

Report subject	Town Centre Improvement Fund
Meeting date	2 October 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>In February 2024, Council approved the one-off in year funding allocation of £358,000, the Town Centre Improvement Fund, to improve Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres. Funds were divided among the three town centres as defined in the current Local Plans based on the population of their respective towns. The aim of the fund is to generate proposals that will deliver long term benefits rather than a one-off boost to the local economy, and/or to seed fund new ideas that empower partners to unlock new opportunities.</p> <p>This report informs Cabinet about the application and scoring process, provides summaries of the proposals and recommends approval for those projects that were successful.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Cabinet approves the projects selected following the application process and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Endorses the application and scoring process. (b) Notes the benefits the projects will bring to town centres. (c) Authorises transfer of the funds to the applicants, enabling delivery of the projects, in accordance with the Scheme Document. (d) Ringfences the remaining funds for Coastal BID to submit an appropriate future project bid within a reasonable timescale. (e) Delegates authority to the Chief Operations Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Destination, Leisure and Commercial to review and determine future applications and monitor delivery.
Reason for recommendations	This one-off in year funding enables our partners to create and deliver these inspiring projects, adding to the ongoing positive work

	to revitalise Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Richard Herrett, Portfolio Holder for Destination, Leisure and Commercial
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton, Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Liz Orme, Economic Development Officer Paula Sales, Economic Development Officer Hannah Porter, Economic Development Officer Chris Shephard, Head of Operations Strategy
Wards	Bournemouth Central; Christchurch Town; Poole Town;
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. In the budget approved by Council on 7 February 2024, a budget of £358,000 was allocated to improve Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres, known as the 'Town Centres Improvement Fund'. This is a one-off funding stream for 2024/25 from the additional grant received from government.
2. Funds will be divided among the three town centres as defined in the current Local Plans. The allocation is based on the population of their respective towns with Bournemouth allocated £179,000; Christchurch £60,000 and Poole £119,000. The fund cannot be spent in any other defined centre or high street outside of the three town centres.
3. Discussions were held between Cllr Earl and Economic Development Officers with the following stakeholders:
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Business Improvement Districts (BID)
Christchurch Town Council
Christchurch Town Ward Councillors
Bournemouth Central Ward Councillors
Poole Town Ward Councillors

Application Process and Determination

4. Applicants were encouraged to submit proposals that were able to deliver longer term benefits rather than a one-off boost to the local economy, seed fund new ideas to empower partners and unlock new opportunities.
5. The application window was open for 4 weeks and closed on 2 August 2024, with applications submitted via an online portal for assessment using a scheme guidance document note and scoring matrix, included as **Appendix 1**.

6. Applicants were informed that, if total project costs were to exceed the budget available, the successful applications will be selected on their merits, scored using the matrix and in accordance with the priority expressed by the applicant themselves. The opportunity to refine and amend the applications was offered to ensure that the most positively impactful projects came forward with the budget available.
7. Applicants are required to complete at least one monitoring report to show progress against milestones, and a report at the end to show outcomes and outputs achieved in line with their original application. Regular meetings to monitor progress will also be established.
8. Match funding by partner organisations was not made mandatory but applicants were advised that it could help to deliver best value for certain projects.
9. Applicants were required to identify how their proposal will deliver the aims and objectives of the [BCP Council Corporate Strategy](#), [High Streets and District Centres Strategy](#) and [Cultural Strategy](#) amongst others.
10. To ensure effective management of the scheme and to help recover its costs in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, Economic Development will take a fee of £8K. This is in line with the fee the team takes for managing other Government projects. This will be split across the 3 towns in the same way as the original totals, meaning the total funding available for each town is:
 Bournemouth £179,000 (– Project Management Fee of £4000) = £175,000
 Christchurch £60,000 (– Project Management Fee of £1340) = £58,660
 Poole £119,000 (– Project Management Fee of £2660) = £116,340

Project Proposal Summaries

11. Applications were received from each of the four BIDs representing the 3 town centres, and these are summarised below. Whilst early conversations have been had with relevant Council departments including Planning to seek guidance, and costs have been built in, more work will be required by the applicants to ensure that the relevant permissions are applied for from the Council, other organisations and private landlords if necessary. A change management process has been developed should it need to be used.

