcome Back Fund as it now stands is an additional allocation which will be reclaimed from government on evidence of compliant expenditure and in accordance with guidance that continues to evolve. The fund acknowledges the significant impact of COVID-19 on tourism and on local high streets. It seeks to support projects subject to compliant processes and within defined criteria.
- 1.4 In total, £583,538 has been allocated to the Council by government and £22,061 was spent last year and claimed. The remaining £561,477 has to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. For this reason, a project officer has been recruited to manage the compliance and reclaim processes, with other contracted staff ready to deliver the programmes.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture be granted delegated authority to allocate the remaining funding in accordance with the government's eligibility criteria and in consultation with business representatives in line with the proposals set out in the report.

### 3 CONTEXT/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The RHSS fund provided by government was explicitly targeted at the following activities.

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

3.2 The first tranche of spend from the RHSS Fund was allocated to stewarding and publicity/safety advice, which were government approved activities, utilising £22,061 of Brighton & Hove's allocation.

3.3 Subsequently, following acknowledgement that the RHSS fund was difficult to spend because of ERDF restrictions, the Welcome Back Fund was announced by the Communities Secretary, with additional scope for eligible spend but still with the same regulations requiring procurement for all activities. The revised fund was announced as a route to helping boost tourism, through events, improving green spaces or provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups. Government indicated the fund could be used for the following.

- Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- Support and promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy.
- Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of Covid-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.
- Run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses.
- Boost the look and feel of their high streets by investing in non-permanent street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible.
- Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety.

3.4 Guidance from government to date on the application of the funds confirms that councils will not be reimbursed for these new activities where the spend occurred before the date of the new guidance and that ERDF requirements, including those

around procurement and branding will continue to apply. All activity needs to be linked to a government approved action plan and form part of the council's overall response to the pandemic. This is to align with the ERDF framework under which this is funded. Government have now approved the action plan approach outlined in this paper.

- 3.5 The fund allows local authorities in England 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. It recognises that the impact of Covid-19 on local economies is significant. Local authorities can therefore also use the fund to develop plans for responding to these impacts, this could include considering how other funding streams could help address those challenges in the future.
- 3.6 Part of the fund will be used to provide support for coastal resorts across England to support areas as they prepare for a great summer to safely welcome holiday makers in the coming months.
- 3.7 Activities out of scope:
- Activity that provides no additionality - government recognises that local authorities will already be delivering activity to ensure the safe reopening of their economies. This funding is intended to be additional funding on top of that existing activity; it should not be replacing the source for already committed expenditure. If an in-house department undertakes works (e.g. additional road markings) the staff costs associated with this activity would not be eligible, although additional materials purchased for this purpose would be eligible.
  - This is a revenue only funding project intended to 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 therefore not permitted.
  - Grants to businesses – Funding cannot provide direct financial support to businesses to make adaptations to premises, purchase PPE, purchase goods or equipment or offset wages or other operating costs.
- 3.8 Central Government expects local authorities to engage with stakeholders including local businesses, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Destination Management Organisations (DMO), town and parish councils. Consultation with stakeholders has already commenced and once completed the action plan to deliver on the fund's requirements will be agreed and funded activity will be procured.

**PROPOSED ALLOCATION OF 2021/22**

- 3.9 It is proposed that the fund will be spent on eligible activities to support tourism and the return of the public to local high streets. All activities can be completed by the government's deadline.

Budget Allocation to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

Welcome Back Fund Breakdown Overview	
	£
Public information and communications	71,800

Local tourism initiatives and environmental improvements	252,000
Events and support for culture recovery in the city	75,000
Temporary public realm changes	94,400
Administration for process and reclaims, project delivery and management	39,000
Fees & Contingency	28,800
<b>Total Spend in 2021/22</b>	<b>561,000</b>

3.10 The projects developed within this framework and each Fund theme are detailed in Appendix 1 of this report, detailing which activities have already been procured and funds committed.

