

**Business Support Programme for Swale**

1. As previously reported, a pilot programme of business support was introduced for the second half of 2013/14, delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. This contract ended on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, and whilst final outcomes have yet to be reported by the contractor, around 100 individuals accessed the service and as of the end of February 2013 7 new businesses had been started.
2. The service has been re-contracted for 2013/14, jointly with Medway Council, so as to provide a uniform service across a wider area and generate the potential for cost savings. Having been through an open tender process Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC) has again been appointed to deliver the service.
3. As before the service provides workshops and 1:1 advice sessions, delivered in Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham and the programme caters for individuals and businesses working in the private sector or providing community services as a charity or not-for-profit organisation. The final schedule for delivery is under negotiation with KICC as the time of writing but should be available for circulation at the meeting of the Rural Forum.
4. The specific tourism business advisory service is also provided through Visit Kent and this will also be continuing. The programme comprises:
  - Advisory visits to existing, diversifying and new local tourism business in Swale (up to two, one hour appointments to meet the tourism advisor and a site visit if appropriate)
  - Telephone advice to local businesses in Swale and professional tourism staff
  - Promotion of tourism training courses
  - Advice on National Grading Scheme
  - Local Entry Scheme (LES) for Kent – includes listing on webs site, listing in local visitor guide, Tourist Information Centre listing
5. Again we would ask that the Rural Forum promote this free service to potential beneficiaries. Anyone interested should call the business support line on 01795 379012 or contact the Economy and Community Services team on 01795 417398.

**TIGER – Thames Gateway Innovation, Growth and Enterprise**

6. A new funding opportunity for local businesses was launched in Swale on the 26<sup>th</sup> March and is now open for applications. Funded through the Government's Regional Growth Fund, the TIGER fund is offering the potential for 0% loan funding of between £10,000 and £2 million to business projects which are investing in new products, processes or markets, or potentially seeking to expand existing activities.

7. The underlying emphasis to this new funding opportunity is the creation of new sustainable employment and the fund is particularly seeking applications from the following business sectors

- Manufacturing
- Pharmaceuticals and life sciences
- ICT, software and Information management
- Low carbon technolog
- Creative and media sectors
- Technology development

8. For further information or if you wish to make an application to the TIGER fund go to [www.tiger20million.co.uk](http://www.tiger20million.co.uk) or contact the economic development team at Swale Borough Council on 01795 417398.

### **Jobcentre Plus Wage incentives**

9. Jobcentre Plus has recently made changes to its wage incentive programme, which is now offering financial support to employers who take on 18-24 year olds who have been registered unemployed for 6 months or longer. The wage incentive is available if you employ someone for 16 hours or more each week in a job lasting more than 26 weeks. There are two rates:

- for part-time work between 16 and 29 hours a week – £1,137.50
- for full-time work of 30 hours or more a week – £2,275.

10. This will be paid 26 weeks after the employee starts work. Small businesses with fewer than 50 employees can claim a part payment eight weeks after the employee starts work. For more information contact the Jobcentre Plus on 01795 562532.

### **LEADER in the new RDPE 2014 - 2020 in Kent**

11. The next LEADER programme will not start until 2015 and it is likely that there will be a transition period (close of old programme and launch of new programme) but the guidelines relating to this transition period have yet to be clarified and unlikely to be before the end of May 2013. All current Leader Local Action Groups (LAG's) will be able to apply for transitional funding estimated to be in the region of £30,000 to £40,000 per LAG. Work in the transition period will include:

- retaining key posts
- evaluate delivery of current Local Development Strategy
- reviewing evidence, geographic coverage and setting new priorities
- informal consultation with local community and businesses
- identifying training needs and capacity building
- preparatory work for a new Local Development Strategy
- collaboration between LAG's (best practice, lessons learned, shared activity)

- activity to build relationships with LEPs, neighbouring LAGs and other relevant local partnerships
- Local Action Group assessment (performance, governance and processes)

12. Transition funding will not support new projects or allow for completing current programme management or administration; neither will an allocation of transition funding imply entry into the next programme.

13. There will be distinct EU rural funds (EAFRD) the majority of which will be in a new Rural Development Programme but some EAFRD will be allocated to the Growth Programme (addressing LEP priorities). Rural Development Programme priorities include:

- Boosting competitiveness of agriculture and forestry
- Securing environmental benefits
- Strengthening rural communities

Growth Programme priorities include:

- Increasing global competition
- Driving growth
- Greater flexibility
- Reducing red-tape

14. The proposed timetable for transition funds (subject to change) is as follows:

End May 2013	Transition guidelines issued
June 2013	Assessment panel and successful bids announced
July 2013	Individual transition plans formalised Review of any rejected/amended bids Sign-off of transition plans
January 2014	Allocations available to spend