Bournemouth Town Centre

12. Bournemouth Town Centre and Coastal BIDs have collaborated and agreed to split the budget between them. This is with the constructive intent that their combined projects will ensure a positive impact and mutual benefit for the town centre, delivering against their business plans, and contributing to the ongoing partnership work to make Bournemouth Town Centre clean, safe and vibrant.

Bournemouth Town Centre BID (TCBID) Project 1 - 'Street Life':

13. This incorporates a street enhancement scheme focusing on 6 streets across the TCBID area to add vibrancy and animation. The aim is to introduce new street installations to create cultural trails, add place branding and use towers and graphics to dress the streets.
14. The proposal includes the use of catenary wires across new focal areas to bring vibrancy and colour with unique sculptural assets strung across the streets. The

sculpture concept has been used to great effect around the country to increase footfall and sense of place, and the designs will be unique to Bournemouth.

15. Other assets for the town centre will also be provided in the form of selfie and photo opportunities and 'story blocks', an initiative that supports culture, promotes local authors as well as promoting literacy and reading. It also doubles as adding flexible seating. Each block promotes an author with a QR code to download a short story. The town centre can promote their association with the likes of Shelley, Tolkien Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson and Bill Bryson, as well as helping local unpublished authors. This builds on the success of the Creative Writing Festival and other associated events, promoting Bournemouth's literary connections.
16. The proposals align with the objectives of the High Streets and District Centres Strategy and Corporate Strategy ambitions to revitalise high streets and create new opportunities whilst increasing community pride.

Grant: £33,500 revenue + £20,210 capital. Match funding: Some financial and in-kind sponsorship to be determined. Additional hardware and services from supplier.

Bournemouth Town Centre BID Project 2 - 'Street Life' Festival:

17. A series of animations and activities to support the activation of the new street enhancements and enliven the town centre, increase footfall and appeal to all ages and interests.
18. Staged in key locations, each will feature one aspect of 'Street Life' - sport, art, dance, theatre, music, food and fashion. Encouraging the long-term increased use of the Lower Gardens Bandstand is one of the objectives of this street activation project.
19. The festival will draw on the heritage of the town centre by incorporating themes, values and culture of an assortment of communities designed to promote pride in the town centre and encourage stronger community links.
20. Grant proposed: £25,445. Match funding proposed: £10K from TCBID and £10K from external sponsor

Bournemouth Coastal BID Project 1 – Street Art Revitalisation:

21. Installation of vibrant street art on walls adjacent to the under-used cycle path running from Pier Approach to the BH2 Cinema complex, and at the entrance to West Hill car park behind the Triangle to enhance the aesthetic, promote local culture, improve feelings of safety and encourage community engagement in alignment with BCP Council's strategic objectives for urban improvement.
22. The project will encourage community engagement by involving local artists, promoting feelings of ownership and community pride in these core town centre areas. It will highlight local talent and cultural themes, celebrating Bournemouth's unique identity, and encouraging an appreciation for public art.
23. Active transport will be encouraged by enhancing the visual appeal of the cycle path to encourage more people to use it for commuting and leisure, promoting healthy and sustainable transportation options.
24. Grant proposed: £39,845. Match funding proposed: £5K from Coastal BID (contingency, should this be required)

Christchurch Town Centre

25. Christchurch BID and Christchurch Town Council worked together to develop their project proposals. The application forms have been submitted by Christchurch BID who will be working in partnership with Christchurch Town Council to deliver the projects.

