Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Briefing Note
Welsh Government Transforming Towns Revenue Funding 2020/21

In January 2020, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn announced the £90 million Transforming Towns package of support for regenerating and increasing footfall in our town centres.

The announcement also included the identification of £500k revenue funding across Wales for 2020-21. The funding will be shared equally between the 22 local authorities equating to £25,000 per Local Authority.  The money was earmarked for spend on a menu of possible options which will included developing masterplans; digital projects and provisions; community/stakeholder engagement; empty property/enforcement work; green infrastructure audit; place branding.

In order to secure their share of the funding each Local Authority had to submit an application outlining how they would propose to utilise the allocated funding.  Within Blaenau Gwent work is already underway to develop masterplans for the Towns and we are working with Welsh Government on their programme to tackle empty and derelict buildings across town centres.

Therefore, in order to afford the newly established post of Town Centre Business Development Officer the best opportunity to support the businesses we focused our application upon place branding, marketing and communications along with digital projects.

Alongside the physical regeneration projects there is an increasing need for us to support our town centres in creating an offer that is attractive to local users, visitors and potential investors.  Each of our towns can develop their own identities and this will only be made possible through working with our Town Centre Forums and businesses.

This proposal will take forward an overall place branding approach for Blaenau Gwent which will then supported by each of the towns and the areas they most want to 'shout' about.  This could be supported through the investigation of how a digital approach can support the traditional 'bricks and mortar' trading.

The Council will undertake the lead role in commissioning the place branding and supporting areas of work around place branding, marketing and communications along with developing digital projects.  We are currently recruiting a Town Centre Business Development Officer which will be responsible for supporting and working with our Town Centres.  This role will undertake the day-to-day project management role of this proposal supported by the Team Manager and Team Leader within the Regeneration Opportunities Team.

Alongside the place branding work, an agreed programme of marketing and communications to support the town centres will be developed and put into action with support from the Town Centre Forums.  This piece of work will help establish the town identities and messages the towns wish to promote.

In addition to the above, the funding will be used to investigate how digital can be used to support our town centres in both their current role and future roles within the local community.  The recent situation of COVID-19 has showed us how the community is

turning to local food providers such as greengrocers, butchers and local shops to avoid significant travel.  What we must ensure is the positive steps that have been taken to shop locally are not forgotten and we seek to maximize the renewed connections the community have to our local shops.

The current situation has changed the way we all live, travel, work and shop and it is the right time to consider how our town centres can embrace this change and for those retailers not currently considered essential to have a high street presence, how can we support them in developing an alternative online presence that allows them to trade under many different and difficult circumstances.

Welsh Government have agreed to support our funding of £25,000 on the basis of the proposals detailed within our application and appointment of the Town Centre Business Development Officer will take forward the work to deliver upon the priority areas detailed within the application.