

PROPOSED BUDGET AMENDMENT FROM THE LABOUR GROUP

(Proposer Cllr Keith Darvill)

(Seconded Cllr Matthew Stanton)

The Labour Group proposes the following budget amendment:

This Council calls on the Administration to introduce and promote an SME Support Package, initially, funding such a proposal from unspent UKSPF (and/or other unspent grants) seeking partnership for such a support package with organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Adult College.

The Support Package would include:

1. High Street Activation Fund up to £150,000 - To deliver public realm improvements, signage, greening, lighting, local events, markets, and mean-while use activation in priority town centres.
2. Small Business Digital & Skills Support Hub up to £75,000: To commission digital adoption support (e-commerce, payments, social media, SEO), cashflow and business planning help, and sector specific resilience programmes.
3. Micro Grants for Independent SMEs up to £100,000: £1,000–£5,000 grants for equipment, accessibility upgrades, shopfront improvements, security, digital tools, and minor refits.
4. Planning & Licensing SME Support — Cost Neutral Simplified guidance, clearer standards for minor retail/hospitality applications, quicker routes for low-risk licensing.
5. Local Procurement Opportunities for SMEs — Cost Neutral Segmented contracts, forward procurement pipelines, and “Meet the Buyer” sessions to widen SME access.

Financial Implications from Strategic Director of Resources

The Council's budget for 2026/27 incorporates all grants including the UKSPF. The current UKSPF has been fully allocated to projects in conjunction with the GLA so would need to be re-directed to enable the proposals in this amendment to be funded. The original grant timelines for the UKSPF was for expenditure to be incurred by 31st March 2026, however, this has now been extended to the end of September 2026.

If this proposal is approved, officers will proceed with discussions with the GLA regarding the re-allocation of this grant to incorporate some of the initiatives above. However, this will require de-prioritisation of existing schemes, some of which may be in contract.

The Council may have underspends on this grant or receive further grants in the future. Providing the proposals above meet the grant conditions of existing external funding sources, officers will seek to incorporate the proposals above subject to Full Council approval of this budget amendment.

Subject to the Budget Amendment being approved, officers will develop a simplified guidance for SMEs, minor hospitality and retail planning and licensing applications. This proposal will be cost neutral as it can be absorbed into officers' current work programmes.

Regarding the proposed Local Procurement Opportunities, under the current legislation (Procurement Act 2023, Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Provider Selection Regime under the Health Care Act), the Council has a requirement to support SMEs. A number of initiatives below are already being conducted or will be explored further in the coming months, in support of Small Businesses:

- Create our own frameworks - this can allow for larger procurements to be broken down into smaller elements, which removes some of the barriers for SMEs to apply, this includes those in our Borough. An example is the development of the Adults Placement Framework which is currently being evaluated and has targeted businesses within the borough boundary to provide services. The response from the market has exceeded expectations.
- For below threshold but above £30,000; in some circumstances the Council is able to "reserve" contracts under the legislation to SME's that will also include local providers, which will be subject to rules of engagement. This element will need further exploration and support from legal colleagues as there are specific legislative elements that need to be complied with.
- Use Social Value as a tool to develop strategic alliances between larger operators and our local supply chain, as an example we can request local suppliers used as sub-contractors, employment opportunities are advertised locally, or goods are purchased locally creating a circular economy. Social Value can also be used to contractually engage in commitments that the supplier needs to conduct, such as "how many 'meet the buyer' events will they attend". This already occurs patricianly within the larger construction and/or regeneration contrcats, these stipulate that the bidder must use local supply chains to purchase goods and services where available, to use local residents and companies in terms of employment or sub contracting.
- Engagement locally - the Procurement team can arrange with other parts of the Council, targeted 'meet the buyer' events so we get the right people and companies in the room, this tends to work well if there are a few up and coming procurements that will be going to market, so they can see the benefit. This will need to be carefully planned with other parts of the Council to ensure there are enough live procurements to give validity to the event. Events have

occurred and have been received well in the construction and regeneration sectors and have been conducted as collaborative events with neighbouring Councils to drive economies of scale.

- As part of the procurement strategies, the Council has an obligation to consider and remove barriers for SME's bidding for work, and these are actively challenged at numerous check points such as Governance Review Group. This occurs on a regular basis, as an example both procurement strategies and award submissions are reviewed at Governance Review Group on a weekly basis.
- Under the Act the Council has an obligation to publish a pipeline of potential procurements over £2m in the next 12 to 18 months. The Council's Procurement Pipeline will be published prior to the statutory period of 56 days after the 1st April and then annually.