

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 2 November 2020

Title: Tourism Events Funding

Report of: Ben Hook, Head of Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration

Cabinet Member: Councillor Timpe

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To consider the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny and agree a way forward for Tourism Events Funding and to consider a funding request from Light Up Bexhill.

Decision Type: Non- Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the constitution of a Bexhill Marketing Group be deferred until the establishment of the new Bexhill Parish (Town) Council in April 2021;
- 2) £3,500 of the events funding for Bexhill, Rye and the Rural areas not allocated in the 2020/21 financial year be allocated to Light Up Bexhill as an additional contribution towards the Bexhill town centre Christmas lights
- 3) £500 of the events funding for Bexhill, Rye and the Rural areas not allocated in the 2020/21 financial year be allocated to both Sidley and Little Common areas as an additional contribution towards their own Christmas lights displays; and
- 4) the remaining £13,500 of the events funding for Bexhill, Rye and the Rural areas not allocated in the 2020/21 financial year be carried forward to 2021/22.

Introduction

1. Following the debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 14 September (OSC 20/21 refers) further discussions have been held with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism. Consideration has been given to the recommendations made by the OSC, in particular, those relating to the setting up of a Bexhill Marketing Group. The Minutes arising from the OSC are attached at Appendix 1 for reference.
2. It is recognised that with the approval of a new Parish Council in Bexhill (Bexhill Town Council) (C20/38 refers) that it would be more appropriate to defer decisions about marketing and events for the town, until such a time as the Bexhill Town Council can be properly consulted.

3. A request for additional funding has also been received by representatives of Light Up Bexhill (LUB), who receive £13,000 per year from the Council as a contribution towards the Christmas lights in Bexhill town centre.
4. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fundraising from local businesses has been problematic as they face uncertain trading conditions and futures. As such, LUB have requested additional funding from the Council to help ensure an attractive 2020 display, drawing residents into the town for their seasonal shopping.
5. As no events grants were paid in 2020 there is still an amount available for use. The combined £18,000 pot for Bexhill, Rye and the Rural areas could be utilised, in part, to support these additional contributions.
6. It is therefore recommended that £3,500 of the events funding not allocated in 2020/21 be awarded to LUB as an additional contribution towards the Bexhill town centre Christmas lights, together with £500 each to both Sidley and Little Common areas as an additional contribution towards their own Christmas lights displays.
7. The remaining funding could be carried forward to 2020/21 financial year to support more events and the tourism industry as a whole during the COVID-19 recovery period, in line with the draft Economic Recovery Plan.

Conclusions

8. Events remain an important part of the tourism industry in the district. Ensuring their funding into the future will be critical to the economic recovery of the area. Carrying forward funding will enable the Council to support more events in 2021 supporting local businesses as they seek to recover from losses in 2020.
9. Bexhill town centre businesses have experienced an extremely difficult year and supporting the Christmas lights with additional funding will help draw additional footfall during the festive period. The same principle applies to other areas of the town such as Sidley and Little Common who receive small contributions towards their displays. Although no request has been made by these areas, a small additional contribution would provide parity.
10. A Bexhill Marketing Group requires proper support and administering infrastructure. The Bexhill Town Council presents an opportunity to provide this and therefore it is recommended that any new approach be deferred until after the Town Council has been established with effect from 1 April and the elections in May 2021.

Financial Implications

11. Carrying forward unspent funds will mean that these cannot then be captured as savings against the revenue budget.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No

Risk Management	No
Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Ben Hook, Head of Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration
e-mail address:	ben.hook@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	1 – OSC Reference
Relevant Previous Minutes:	OSC 20/21
Background Papers:	-
Reference Documents:	-

Extract from Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes of 14 September 2020

OSC 20/21. **TOURISM EVENTS FUNDING**

Members were requested to review the allocation of funding for visitor events in light of the impact of COVID-19 on the events industry. In June 2019, Cabinet had approved the recommendations from the Tourism Task and Finish Group that included a recommendation to consolidate the visitor events funding into a single programme for the whole of the district, with effect from April 2020.

The events budget was managed by officers in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism. The budget available was £18,000 per annum and covered Bexhill, Rye and rural Rother, but not Battle which had a separate arrangement in which £9,000 funding was allocated to the area, as detailed in the report.

The COVID-19 crisis had resulted in the cancellation of all events planned for the year which would otherwise have received Council support and accordingly all applications had been postponed. Funding that would have been allocated towards events during the current year had therefore not been spent and it was recommended that this funding be rolled forward to the next financial year. This would enable the Council to support more events to assist with restarting the visitor economy in 2021.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism had indicated a wish to establish a Marketing Group for Bexhill, to co-ordinate local marketing and promotion for Bexhill, in much the same way as existed in Battle. A Bexhill Marketing Group would bring together key stakeholders including Rother District Council, Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill Museum and others. A suggested Terms of Reference was attached at Appendix A to the report.

It was proposed that £9,000 of the events budget (equivalent to the amount previously ringfenced for Bexhill events), be devolved to the Bexhill Marketing Group and for a legally constituted Accountable Body to be identified in the future to enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Council to receive and pay funds and be accountable for the use of the Council's funding. Rother District Council could undertake this role for the first year of the arrangement but could not provide secretariat support. Members were keen to ensure that the emphasis remained on the supporting of events and agreed to re-look at the Terms of Reference, with a revised version to be presented to Cabinet that included other organisations such as the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society.

A request had been received by Rye Bay Marketing Ltd to assist with the shortfall in the 2021 funding for their annual Rye Visitor Guide. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the summer season, only 50% of their 130,000 guides had been distributed, which were privately

funded through advertising revenue (many of the contributing businesses had experienced significant losses, therefore the future of the guide remained in doubt). In most years, £9,000 would have been spent on part-funding events in the town through the Council events budget, but as no events have been supported through this fund during the current year, it was recommended that Cabinet be requested to make this money available for one year only, to Rye Bay Marketing Ltd to ensure that they have sufficient funding to produce the 2021 visitor guide. Members, however, did not support this and it was recommended and agreed that the funds be rolled forward and allocated to the Rye Events Group.

On-going, the remaining £9,000 from the annual budget would continue to be ringfenced for the support of events in Rye and rural Rother under the existing guidelines for events support and administered by Council officers in consultation with the Lead Member.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to:

- 1) authorise the constitution of a Bexhill Events and Marketing Group under a revised Terms of Reference;
- 2) allocate the £9,000 from the Council's Events Budget to Bexhill Events and Marketing Group, to support the marketing, promotion and events of Bexhill from 2021/22 onwards;
- 3) approve that £9,000 events funding for Bexhill not allocated in the 2020/21 financial year be carried forward to 2021/22; and
- 4) the £9,000 usually allocated for Rye, to be awarded as a one-off grant to Rye Bay Marketing Ltd for their 2021 campaign not be supported and that the money be rolled forward and allocated to the Rye and rural Rother Events.

(Councillor Dixon declared a personal interest in this matter as a member Battle Marketing Group and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof.)

(Councillors Gray and Madeley each declared a personal interest in this matter as members of the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof.)

OSC Agenda Item 7