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## NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

14th May 2019

### Cabinet

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**Title:** **Town Centre Fund**

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**Purpose:** This report seeks approval of the approach being developed for the new Scottish Government Town Centre Fund.

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**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the following approach to managing the Council's allocation of the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund proposals, including:

i) the development and implementation of a strategic regeneration programme in Stevenston and Dalry;

ii) the creation of a fund to support a programme of town centre minor improvements, asset acquisition, environmental works or development of community capacity;

iii) the creation of a temporary town centre officer post for 1 year to support the development and implementation of projects;

iv) that delegated authority is given to Head of Economic Growth to progress projects following engagement with Portfolio Lead for Economic Growth and ward members whose ward contains proposals relating to the Fund.

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### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Scottish Government has created a Town Centre Fund, which will make £50million available to Scottish local authorities over financial year 2019/2020. North Ayrshire Council's allocated portion of the fund is £1,418,000, to be claimed within the financial year.
- 1.2 This report sets out an approach to delivering a range of town centre projects that meet the requirements of the fund and impactful improvements. The proposals reflect current and previous town centre investments.

- 1.3 The report recommends that approximately £1m is utilised to prioritise action in Stevenston and Dalry; with the remaining £0.418m being distributed in smaller portions to support a range of other projects and community-led initiatives across North Ayrshire towns. A 1 year temporary town centre officer post would be recruited to support development and implementation of projects.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Through the establishment of a Town Centre Fund, North Ayrshire has been allocated a share of a national fund of up to £1,418,000, which requires to be claimed within financial year 2019/2020. This means the Council must secure commitments to incur expenditure within the current financial year either directly (i.e. by spending money or letting contracts prior to 31 March 2020), or through grant schemes directed to third parties having committed project costs.
- 2.2 Scottish Government sets out a range of options for projects that will align with the grant conditions, including projects that support town centre living, digital solutions for communities, land and asset acquisition, transport, greening, environmental improvements and community support. It recommends a balance of larger scale interventions, together with support for some smaller projects, recognising that splitting funds equally amongst all centres will dilute potential impact. It is recommended that town centre audits, charrettes and local knowledge assist to identify appropriate projects.
- 2.3 Recognising the overall intent of the fund, a qualitative scoping exercise has been undertaken to recommend a strategic approach to managing the Fund. This is based on town centre audits, conservation area management plans, charrettes, SIMD data, locality priorities and assets review. Consideration has also been given to prioritising those towns that have not benefited from recent investment or have other planned investments being prioritised. For that reason, not all towns will benefit from the Town Centre Fund.
- 2.4 On this basis, it is recommended that the fund is dispersed through 2 larger projects for around £1m combined value, with the remaining £0.418m being allocated to a series of smaller projects and community-led initiatives. This seeks to maximise the impact of the fund, while supporting a range of smaller initiatives around North Ayrshire. It has been identified that Stevenston and Dalry would potentially benefit most from larger portions of the fund. An overview of the strategic case for strategic town centre regeneration projects is presented below.
- Stevenston has a significant amount of prominent vacant and derelict sites and buildings, condition issues with town centre buildings and public space and a lack of diversity of uses and amenities. A programme of environmental improvements including land acquisition, green space, and grants scheme for buildings could have a transformational impact on the centre and be linked to a wider three towns regeneration programme following works in Saltcoats and planned investment in Ardrossan.

- Dalry has building condition issues and a high town centre vacancy rate. Traffic is a significant physical barrier to town centre movement, however the Dalry bypass will alleviate that issue and create an opportunity to reconsider circulation in the town centre, to improve the vibrancy of the town centre. A conservation area management plan is currently being finalised, which will assist to identify potential regeneration opportunities. Its conservation area status may offer opportunity to lever in historic environment funds to increase the available budget, but this is dependent on Town Centre Fund grant conditions and timing and availability of other grants.
- 2.5 Developing and implementing initiatives will require dedicated officer resource. It is recommended that a temporary town centre officer is appointed for a period of 1 year. Officer costs will be reclaimed from the grant.

- 2.6 Given timescale restrictions and conditions associated with the Town Centre Fund, to be able to claim North Ayrshire's full allocation of grant, it has been essential to develop a provisional project list. Work to progress this is ongoing and consultations with local ward members on the proposals will take place. Examples of projects include support for local town centre business groups, site acquisitions of vacant or derelict property.

Scoping of provisional projects has been informed by compliance with grant conditions, deliverability of projects and known strategic and community-based projects and priorities.

- 2.7 In light of time constraints and to maximise the deliverability of projects from the Fund, it is also proposed that officers are given delegated authority to progress and agree specific town centre projects in consultation with the Portfolio Lead for Economic Growth and relevant ward members, on the basis that these meet the fund requirements as set out at 2.2, and are deliverable within the timeframe.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the following approach to managing the Council's allocation of the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund proposals, including:
- i) the development and implementation of a strategic regeneration programme in Stevenston and Dalry for a combined value of approximately £1m;
  - ii) the creation of a town centre fund to support a programme of minor improvements, asset acquisition, environmental works or development of community capacity;
  - iii) the creation of a temporary town centre officer post to support the development and implementation of projects;
  - iv) that delegated authority is given to Head of Economic Growth to progress projects following engagement with Portfolio Lead for Economic Growth and ward members whose ward contains proposals relating to the Fund.

#### 4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

<b>Financial:</b>	Work will progress to secure grant funding through the current financial year.
<b>Human Resources:</b>	Scoping, planning and implementing projects, including administering grants to third parties will require dedicated resource to deliver. It is recommended that a temporary 1-year town centre officer post is created.
<b>Legal:</b>	Individual projects will consider legal implications through their development and will progress in compliance with grant conditions.
<b>Equality/Socio-economic Duty:</b>	An impact assessment has been undertaken for the proposed strategic management of the town centre fund. It is anticipated that the proposals will have broadly positive impacts
<b>Children and Young People:</b>	As above.
<b>Environmental &amp; Sustainability:</b>	It is expected that the recommendations in the report will have a range of positive environmental impacts. Projects are likely to addressing identified environmental improvement opportunities, including improving the urban fabric of town centres, in line with Scottish Planning Policy and the Scottish Government Town Centre First Principle.
<b>Key Priorities:</b>	<p>The proposals will support the implementation of the <b>Working</b> theme of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan as follows: - “we will provide the best conditions for business, creating a diverse and inclusive economy”; and “we will build the capacity of our communities to promote inclusive growth”.</p> <p>The recommendations support the delivery of the draft Council Plan outcomes under the inspiring places and aspiring people themes, particularly support safe communities and welcoming and attractive places.</p>
<b>Community Benefits:</b>	It is recommended that project development considers opportunities to engage locality planning partnerships, particularly where a larger programme of work is proposed, to maximise community buy-in and support development of community capacity.

#### 5. Consultation

- 5.1 Internal consultation has taken place to identify deliverable projects to maximise the benefit of the fund for North Ayrshire communities. Input from locality coordinators has assisted to identify provisional projects. Proposals have been presented to the Policy Advisory Panel for comment and consideration.

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## **Background Papers**

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