

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

8 NOVEMBER 2012

SUBJECT:	<i>OUR TOWN FIRST: HIGH STREET X-FUND</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, HOUSING AND PLANNING</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>CLLR PAT HACKETT REGENERATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY</i>
KEY DECISION?	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out an update of work being undertaken from Government Initiatives to support Town Centres. Specifically, the recently announced: Our Town First: Future High Street X-Funding. This £1million fund will support locations which can demonstrate existing innovative high street regeneration schemes that have effective transformation and how they can build on these schemes to strengthen their impact.
- 1.2 Members are asked to agree that under the delegated authority of the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the Portfolio holder, final applications with a letter from the Local Authority agreeing to be the accountable body will be agreed and submitted by the 6th December 2012 deadline.
- 1.3 Members are also asked to note the progress of Town Team Partnerships which support unsuccessful Portas Pilot areas with a package of support to help revitalise their high streets. Through their local MP's Town Teams were asked to register their interested to be a Town Team Partnership to receive £10,000 from the Government to support elements of their original Portas Pilot bid. The Council will act as the accountable body for this funding.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

PORTAS PILOT UPDATE

- 2.1 As part of the Government's initiative to tackle the challenges of high streets, Mary Portas was commissioned to undertake a review of high streets in 2011. In December 2011 Mary Portas published 'The Portas Review - an independent review into the future of our high streets'. This set out 28 key recommendations for overhauling our high streets, one of which was to create "Town Teams", described as a "visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets".
- 2.2 On 4th February 2012 Government announced the 'Portas Pilots – Prospectus: an invitation to become a Town Team' which encouraged applications from groups across the country to become a Town Team. The Government agreed to support

twelve pilots across the Country with up to £100,000 available for each, dependant on the amount sought and Government's overall assessment of the bids.

- 2.3 As Members will be aware, the Council has been working with interested groups in Wirral who have been seeking to create Town Teams. The first round of applications for Portas Pilot funding closed on 30th March 2012 and five Wirral applications were submitted from the following areas: Hoylake, Liscard, Moreton, New Brighton and New Ferry (reported to Cabinet 15th March 2012, minute 346 refers).
- 2.4 The initiative was heavily oversubscribed with over 360 applications from across the country submitted to DCLG. Unfortunately none of the Wirral proposals were successful in the pilot phase. Due to the high demand, the Government subsequently announced an additional round of funding to support a further twelve projects up to £100,000 each.
- 2.5 A further three applications were submitted for Portas Pilots round 2. The Wirral proposals were; Birkenhead & Oxton Road, Seabank Rd (New Brighton) and Birkenhead Market (reported to Cabinet 21st June 2012, minute 24 refers). Unfortunately none of the second round applications from Wirral were successful.

TOWN TEAM PARTNERSHIPS

- 2.6 Following the major rounds, Government announced on 30th August 2012 a Town Team Partnership scheme which is a national package of support totaling £5.5 million. It was designed to support unsuccessful Portas Pilot areas, so that no area is left behind. Town Teams who sign up to be Town Team Partners will receive backing to help put elements of their plans into action and will be able to access support from a variety of experts to gain further advice to tackle issues within their centres. The first step in this process was for Town Teams to register their interest in being a partnership through their Local MP by 16th September 2012. Their MP had to support the registration of the Town Team to become a Town Team partnership.
- 2.7 Seven of the eight Town Teams in Wirral who applied for the Portas Pilot funding have registered to be a Town Team Partnership with approval from their MP's and are waiting to hear if they will receive £10,000 towards implementing an element of their original bid. The Council will act as the accountable body for the funding.

X-FUNDING

- 2.8 Following this, Government announced on the 30th August – Our Town First: Future High Street X-Fund prospectus. This fund invites nominations from locations with exemplary, innovative schemes implemented since May 2011. There are two criteria which the nominations will be judged against, these are innovation and effectiveness. The guidance states that nominated areas should:
 - Demonstrate that their schemes are innovative in responding to the area's challenges – i.e. new or bespoke ideas that have not been previously been undertaken elsewhere,
 - Set out how they could help other areas learn from their experience and how their innovative schemes could be replicated elsewhere