3.11 To meet the requirements of the fund, the recruitment of the administrator to process the claims and refunds has been completed, with the officer employed from July 2021 to March 2022. Equally, the project delivery and management role is in place on a part time basis during 2021. Recruitment of the Information Officer has commenced and should be completed in July.

#### **4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

4.1 The proposals set out in the report for the allocation of Welcome Back Fund have been drawn up by officers in consultation with business representatives to ensure that they are consistent with the aims of the grant. They are also consistent with the council's Recovery & Renewal Programme and officers have worked with external partners to identify either the most pressing unmet needs or where funds can have, potentially, the greatest beneficial impacts.

#### **5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 Business consultation has been undertaken, in line with government funding requirements and Brighton and Hove's wealth of existing engagement with stakeholders via the:

- Brilliant Brighton BID
- Brighton & Hove Tourism Alliance
- Cultural Recovery Plan: Working Groups and Governance Group:
- Destination Experience Group delivering the Tourism Recovery Plan
- Brighton & Hove Chamber of Commerce

5.2 Officers have met with each group and discussed their priorities and preferences. With both the Cultural Recovery and Destination Experience groups, officers have developed the majority of the projects detailed in this report. All stakeholders are supportive of the plans and officers will continue to liaise throughout the lifetime of the programme.

#### **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The Welcome Back Funds can be used to support a wide range of activities as set out in paragraph 3.9 above and in Appendix 1 attached to this report. Government have provided approval for the projects listed above as the council's action plan for the funds.
- 6.2 The report recommends that allocation of the recently announced 2021/22 funding is spent as set out, with the delegated authority to the Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Culture to allocate the funding in accordance with the government's eligibility criteria and in consultation with the relevant business representatives.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 In March 2021 the council received notification of a Welcome Back Fund (WBF) allocation of £0.324m from government for the 2021/22 financial year. This is in addition to the previously allocated Reopening the High Street Safely Fund sum of £0.259m of which £0.022m has been claimed from government. The remaining balance will roll forward into the Welcome Back Fund, bringing the total allocation to £0.583m, with a balance remaining of £0.561m.
- 7.2 The proposed allocations set out in this report aim to fully spend all available grant by 31/03/22.

*Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld*

*Date: 13/06/21*

### Legal Implications:

- 7.3 There are no subsidy control issues in relation to this funding which cannot be used to directly support businesses. The Council will be required to comply with its Contract Standing Orders when spending this funding.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Alice Rowland*

*Date: 09/06/21*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 The activities within the Welcome Back programme cater for people from all sectors of the community as there is a diverse range of events planned. Issues such as physical access are detailed in event plans where applicable. Where relevant, event organisers will be required to complete an Equalities Impact Assessment, new for 2021. Events will consider their audience and the additional adaptations required to ensure an inclusive environment e.g. posters and documentation converted into other languages.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 Whilst some of the spend within this fund is on digital activities, the nature of attracting people into local high streets means that they often involve a range of potential sustainability impacts (both positive and negative) from travel, energy and water use, food, local economic and social impacts, use of outdoor spaces and production of waste. Through the requirement of organisers to complete the newly introduced Environmental Impact Assessment and Action Plan, event organisers will

be required to think more carefully about these impacts. They will be monitored and held to account if they wish to promote or organise events in the future.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.6 There are no Brexit implications.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 The diverse range of community and visitor events has the potential to contribute positively to the health and well-being of participants and audiences. This includes the direct benefits of taking part in physical activity events such as those for running, walking, cycling or socialising. Furthermore, events can contribute to a sense of community, local pride and cultural identity which can have a positive impact on the well-being of those involved. However, where relevant all events will meet COVID safe requirements in accordance with national guidance at the time.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 The Welcome Back Fund will be used to support local high streets across the city as well as to encourage visitors, particularly in the later part of the 2021/22 year when trade is needed to sustain businesses over the Winter and Spring months. The fund has to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and the plan outlined in this paper will make best use of these restricted funds.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Appendices:

1. Welcome Back Fund – Projects Outline

Background Reading:

1. Guidance [Welcome Back Fund - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
2. FAQs [Welcome Back Fund FAQs v2.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)