

SUMMARY OF WELCOME BACK FUND EXPENDITURE

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That the Panel note the content of the report.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report summaries the projects that have taken delivered to date and future planned projects to be funded through the Welcome Back Fund.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Welcome Back Fund is an extension to the Reopening High Street Safely fund which was launched in 2020. The Council has been allocated £224,208 Welcome Back Fund.

3.2 The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) is providing councils across England a share of £56 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the pandemic. This funding builds on the £50 million Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSSF) allocated to councils in 2020 and forms part of the wider support government is providing to communities and businesses.

3.3 The purpose of the WBF is to provide support to enable safe trading in public places for businesses and customers. There is a particular focus on our high streets or 'District Centres' as well as other public places that are at the heart of towns and cities gearing up to reopen as safe, welcoming spaces. The funding is in place to deliver temporary enhancements until 31 March 2022.

3.4 The allocation can be spent across 6 strands of activity and Local Authorities are encouraged to work with Town/Parishes as delivery partners.

1. Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.
2. Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
3. Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
5. Support to promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy.
6. 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.

3.5 Any activities carried out must be procured in accordance with the EDRF rules and have the appropriate branding relating to the fund to be able to submit a successful claim.

4. PROJECTS TO DATE

4.1 The Council has been working with town and parish councils to identify and implement projects. The activities that have been carried out are as follows:

- Publication of a dedicated web page which includes posters that can be downloaded (or printed on request)
<https://newforest.gov.uk/article/2711/Planning-support-for-businesses-reopening>
- Appointment of Covid-19 Safety Operative to work on Lymington Market days to ensure safe working on market days along high street (employed by Lymington and Pennington Town Council)
- Signs/Stickers/floor graphics for public information on social distancing (procured by New Milton Town Council)
- Be Alert Safety packs for businesses including sanitiser packs (procured by Ringwood Town Council)
- Installation or queuing / barrier rope around shopping area to assist shops (procured by Burley Parish Council)
- Traffic and diversion signs to widen an area of pavement. No entry symbols to highlight temporary no traffic zone (procured by Brockenhurst Parish Council)

4.2 To date the Council have submitted a claim to MHCLG for £11,435.56 and all direct costs have been occurred by delivery partners (Town and Parish Councils). The original funding criteria were very limiting and hence the low reclaim rate. To increase the number of projects officers have now identified a series of initiatives.

5. PROJECTS CURRENTLY BEING PROCURED AND IMPLEMENTED

5.1 Currently officers are at advanced stages to procure resources to deliver a number of additional projects to utilise the funding:

Media Campaign

5.2 A consultant is being appointed to develop, promote, and deliver a campaign plan to highlight and support local businesses and encourage visitors to the local economy with activities to include:

- Support the businesses and sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, from retail and hospitality, to attractions and events.
- Work with local businesses to understand change in footfall, encourage safe behaviours and develop safety messages for returning customers.
- Deliver clear messages on safe reopening via both social and print media to increase day visitor and resident awareness.
- Maximise and market the districts USP's to residents and visitors to the area
- Provide incentives to both residents and businesses, such as shopping offers to raise the profile of the local area and promotion of the safe reopening.
- Enhance communication and marketing locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Work with NFDC and Town and Parish Council to ensure common action and common benefits across the whole district are achieved.

Video Campaign

5.3 A consultant is being appointed to produce 13 videos (one for each of our main town/villages). The video will promote businesses and local services within each area, highlighting key safety messages specific to each area, but not specific businesses.

- 5.4 Each video map will be made available to publish on our website and also have the ability to be used by and linked to Town & Parish Council and/or local Business Association/Chamber of Trade websites.
- 5.5 In addition, a 'New Forest' wide video will be produced to include a seasonal safety video for use on social media and web distribution.

Information Panels

- 5.6 At least 10 information panels are being installed in the major car parks and high streets across the district. The panels/artwork will remain in place until the end of the claim period.

Solar Compacting Bins

- 5.7 Solar compacting bins have been purchased through this fund and will be installed initially in Lymington. These bins will be installed around Lymington Quay and High Street. Further bins will be purchased and located around the District.

Water Fillers

- 5.8 The fund is being used to install an initial 4 water bottle refilling stations at town centre toilet blocks. These fillers will reduce plastic and ensure the bottles are filled with uncontaminated water so a sustainable and safe investment.
- 5.9 Further projects will be identified in the remaining months on the contract period.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 All claims are submitted to MHCLG retrospectively and audited by them. It is therefore important that all procurement and branding rules are followed to ensure that the monies can be recovered.

7. CRIME & DISORDER, ENVIRONMENTAL AND EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none.

8. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none, no personal data is being collected as part of this work.

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Background Papers:

General guidance:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1021246/Welcome_Back_Fund_Guidance_v3_Final.pdf

FAQ (including procurement):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1021247/Welcome_Back_Fund_FAQs_v3_Final.pdf

Branding and publicity:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836956/ESIF-GN-1-005_ESIF_Branding_and_Publicity_Requirements_v8_updated.pdf