

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel

17 November 2021

TITLE:	Welcome Back Fund Update
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Ralphs - Council Leader SMDC
CONTACT OFFICER:	John Betts - Interim Executive Director Finance and Revenues & Benefits
WARDS INVOLVED:	All

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 At the previous meeting of the Panel there was a request for an update on the Council's use of the Government's Welcome Back fund.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee note the report.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Council was awarded a Welcome Back grant of £87,090 and is using this grant, alongside underspend from Re-opening High Streets Safely Fund grant, to support activities to safely re-open local economies.
- 3.2 Service Level Agreements have been agreed with Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph town councils to delegate funding to support local activity.
- 3.3 Funding is also being used to support distribution of Staffordshire Moorlands Christmas gift guide (funded using Additional Resources Grant) to promote local shops and town centres.
- 3.4 The balance of funding is currently held as a contingency to use in response to further lockdowns, but with plans under development for its use in early 2022, should this not be required.

4. How this Report Links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The activity funded from the grants outlined in this report will support:

- Aim One – To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work
- Aim Three – To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages.

5. Options and Analysis

5.1 There are no alternate options to consider at this time.

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
None.

6.2 Workforce
There has been considerable officer time spent supporting delivery, but this is drawn from existing resources.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Equality and Diversity policies.

6.4 Financial Considerations
These are all detailed in the report, in terms of the grant received and proposed deployment.

6.5 Legal
None

6.6 Sustainability
None

6.7 External Consultation
There has been consultation with town councils and volunteers to develop local activity.

6.8 Risk Assessment
The primary risk is around not spending the grant by the end of the financial year and will be mitigated by monitoring and implementing alternate uses of the grant by the end of the calendar year.

JOHN BETTS

Interim Executive Director Finance and Revenues & Benefits

Web Links and Background Papers

None

Location

Moorlands House

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7. Background

- 7.1. In May 2020, the government announced the launch of a Re-opening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) to help fund temporary works required for the safe reopening of high streets. Due to additional lockdowns, the funding agreement was not signed until 21st January 2021 but this awarded the Council £87,090 to pay for both retrospective and new temporary works until June 2021.
- 7.2. In March 2021, the government announced the launch of a second fund called *Welcome Back*. This awarded the Council an additional £87,090 to the period ending 31st March 2022. This funding is 50% derived from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), meaning that it is subject to both UK and ERDF procurement rules and criteria with all spend needing to be agreed by Department for Levelling-up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) in advance.
- 7.3. The principle uses of the funding must be:
 - Support activities that allow the local authority to safely reopen their local economies. e.g. temporary public realm changes
 - Communications and public information activity to promote a safe public environment, encourage residents and visitors back and direct business-facing activities
 - Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium term impact of Covid-19, including through employment of temporary staff.

8. Activities:

- 8.1. Using the initial RHSSF fund, the Council has completed (or has agreed funding) for the following activities:
 - Officer salary costs (co-funded) until March 2022 (£32,275)
 - Retailer information folders (£6,015)
 - Town centre temporary barriers (£2,509)
- 8.2. The balance of the funding has been incorporated with the Welcome Back funding.
- 8.3. In May 2021, it was agreed that the Council would support Town Councils to take a key role in the delivery of objectives by delegating part of the funding directly to them. Service Level Agreements were signed with each of the Councils and they have been awarded funding to deliver:

Leek Town Council (£17,800)	Leek War Memorials spring clean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Edward’s Church Stockwell St • Ball Haye Green • Nicholson War Memorial Ball Haye St Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leek Family Fun day - Local professional entertainment agency to deliver mixed entertainment to build footfall to retail centre. e.g. Jugglers, Street Magicians. (Completed).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra event during Leek Blues/Americana Festival -Family venue with opportunity for young people to perform, participate in workshops meet up and enjoy music.(Completed). • Exhibition of a Women's Land Army project developed by Borderland Voices. • Leek Community arts project including hire of large room in Arts Centre for display by local artists. • Young people's art displayed in retail and associated premises within town centre retail area (1st -9th Oct). • Laser shows in the lead up to Christmas. • Children's rides selected Saturday and Sunday markets and Fridays.
Cheadle Town Council (£15,840)	<p>Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music event (completed), • Halloween event (completed) • Artisan markets x three.
Biddulph Town Council (£18,450)	<p>Clean pavements within Biddulph town centre, improving the look and feel of the High Street.</p> <p>Additional planting added to shop frontages. Footfall analysis.</p> <p>Biddulph Guide and town map (digital and paper based)</p> <p>Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classic Car Show (completed). • Enhancing the Night time economy event. • Launch event for Biddulph guide • Support for local schools and organisations to create art events/ displays around the town (e.g. in the bus hub, shop windows, Town Hall, etc.) Materials and publicity • Vintage afternoon tea/ planting - Biddulph Local People's Project • Halloween Trail - town centre shops • Lasers/ entertainment at Christmas lights switch-on

- 8.4. The Council has invested a great deal of officer time into helping the town councils and volunteers develop their ideas, support them through preparation of risk assessments and permissions as well as ensuring that delivery is in line with procurement requirements and other regulations.
- 8.5. It was originally proposed that the Council would also procure a design and marketing agency to develop place marketing products as well as lead on installation of welcome back banners attached to lamp posts. However, the Council received no responses to the tender, and Highways regulations and Conservation areas of much of our town centres has meant that this has been difficult to deliver in the short timeframe. The Council therefore sent a change

request to DLUHC, which was approved allowing us to re-focus the balance. Activities to be funded include the distribution of Shop Local Christmas gift guide promoting independent local shops and covid friendly town centres shopping which will go to every household in the district.

- 8.6. At present, the Council has an unallocated balance of £39,900 which is being reserved as a contingency fund in case of further lockdowns and to allow for any overspend on the above projects. If this is not required by the end of December, plans to utilise this funding will be finalised with a focus on welcome back messages for Spring 2022 including further activity to promote the town centres and encourage winter break tourism will be commissioned.