

Title of Report:	Department for Communities and Department for Agriculture Town Centre Recovery Funding
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	18th August 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	Promoting the Borough as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit
Lead Officer	Head of Service, Prosperity and Place – in conjunction with Town and Village Management Team, Regeneration Team and Funding Unit Team.

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Cost to Council – staffing time
Included in Current Year Estimates	Not applicable – external funding
Capital/Revenue	Capital
Code	
Staffing Costs	No staffing costs

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform members of the development of a Covid Recovery Programme for town centres and rural businesses.

2.0 Background

On 19 June, Council was informed of the Department for Community's intention to provide funding for town centre recovery actions. The proposal was to fund the scheme in two tranches - Tranche 1 for immediate and urgent support and Tranche 2 for aspects of town actions that are more medium term or require a longer time to design and/or procure. Some guidance that was given included:

- Councils will be expected to absorb delivery costs – in Council's case, this is staff cost only.
- Monitoring and evaluation will be the responsibility of the Council – outcome report card has been developed by the Department and surveys will be provided
- Expenditure must be incurred by March 2021 with final PPE completed by March 2021.

A timeline for progression of this funding package is included at the end of this report at Annex A. The submissions to the Department were based on initial findings during lockdown from research undertaken by Town and Village Management at Annex B.

3.0 Covid Recovery Programme

3.1 Tranche 1 – Immediate Spend

As guided by the lead Department for Communities, Tranche 1 was aligned to immediate relief efforts, and was to represent no more than fifty percent of funding from the package, if used for grant assistance purposes. This initially represented £340,000 from the Department. An additional £109,000 was allocated from the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

After a quick turnaround of application form, guidance notes, and other material, the fund was launched on 3 August at 10:00am.

The funding was distributed via a Small Grant Scheme, covering two levels of capital investment. Business owners could apply for up to £500 for PPE equipment, hand sanitisers, internal social distancing measures, Perspex screening, signage, contactless payment or app development for booking systems. Alongside this, grants of up to £1000 were to be available for outdoor seating, heaters, front-of-house barriers, awnings or canopies where this would be appropriate. (Neither list was promoted as being exhaustive, and in terms of the larger grant, applicants were informed that additional permissions may be needed for any structural work to premises)

A snapshot of funding applications will be provided at Committee. Publicity was by direct email, social media, press release and linkages to group bodies such as Chambers, Invest NI, and others.

This is a rolling fund, which allows for letters of offer to be released on the same basis as applications are received. This helps towards a quick distribution of funds at a time of most need, and a final paper on the allocation will be brought back to Committee upon completion. At the end of the first day of application opening, Council had received 138 applications, with 78 still in draft.

3.2 Tranche 2 – Spend aimed at mid-term recovery

Tranche 2 is based around longer term initiatives to assist town centre recovery. It is solely funding from Department for Communities at this stage. Staff have returned an expression of interest based on the request from Department for Communities, with indicative actions, which included:

- Creation of ‘Meanwhile Spaces’ by adapting gap sites, public space – for cultural and/or economic use. To adhere to government guidelines on Covid-19 and create safe environments - outdoor furniture, canopies, PA systems, planters, lighting, street dressing, event equipment.
- Parklets – reconfiguration of pavement, public space and/or carriageways within town centres to facilitate outdoor hospitality, distancing measures, and social interaction whilst adhering to disability guidance. Modular system which could be adapted to location and need.
- Access & navigation to town centres ; physical and digital projects:
 - Cycle parks or routes to town centres. Include cycle infrastructure.
 - Feasibility study of pedestrian areas in the 6 main towns- current & additional spaces.
 - Enhancement of existing planned digital platform to encourage positive town centre experiences.
 - Digital signage.
- Expansion of outdoor market infrastructure to ensure continuity throughout the year.
- Data Collection - expansion of the digital footfall monitoring infrastructure across the borough. To include Portrush & Portstewart and additional counters in the 4 main towns.

This will require input from Planning, Environmental Health, Roads, Police and other stakeholders. If any of these actions prove to be successful with full buy-in from other departments or stakeholders, it is unlikely that activities will be on the ground for some months to come. There has been early engagement with local representative bodies, and some positive thoughts have come forward from Ballycastle Chamber in the first instance.

Progress papers will be brought to Committee as Tranche 2 proceeds. Final grant allocations will also be brought for information.

Annex A: Timeline

Notification of funding	19 June
Notification of expression of interest for Tranche 1	22 June with closing date of 24 June
Completion of EOI for Tranche 1	22 June
Notification of expression of interest for Tranche 2	23 June with closing date of 24 June
Completion of EOI for Tranche 2	24 June
Formal Announcement of funding from Departments	27 July
Letter of offer for Tranche 1 received:	28 July
Launch of funding information disseminated	31 July
Fund launched	3 August

Annex B: Information gathered during lockdown

Town & Village Management has conducted several surveys since April 2020 to gauge the impact of the pandemic restrictions as well as the public and the business community perceptions of their town centres during lockdown. The evidence gathered from these surveys will be used to develop actions to assist our towns to move through recovery and into potential transformation.

Business Surveys

4 key themes emerging to assist with recovery:

- Business Support & Training – finance, digital, staff, H&S
- Place Management Changes – signage, cleaning, outdoor hospitality areas, assistance with guidance requirements
- Marketing & Promotion of the Local message – shop small, shop local, & welcome back campaigns
- Events – outdoor, plans for 2021, Covid-19 compliant

From public survey May 2020

Top 5 things missed about not being able to visit town centres were:

- 'Meeting Friends', 'Eating out', 'Browsing in Shops', 'Visiting Cafes' and 'Shopping'

80% said they would Shop more locally

94% said they would prefer limiting number of customers in shops

85% said they would like to see more cleaning of public areas and reminders about social distancing on display.

When asked what changes the public would like to see in their town centres the following was received.

Welcome signage, Social distancing reminders	72.96%
Increased cleaning of public areas and/or on-street sanitising points	85.19%
More pedestrian areas developed / wider pavements	42.59%
More on street seating, green spaces, planting	49.26%
More on street animation eg live music, things to do	31.85%
More outdoor catering / pavement cafes	50.37%

The business community were also asked what changes they would accept outside their premises based on the public response the following was received:

Wider pavements to allow for physical distancing regulations	36.94%
More cycle lanes and cycle parking in town centres	36.04%
Additional Pedestrian areas	36.94%
Signage reminders for physical distancing and covid symptoms	62.16%
Additional outdoor facilities for food and beverages – communal pavement café areas	56.76%
Additional on street seating areas	48.65%
Additional plants & trees	30.63%
Additional on street animation – art/music/culture/play areas	30.63%
Additional hand sanitising points / handwashing facilities	73.87%
More cleansing /disinfecting of public areas in town centres	74.77%

Footfall data shows : March down 45%, April down 82%, May down 77%

Community perception survey May 2020

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During lockdown people appreciate local businesses more.

People are more aware of local walking/cycling routes and local online home deliveries.

Business Survey June 2020 – Town Centres Preparing for easing of Restrictions – closed 12 June

74% more cleansing of public areas

62% additional signage

56% additional outdoor facilities for food and beverage

More cycle lanes & parking, additional pedestrian areas, wider pavements 36% each

Business Survey June 2020 – Outdoor Hospitality – Are you considering? survey

Early indications : 92% of those surveyed wish to use outdoor space to provide hospitality,

64 % would like to use pavement area, 64 % do not own the space