- Provide evidence that they have been effective in transforming their areas through schemes implemented since May 2011. Evidence of the effectiveness of the scheme may be quantitative and/or qualitative
 - Provide evidence of the schemes' costs and value for money
 - Explain how they would use potential prize funding, for example to extend or strengthen their high street schemes and what impact it would be reasonably expected to have.
- 2.9 The application process requires applicants to fill in a form and provide a supporting 2-4 minute video setting out why the area should be awarded a prize. The application must be accompanied by a letter from the Local Authority confirming its intention to act as the accountable body for the fund, should it be successful.
- 2.10 All of the Town Teams and Trader groups have been notified of the X-Funding and have been asked to contact the Council directly if they are interested in applying for the funding, as the Local Authority will be the accountable body. The X-Funding has been advertised on the Council's Website. This X-Funding is very specific in its criteria and must build on existing work done by groups in centres.
- 2.11 The applications have to be submitted to Government by 6th December 2012. Currently we have interest from three of the town teams who are looking to build upon their existing work. These are Oxton Road (part of the Birkenhead Town Team – Wirral Chamber), Hoylake Town Team and Liscard Town Team.
- 2.12 These areas are still looking at whether they will submit a final X-Fund application. Oxton Road have drafted an application which would look to build upon their existing work refurbishing empty units and sub dividing them into Micro units for small start up businesses with a package of incentives and support to businesses.
- 2.13 Council officers are continuing to work with any interested group looking to apply for X-Funding and helping guide them through the application criteria process.
- 2.14 Members are asked to agree that under the delegated authority of the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the Portfolio holder, final applications with a letter from the Local Authority confirming it will be the accountable body will be agreed and submitted by 6th December 2012 deadline.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The principal risk for the applications is that they are rejected by Government, due to over subscription or that the applications submitted are not seen by Government as fulfilling their criteria.
- 3.2 The Council's costs liability at this stage should be restricted as funding will only be payable to the Council from Government if the X-Funding applications are successful from Government. If the applications are not taken forward by Government, then there is no liability on the Council for the funding.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No other options have been considered, as this report sets out a response to proposals that have been called for by Government and responded to by local organisations, Our Town First: Future High Street X-Fund.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The X-Funding application information has been shared with all existing trader groups and advertised on the Council's website.
- 5.2 Officers will work with the interested applicants to develop their proposals. Appropriate targeted support will be provided to ensure engagement with the widest possible number of local residents through the existing communication mechanisms, if the funding is successful.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 The development of the applications if successful, may require additional skills and expertise that maybe lacking in some organisations. Whilst some organisations may have the necessary skills and experience some may need support and may not have the resources to 'buy in' those skills.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 7.1 In accordance with the criteria set out in the X- Fund, the Local Authority must agree to be the Accountable Body. The total of the fund is £1million and bids are being invited for a proportion of the funding with no prescribed limitations up to £1million. The Local Authority must prepare and submit a letter to Government with each application going forward. The grant will be paid directly to the Local Authority through section 31 un-ringfenced revenue grant.
- 7.2 There will be staffing implications in supporting X-Funding. This will be absorbed within existing work programmes, which aim to support economic development and the promotion of Wirral's town centres.
- 7.3 The Town Team Partnership £10,000 funding will come to the Local Authority for each of the seven town teams that have signed up to be a partnership. A funding agreement will need to be put in place between the Council and the Town Teams.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council will be the accountable body for the funding.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review is attached – Links to existing Portas Pilot Town Team EIA (Completed 23rd February 2012) and a further EIA will be completed if required for any successful X- Fund applications.

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010-0>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The X-Funding applications will have to conform with national policy in terms of sustainable development.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The applications may require planning permission for 'change of use' to any premises which are proposed to be brought into use, dependant on the use classification.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

12.1 That Cabinet agree to be the accountable body for the Our Town First: Future High Street X-Fund, for each application submitted if successful and the money be allocated in line with the Council's accounting policies.

12.2 That Cabinet agree, for any application submitted to the Council prior to the Government's 6th December 2012 deadline, that the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the portfolio holder has the delegated authority to agree applications to be submitted along with a letter agreeing that the Council will be the accountable body.

13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 The 'Our Town First: Future High Street X- Fund' stipulates that the Local Authority must be the accountable body for any bids submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

13.2 To allow officers to work with any interested groups to complete their application prior to the 6th December deadline.

REPORT AUTHOR: *Hayley Crook*
Investment Strategy
telephone: (0151) 691 8297
email: hayleycrook@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

(List and, if not attached, specify location – e.g. website and/or Group rooms.)

REFERENCE MATERIAL

(Include background information referred to or relied upon when drafting this report, together with details of where the information can be found. There is no need to refer to publicly available material: e.g. Acts of Parliament or Government guidance.)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Portas Pilot Bid Funding	15th March 2012
Cabinet – Wirral Town Teams Funding	12th April 2012
Cabinet – Portas Pilots Round 2	21st June 2012
Economy and Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny - Town Centre Update	5th September 2012