

To: Councillor Ivan Henderson, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism

From: Laura Richardson, Economic Growth Officer

Cc: Lee Heley, Corporate Director – Projects Delivery

Cc: Mike Carran, Assistant Director, Economic Growth & Leisure

Cc: Barbara Pole, Economic Growth and Enterprise Manager

Date: 3rd March 2025

Dear Councillor Henderson,

25/26 Grant Continuation Recommendations for Harwich Harbour Ferry (HHF) and Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership (ESSCRP)

This letter follows the above named grants being considered at Management Team in February 2025; each is a continuation of grants made annually. The grants have been reconsidered alongside the requirements of the new External Grantmaking Policy, to ensure these grants continue to represent good value for money and align with the aims and objectives of TDC.

These have also been considered in light of Devolution and Local Government Reform; each are requested, reviewed, and if approved paid, on a yearly basis and therefore they represent no ongoing obligation or cost pressure beyond 25/26.

Harwich Harbour Ferry – Recommend Signing of Partnership Agreement 25/26 and Payment of £1,500 Grant

HHF operates a service between Harwich, Felixstowe and Shotley, with Harwich in particular benefitting from the increased tourism revenue and brand recognition the company brings to the area.

TDC currently contributes £1,500 annually towards the operational costs of HHF, alongside partners Essex County Council, Suffolk County Council, Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Harwich Town Council and Felixstowe Town Council. The grant is not assigned in the base budget but is annually paid via a movement of money from TDC Economic Growth's 'Miscellaneous' budget. Each Partner Council contributes, with a refreshed Partnership Agreement signed each year. The total amounts to £31,750, each year, which contributes to out-of-season maintenance to the vessel, and legislative requirements (via Marine & Coastguard Agency) for the service to remain running.

Consideration has been given to the environmental impact of this continued contribution; the Ferry offers alternative public transport options to those who use the service to commute or travel for pleasure, as well as encouraging other sustainable travel through initiatives such as allowing bicycles onboard. This is an extant service and therefore will not be a new impact to the surrounding area and waters.

It is recommended that TDC allocate the grant of £1,500 for the 2025/26 period, after the following considerations:

- TDC (and Harwich Town Council) are the key beneficiaries of the continuing service, whilst paying among the lowest contributions. Most of the passenger journeys begin and return to Harwich in a round trip. The business currently attracts predominantly local people to use the service, but has identified key markets to grow, and are seeing customers from further afield including London, Chelmsford, and Cambridge.
- Continued payment of this grant amount, £1,500, to leverage in a total of £31,750 to a Tendring town, represents good value for money.

- The service creates local jobs; mostly seasonal in terms of Skipper training and ticket collection, but also in terms of the winter repairs which are undertaken, and implementation of new technologies/fixes which reduce the carbon impact of the service. Marine training and expertise of this nature is part of the history of Harwich.
- Several Partners have caveated their committed funding based on the continuance of the Partnership in its current form, exposing TDC to reputational risk should we withdraw support, particularly as a key beneficiary with Harwich in this District.

Subsidy control elements have also been considered in making this recommendation. With reference to the Subsidy Control Act 2022, this grant would not constitute a subsidy by answering 'no' to the following question:

Will the financial assistance have, or is it capable of having, an effect on competition or investment within the UK, or trade or investment between the UK and another country or territory?

As the service is unique in the area and on this route, there is no current competitor to be affected by the public support being given, particularly at the amount recommended in grant, or even in the Partnership's grant total. The TDC grant is of a low value and is reliant on other funders contributing as well; there is no other service provider who has the other funders aligned. Furthermore, such a low value does not have a significant effect on competition.

Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership – Recommend Payment of Grant of no more than £3,000

The work of the ESSCRP covers a number of rail lines and Tendring District benefits from their work relating to the Mayflower and Sunshine Coast lines in particular. The ESSCRP promotes train travel in general and also facilitates Station Adoption and beautification programmes, as well as event trains.

TDC currently contributes £2,100 annually towards the project costs of the local Community Rail Partnership, alongside partners Essex County Council, Greater Anglia, Colchester City Council, and Braintree District Council. Across Partners, the total contribution for project activity was £73,250 in 24/25, excluding ECC which contributed to staffing costs and overheads to the value of £97,000.