Christchurch Project 1 - Christchurch Town Centre Wi-Fi, Connected & Safe

26. This project will see the installation of digital infrastructure to implement public Wi-Fi across Christchurch Town Centre, ensuring its residents, visitors and businesses can access the internet for free whilst using the Town Centre for years to come.
27. At present mobile phone signal is patchy and unreliable across all network providers in the Town Centre impacting residents, visitors and businesses.
28. Working with BCP-based, Fusion Wi-Fi to install the digital infrastructure required to connect the High Street, Saxon Square, Bridge Street, Church Street and The Quay to free Wi-Fi, creating an online Town Centre.
29. Provide residents, visitors and businesses with essential online access, with research showing this will increase the length of their stay, average spend and local productivity.
30. All users accessing the network will be greeted by a dynamic splash page that will be used to promote Christchurch and will include key events, initiatives and useful information.
31. Grant proposed: £48,659 (capital). Match funding proposed: Christchurch BID will match fund £5,145 to cover the monthly Wi-Fi costs from installation in November during the testing phase to March 2025.
32. From April 2025, the BID will pay the ongoing monthly Wi-Fi provision, in partnership with Christchurch Town Council.

Christchurch Project 2 - Public Realm Enhancement

33. This project will put in place the critical infrastructure elements to improve the look and feel of Christchurch Town Centre. Enhancing and beautifying the local area with year-round planting, miniature festive trees and seasonal bunting; ensuring it is an attractive place for residents to be proud of, visitors to enjoy and recommend as well as encouraging business growth within our town.
34. Without the infrastructure proposed as part of the application, the ability to improve the look and feel of Christchurch Town Centre will be very limited. This funding enhances the appearance and appeal of the Town Centre for many years to come making it a more attractive and vibrant place encouraging more people to visit, increasing dwell time and increasing the sense of pride our community feel in their neighbourhood.
35. Project includes removal and replacement of pedestal planters, removal and replacement of hanging basket brackets, installation of commercial grade Christmas tree wall mounts, installation of lamppost banner fixtures in Bargates.
36. The project will improve the sustainability of the town centre planting, conserving water using innovative new self-watering pedestals and baskets alongside sustainable perennial planting.

37. Grant proposed: £10,001 (capital). Match funding proposed from Christchurch BID: £14,618.
38. Additionally, there is a commitment by Christchurch BID to fund the ongoing revenue costs of planting and watering.

Poole Town Centre

39. Poole BID submitted three project proposals.

Poole BID Project 1 – Poole Town Grounds Maintenance Machine

40. Sourcing a grounds maintenance machine to do various jobs across Poole Town – clearing graffiti and chewing gum, watering plants, jet washing pavements and alleyways etc.
41. Poole BID will employ 2 staff to run the machine, providing a dedicated resource to improve public realm in the town centre.
42. Grant proposed: £40,000 (capital). Match funding proposed from Poole BID: £30,000 to employ 2 staff and for running costs. The BID will own and maintain the machine.

Poole BID Project 2 – Subway Murals

43. This project will create a mural through the subway leading to Lighthouse, Poole.
44. Poole Town is an inward facing concrete jungle with few gateways, of which the Lighthouse / Bus Station area is the main one and has for a long time not been aesthetically pleasing and suffers with Anti-Social Behaviour. Equally, Lighthouse, Poole is cut off from the rest of the town with the subway being one of the main arteries.
45. Poole BID is currently commissioning murals at the train station (one of the other main gateways to the town), along with others that have recently been painted across the town. This bid will continue with the consistent approach, ensuring that the design brief is sensitive to Poole's history and culture.
46. Poole BID will be required to demonstrate how they or their commissioned artist will engage with local residents and schools to generate suggestions of what they would like to see included.
47. Grant proposed: £40,000 (capital)

