

## Report of the Chief Executive

**WELCOME BACK FUND**1. Purpose of report

To update the Committee on The Welcome Back Fund and the proposed actions.

2. Background

Members will recall the Reopening the High Street Fund (RHSSF), which was utilised to employ two COVID-19 Information Officers to support local businesses and the public through the changes and challenges of the pandemic on our high streets. They have operated with great success and have represented the Council in an exemplary manner. Further, to this the RHSSF was used to support communications through social media campaigns, high street signage etc.

On the 20 March 2021, the Government announced that the Council would be allocated a further £101,459 through the Welcome Back Fund (WBF). The WBF will be used by Councils to welcome back visitors and our communities to re-visit our high streets following the lifting of restrictions through steps on the COVID Recovery Roadmap. The allocated WBF funding was available to access from 16 April 2021 and is the same amount allocated through the previous RHSSF. As the WBF is focused on welcoming back visitors, the Council could look to utilise the funds beyond the end date of the RHSSF programme, which will officially end on the 30 June 2021 and provide a calendar of activities supporting local areas into 2022. This would allow for a seamless transition of activity and support.

3. Proposal

It is proposed that the Action Plan included in the appendix, is used as a foundation of activity for our high streets to prosper as we welcome people back and businesses adjust, whilst also maintaining footfall beyond the end of STEP 4. All measured interventions and activities are designed to be rolled out through all four town centres, helping to encourage customers back to these shopping areas and to outline that the Council is being proactive in making these areas as welcoming and safe as possible.

4. Financial implications

The estimated costs of the proposals within the Action Plan are included in the appendix, and will be met with the resources provided through the Council's WBF allocation. Any inclusion of additional actions to the plan by Members may require additional revenue budget to be agreed, a decision on which would be deferred to the Finance and Resources Committee.

**Recommendation**

**The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that support be given to the Welcome Back Fund as highlighted in the report.**

Background papers:

Nil