TDC's contribution of £2,100 is included in the base budget. It is possible that the grant request may increase in line with inflation when the formal request is made in March 2025, in which case it would be an instance where further funding would be moved from Economic Growth's 'Miscellaneous' budget. The grant increase would be capped at £3,000 maximum and if any further was requested, further approval would be sought from PfH.

Activity Plans are shared and reported against at quarterly meetings, and highlights from 2024/25 included:

- Marketing photography and route updates to the ESSCRP website, linking with tourism/heritage highlights such as the Redoubt Fort and Clacton Pier
- Sea Shanty Train, Bucket & Spade Train x 3 around Airshow dates, Cockney Singalong train
- History Boards at Dovercourt and Weeley Stations
- Wrabness Bee Friendly Wildflower Area, Planters funded in Gt Bentley
- Creative art boards at Thorpe le Soken
- Witch Heritage walks at Manningtree, linked with a lunch offer from a local business
- Continued support for existing station adopters across the District, outreach to secure new station adopters where required

The Partnership works to promote train travel more widely, partly via outreach to the public to encourage this method of travel, but also 'behind the scenes' via discussions with Greater Anglia and local stakeholder groups (such as Railfuture, and TDC/HTC Councillors, for example) to make rail travel more appealing and accessible to the public.

For example, 2024 has seen:

- The introduction of a new 'ranger' ticket for multiple journeys in the Tendring area on the same day
- Discussions around connections between train and bus services, which are reportedly impacting young people's ability to access further education in Colchester
- Changes to the announcements on board to more clearly differentiate between Harwich Cruise Terminal, Dovercourt, and Harwich Town.

It is recommended that TDC allocate the grant of £2,100 (with potential increase as outlined above) for the 2025/26 period, to be paid in April 2025, after the following considerations:

- TDC is one of the key beneficiaries of being part of this Partnership Group, with the highest number of stations in the ESSCRP's remit in our District (10).
- Continued payment of this grant to leverage in a total of £73,250 (2024/25 figure) across Tendring, represents very good value for money, even in the event that the grant request (expected March 2025) rises as aforementioned.
- ESSCRP dedicates one of their Officers specifically to Tendring, which has allowed for work such as the aforementioned changes to announcements at Dovercourt, and focussed discussion on the issues of train travel/bus connections in Tendring, to take place with representatives of Greater Anglia and local stakeholders.

This contribution will continue to encourage the uptake of public transport and therefore be environmentally beneficial, alongside wider engagement and beautification projects improving public safety and enjoyment of local train stations. The continuing events trains programme supports Tendring's visitor economy, especially Bucket & Spade trains scheduled around Airshow dates, which reduces pressure on roads and parking at these peak dates.

Consideration has been given to subsidy control; this grant would not constitute a subsidy by answering 'no' to the following questions:

Does the financial assistance confer an economic advantage on one or more enterprises?

An enterprise is defined as an entity taking part in economic activity; offering goods or services on the market. As ESSCRP does not bring any goods or services to market, but merely requires operating costs to continue its work, a grant would not be unduly benefitting them as an enterprise.

Will the financial assistance have, or is it capable of having, an effect on competition or investment within the UK, or trade or investment between the UK and another country or territory?

ESSCRP is a unique service as part of the wider CRP national programme; there is no competitor to be affected by the public support being given.

If you approve of the above recommended payments, or of course if you have any questions before making a decision, please get in touch with me using the details below.

Kind regards,

Laura Richardson

Economic Growth Officer

Tendring District Council

Email: lrichardson@tendringdc.gov.uk

To: Laura Richardson, Economic Growth Officer

From: Councillor Ivan Henderson, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism

Cc: Lee Heley, Corporate Director – Projects Delivery

Cc: Mike Carran, Assistant Director, Economic Growth & Leisure

Cc: Barbara Pole, Economic Growth and Enterprise Manager

Date: _____

Dear Laura,

25/26 Grant Continuation Recommendations for Harwich Harbour Ferry (HHF) and Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership (ESSCRP)

I agree/ do not agree with the recommended grant payments to HHF and ESSCRP.

Kind regards,

Cllr Ivan Henderson

Deputy Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration & Tourism