Poole BID Project 3 – Old Town Poole Street Lamp Upgrade

48. This project will complete the upgrades of Old Town Poole street lamps.
49. A project was completed 2 years ago to paint and upgrade the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) areas street lamps. All the old lampposts in Poole Town were painted using authentic methods, but only some of the fixings and casings were upgraded to replace the whole light fitting, including casing, glass, and the LED upgrade.
50. There remain 48 streetlamps requiring this upgrade which are outside the HAZ area. These are in a localised area, which accentuates the problem with darkness at night and safety issues. The advantage of upgrading to the LED's is a more efficient light source, placing the light where it is best needed and the longevity of the light fitting itself. Poole BID will be required to use warmer tone LEDs which will reduce the impact on the environment. Specifically, these should be LEDs with a correlated colour temperature of below 3000 Kelvin, which according to the Commission for Dark Skies, part of the British Astronomical Society, has the least effect on

songbirds and insects. They also have the added advantage of causing less light scattering and glare and less impact on human sleep patterns.

51. BCP Council will be commissioned to carry out the works.
52. Grant proposed: £36,000 (capital). Match funding from Poole Quays Forum and Poole BID totalling £24,000.

Options Appraisal

53. The town centre project proposals should be supported by BCP Council following agreement on a budget for town centre improvements in February 2024. Stakeholder engagement has been undertaken, including with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Ward Councillors, and applications welcomed for projects that will have a beneficial long-term impact on the three town centres. A scheme document and scoring matrix has been developed to ensure that the projects met the brief to the highest standards and delivered good value for money. The four town centre BIDs will implement, manage and deliver the investments. They will be required to inform the Council of their progress, outputs and outcomes through regular meetings and reports.
54. If support is not offered for the proposals there would be reputational damage to the Council and positive investment opportunities for the town centres would be lost, causing harm to their health and prosperity, which would be contrary to the aims and objectives of the Corporate Strategy, High Street and District Centres Strategy and Cultural Strategy.

Summary of financial implications

55. A revenue budget of £358,000 was agreed by the Council on 7 February 2024 to support the town centres of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. An allocation of £8K has been made to recover the project management of the application process and projects by the Economic Development team.
56. The submitted bids total £293,600. The remainder is recommended to be ringfenced to enable Coastal BID to submit an additional bid in a reasonable timescale. This will be assessed in the same way, using the same scheme document as every other application.
57. Cabinet is asked to authorise transfer of the funds to the applicants, enabling delivery of the projects, in accordance with the Scheme Document.
58. This is a one-off standalone fund, and ongoing responsibility for the successful projects is with the respective BIDs as applicants. Where BCP Council services are required, these costs have been factored into the cost breakdown. There is no further financial implication or responsibility for the Council. Grant recipients will be required to sign a grant agreement which details these conditions, which will need to be received before funds are transferred.
59. As a result of allocating the Town Centres Improvement Grant and working closely with partners, match funding of more than £98,000 and other ancillary benefits including sponsorship have been unlocked to further support the three town centres.

Summary of legal implications

60. The BIDs are established independent bodies that take full legal and financial responsibility for delivering the projects. Grant recipients will be required to sign a

grant agreement which details the conditions outlined, which will need to be received before funds are transferred.

Summary of human resources implications

61. Some of the projects listed will require BCP Council officer time. Where this is the case, costs have been built into the application and will be attributed to the relevant service budget.
62. Members of the Economic Development Team have created and led this work and will oversee the reporting for the successful projects, and as identified have taken an administration fee to ensure their costs are covered, in line with the budget saving requirements in the MTFP.

Summary of sustainability impact

63. Every effort has been made through the grant process to ensure sustainable solutions are used where possible to minimise environmental impact and use local supply chains.

Summary of public health implications

64. An improved environment, cultural offer and public art for people to enjoy and spend time with will bring physical and mental health benefits to residents and visitors.

Summary of equality implications

65. The programme received a positive review at the EQIA panel, demonstrating that the outcomes of these projects will bring benefits to all.

Summary of risk assessment

66. For the Council the risks are low and have been identified in a risk log, with appropriate mitigations including ongoing monitoring.
67. For the BIDs, risks have been identified and mitigations provided as part of the proposals submitted. These will continue to be monitored as part of the reporting governance.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Scheme Document and Guidance Note