

GUILDFORD BID BALLOT – CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2028 - STRATEGY AND RESOURCES EAB MINUTE EXTRACT

Amanda Masters, Chief Executive Officer of Experience Guildford Business Improvement District (BID), presented a briefing note in respect of the BID's re-ballot in 2022. The briefing note included a related consultation document, survey highlights and ballot timetable. The consultation document set out the BID's achievements against the current business plan and invited voters to give their feedback via a survey link. Although the survey had largely closed, it remained open for completion by councillors until 18 June 2022. Next, the BID would hold workshops to give businesses the opportunity to put forward their comments and ideas for the next term which would inform the new business plan to be published in July. The campaign would reach as many voters as possible, including a number of national retail head offices, ahead of the 28-day postal ballot in October in accordance with the timetable.

The EAB was advised that a BID was a business-led and business funded body formed to improve a defined commercial area, in this case Guildford town centre. The benefits of BIDs were wide-ranging and included:

- Businesses decided and directed what they wanted in their area.
- Businesses were represented and had a voice regarding issues affecting their trading area.
- BID levy money was ring-fenced for use only in the BID area.
- Increased footfall and spend.
- Improved staff retention.
- Enhanced marketing and promotion.
- Looking at infrastructure, pollution and movement.
- Guidance in place shaping vision activities.
- Facilitated networking opportunities with neighbouring businesses.
- Assistance in dealing with the Council, police and other public bodies.

The following key facts applied to BIDs:

- In the UK, the majority of BIDs existed in town and city centres, however, they were also in industrial, commercial and mixed-use locations.
- The BID mechanism allowed for a large degree of flexibility and as a result BIDs could vary in shape and size.
- The average size of a BID was 300-400 hereditaments, with some of the smallest having fewer than 50 hereditaments and the largest having over 1,000.
- Although annual income was typically between £200,000 and £600,000, it could be as low as £50,000 per annum or as much as £2 million or more.
- Legislation enabling the formation of BIDs was passed in 2003 in England and Wales (with subsequent regulations published in 2004 and 2005, respectively) and in 2006 in Scotland.

- BIDs were first established in Canada and the United States in the 1960s and now existed across the globe.

Every BID, once elected by relevant businesses, operated for a five-year term. During the term, eligible voters were legally mandated to pay an annual levy. In the case of Experience Guildford, this money was collected by the Council on the BID's behalf and spent by the BID on the town centre within the terms of the business plan. Following a successful initial ballot in October 2012, the Experience Guildford BID launched in early 2013 and had been in existence for approaching ten years, comprising two terms of five years each, and was preparing for its third ballot in October 2022.

Experience Guildford represented 560 businesses featuring retail, leisure and hospitality outlets. 24% of businesses had completed the survey to date and responses were generally positive and supportive of the BID moving forward for a further five year term, providing confidence that it could deliver the support sought by businesses. The next business plan was being prepared on the basis of survey results received. Owing to its property ownership in the town centre, mainly car parks, the Council was a significant stakeholder and entitled to a number of votes in the ballot.

The following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion:

1. Mosaic was a consultancy company employed by Experience Guildford to assist with the BID ballot process.
2. To date there had been approximately 130 responses to the BID survey, equating to a 24% response rate, which was considered to be a high level of response to a survey of this type. This response rate was supplemented by regular engagement and liaison with wider stakeholders via contact with Town Rangers and other means such as weekly e-communications, e-mails, telephone contacts or visits to venues according to the stakeholders' preference.
3. The Town Ranger service provided by Experience Guildford supported the daytime economy in the town centre and operated seven days per week until 6:00 pm. Although the Town Rangers did not have any enforcement powers, they liaised with businesses to provide an observation and incident reporting service with links to radio communication and CCTV camera systems. The BID also provided taxi marshals to safeguard the night time economy in liaison with door staff of club and bar venues. In addition, the BID offered some sponsorship to support the Street Angels initiative, which made a positive impact on any crime or anti-social behaviour occurring during evenings in the town centre.
4. In terms of performance indicators, to be successful a BID had to be voted in by the businesses in the BID area, with two measures being met. The first was that more than 50% of the businesses that voted had to be in favour in terms of number. The second condition was that of those that voted 'yes', had to have a greater total Rateable Value than the businesses which voted 'no'. There were four sets of visitor counting devices in the town centre indicating the level and location of footfall which was currently slightly below the figure recorded in 2019 prior to the pandemic. The Crime Reduction

Partnership assisted in this arena by providing a cost free disk system which enabled stakeholders to report anti-social behaviour, shoplifting and other crime which was utilised by the police as an evidence gathering tool. The BID's target to rollout the system to 200 businesses had been exceeded as it had been taken up by 350 businesses to date. Event management and creation were significant drivers of footfall in the town centre which were now flourishing following the limited opportunities during the previous two years owing to COVID-19.

5. Transformation and evolvement witnessed in respect of Guildford town centre since the pandemic indicated a move away from the traditional fashion outlets towards hospitality and other retail provision, utilised mainly by local residents.
6. Although Experience Guildford's promotional ballot booklet was directed towards the businesses represented by the BID, it also served the purpose of informing the public regarding the purpose and function of the BID. The booklet reflected the four key areas that businesses had identified as a future focus for the BID, namely, promoting awareness of the town; enhancing the safety and cleanliness of the town; improving town parking and access; and providing business support for BID members. In this connection, the EAB was advised that local businesses did not favour the recent and proposed changes to on and off-street parking arrangements, particularly given the current economic situation.
7. Although the Experience Guildford BID locality was a defined town centric area, businesses from slightly outside the designated area could voluntarily join the BID if they wished.

Amanda Masters was thanked for her presentation and councillors were reminded that the survey remained open for their completion until 18 June 2022.