

CABINET

11 October 2006

LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS GROWTH INITIATIVE (LABGI) ALLOCATION TO
ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN PROJECTS – MONITORING REPORT

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB1241 - Winchester Economic Action Plan - 22 March 2006

CAB1243 - Allocation of LABGI funding – 22 March 2006

CAB1297 - Winchester District Enterprise Centre – 22 March 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In March this year, Cabinet approved the allocation of £150,000 of LABGI money to projects in support of the City Council's newly introduced economic action plan. This Report outlines the projects subsequently approved under delegated powers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. It also gives a brief status report on each of the projects to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet monitors progress on implementation of LABGI funded projects from the economic action plan.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

1.1 At its meeting of 22 March 2006 Cabinet approved both the City Council's new economic action plan and the allocation of £150,000 of LABGI money to fund delivery of action plan targets (CAB1241 and CAB1243 refer). At that meeting, Members agreed that the funding be allocated to the budget of the relevant Directorate and that detailed spending proposals be agreed by the Director in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder. This Report summarises the projects subsequently identified by officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for funding by the LABGI allocation. It asks Cabinet to monitor progress on these projects.

2 Major Projects

2.1 There are two major projects which leading Members have identified as priorities for the local economy portfolio in this financial year. These are:

a) Winchester Business Improvement District (BID) - £48,000

In March 2006, Members gave their support for the principle of a BID and for funding certain start-up costs which would enable the City Centre Partnership to lead the BID project (CAB 1240 refers). Early consultative meetings and information-gathering activities have been under way for some months, but the recent appointment (funded by LABGI monies) of a temporary Assistant City Centre Manager has now freed up the City Centre Manager to concentrate on the BID process. The preliminary business consultation document is soon to be distributed, and followed up by an event for businesses in the proposed BID area where feedback on the proposals can be obtained.

The LABGI allocation is being used to pay the recruitment and salary costs of the assistant city centre manager and expenses relating to the business referendum and software procurement for the revenues team, as outlined in CAB 1240.

(A parallel BID initiative is also taking place in the Segensworth area which will include 15 businesses in the south of the district.)

b) The Business Centre - £15,000

Further consultation with partners has seen a change of name to the project previously referred to as the Winchester District Enterprise Centre or the Business Hub, full details of which were presented to Cabinet in July this year

(CAB 1297). The planning application for change of use at 10 Parchment Street has now been approved, and the lease with A2 Winchester has been signed. Work will shortly begin on the fit out of the building in line with the target opening date of January 2008. The cost of fitting out the building will exceed the £15,000 LABGI allocation, so sponsorship is being sourced from the private sector. The University of Winchester has agreed to provide IT hardware and software, and the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce has agreed to maintain IT support services. The Winchester City Centre Partnership and the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry are producing an operational plan for the centre to ensure effective management, marketing and monitoring of the centre.

b) Retail Recovery Programme - £20,000

In response to feedback from a range of business partners, officers have formulated a package of measures designed to support the recovery – particularly of independent traders – brought about by a range of local and national factors. The package includes:

- publication and distribution of a new speciality shopping guide, now being distributed in the region **£ 5,000**
- installation of a series of new pedestrian signs for speciality shopping streets, delivery of which are imminent * **£ 1,000**
- enhancement of the 'hammerhead' section of the Square to improve 'café culture' and leisure appeal of this area* **£5,000**
- enabling grant for the cathedral's new German Christmas market, which will lead to the installation of infrastructure that can be used for a wide range of future events on the Close **£15,000**
- event management and marketing support for the proposed ice rink (subject to planning permission) in the city centre as part of this year's Christmas Festival **£staff time**
- dedicated speciality shopping pages on the new tourism website at www.visitwinchester.co.uk/site/things-to-do/shopping **£staff time**

(* funded by other Access and Infrastructure budgets and therefore not included in headline LABGI total above)

3 Other Projects

3.1 The major projects above are by their nature focussed on Winchester city centre although efforts are being made to extend their impact further afield. However, officers are also taking forward LABGI-funded work which will directly benefit the wider district. This includes:

(i) Rural Towns Development Officer - £20,000

The Market Towns healthcheck process has the potential to unlock up to £40,000 of SEEDA project funding, but local communities have found it hard

to progress their own healthchecks. In response to consistent feedback from parish councils, the City Council is currently recruiting a Rural Towns Development Officer who will report to the Economic Development Officer. This is a part time post for one year which will offer practical, hands-on help to Alresford, Bishops Waltham, Denmead and Wickham.

(ii) Creative Industries Business Support - £20,000

Winchester is increasingly being recognised as one of the south's creative centres. In order to retain and develop creative practitioners and to generate economic benefits for the district, there is a need to provide specialist support for the sector. Alongside mapping research being undertaken by regional and sub regional agencies, officers have begun exploratory discussions with the universities, Business Link Wessex and other stakeholders to develop a programme of business skills training relevant to this industry sector. Once the research and consultation is complete, officers will deploy the £20,000 allocation in support of the initiatives which best meet identified needs.

(iii) Whiteley Green Travel Plan - £7,000

Discussions with the Whiteley Business Forum have indicated that their continued major concern is the travel situation, including bus service provision, the establishing of safe footpaths and provision of cycleways for employees on Solent Business Park. A green travel plan co-ordinator is due to be employed by Hampshire County Council in order to promote green travel schemes, which will complement and increase custom to any new bus services. The City Council's LABGI contribution will be available to support implementation of preferred schemes, in consultation with the traders and the Portfolio Holder.

(iv) Redundant Rural Buildings project - £20,000

Conservation officers are piloting a project to identify redundant historic agricultural buildings in the district. One of the objectives of this survey is to work with owners to encourage alternative uses for these buildings to prevent long term deterioration. Officers intend to develop a database which can match business enquiries with available premises around the district. Whilst the farm buildings project has only taken in three parishes so far, the LABGI funding will enable the commissioning of a consult to extend the study into more parishes. It will also pay for the development of a purpose-built interactive database over the coming 18 months.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- (a) The economic action plan and the projects outlined above directly support the corporate priority of "Homes and Jobs – foster a strong and diverse urban and rural economy".
- (b) It also supports the aim of Winchester's Community Strategy "to create and sustain a thriving, broad-based local economy that integrates business, education and industry to provide prosperity, employment and occupation within the district, for the benefit of all."

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Members approved the allocation of £150,000 of LABGI funding to economic action plan projects. This money will be spent over the two financial years 2006/07 and 2007/08.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None