

<i>REPORT TO:</i>	Scrutiny Commission
<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Economic Recovery Post Covid -19
<i>LEAD OFFICER:</i>	Eileen Mallon
<i>CABINET LEAD MEMBER:</i>	Cllr J. Morgan
<i>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</i>	The Scrutiny Commission on 1st June 2020 resolved that a single substantive agenda item for each meeting concentrates on one of the recovery cells as listed in the report of the Chief Executive 'COVID-19: Council approach to community, economic and organisational recovery'.
<i>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE</i>	To provide the Commission with more detail on the approach to economic recovery.

## *1.EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

1.1 At its meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 the Scrutiny Commission received a report from the Chief Executive outlining the impact of the Covid – 19 outbreak on the financial and operational position of the Council. In addition, Scrutiny Commission was advised of the actions taken to respond to the emergency and begin the recovery for the Community, Economy and Organisation.

1.2 The Economic Recovery cell is leading on a number of actions to support businesses to recover from the impact of Covid -19 measures. The Council is also working at a county-wide level with colleagues from the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership (LLEP), and other Local Authorities, who are also progressing a number of economic recovery actions.

1.3 The objectives of the Economic Recovery Cell are to:

- facilitate opportunities for short/medium/long term economic development and regeneration across the Borough.
- support economic recovery by assessing finances, seeking and embracing opportunities for additional finance and identifying potential projects.
- develop improved networks of support and inclusivity by working in partnership with other agencies to support return to the 'new normal' in a safe way.
- inform and shape how we prioritise and deliver services in the future through consultation and engagement with those most appropriate.

- work with local businesses, partners, communities and stakeholders to support economic recovery.
- 1.4 To deliver the objectives the cell is working through a number of workstreams which are contained in an overarching work programme. The work programme is attached at Appendix A.

## 2. Report

2.1 At the start of the pandemic, the Council's focus was on the response element, which was mainly driven by the LRF through the activation of emergency plan processes. This included setting up the community hub to support those who were shielding or unable to access critical support services and food purchases, taking all the rough sleepers and other homeless off the streets, implementing emergency grants to businesses, closing open spaces and play areas, and dealing with the organisational impact of the closure of the Southfields office, moving most employees to remote working. In addition, arrangements had to be made to protect those staff who were still operating in residents homes, most specifically the housing repairs team which has continued to respond to emergency repair requests throughout.

2.2 As the emergency response phase came towards an end, the focus shifted to the recovery phase, with local authorities taking a lead role in assisting communities and businesses to return to the 'new normal'. The recovery phase has been broken down into three areas, Organisation, Community and Economic recovery. In relation to Economic Recovery, the emphasis has been on preparing for the reopening of businesses across the Borough including retail, other services and hospitality. The actions which have been followed are contained within the action plan at Appendix A and follow five themes to assist the economy of Charnwood. The Strategic Director of Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services has been the lead officer for the Economic Recovery Cell, and will give a short presentation during the meeting on the key actions that have been followed. A summary of each of the themes for recovery is outlined below.

### 2.3 **Theme 1 - Building Back Better**

The main purpose for this work strand is to work closely with businesses and partners to identify the safest way for businesses to return, and to build on any opportunities for improvements. Some of the partners engaged in this area have been the LRF, LLEP, other local authorities in Leicestershire, the BID, (Business Improvement District), parish councils, Leicestershire Police, and individual businesses. Identifying how the new regulations and requirements will impact on businesses as they re-open has been key, and there has been a tremendous amount of work done to ensure that all businesses have

access to information, help and guidance to support them to reopen and be 'covid secure'.

In addition, officers have continued to work on the Town Deal submission, to ensure that if there is funding available to support improvements in Loughborough, the Town Deal Board is in a position to make a bid. The Board is working to a deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> July.

The focus of the group reflects the guidance issued by central government in relation to the sectors which are being opened, therefore subsequent activity will focus on the re-opening of the hospitality sector, the night-time economy, and hair and beauty. Issues affecting tourism and events are also being considered.

#### **2.4 Theme 2 - Backing Our Business**

This area has looked at assisting business in a practical sense, for example providing them with social distancing measures through the BID, including floor stickers and notices, offering advice and guidance on regulatory requirements, and undertaking visits to premises where necessary. The BID has been commissioned to work across Charnwood.

The Council is providing free advertising to businesses as part of a media promotion campaign which will include spotlight features on various locations. As of 25th June 2020, more than 120 businesses had signed up for the offer.

In addition, the effective and efficient distribution of government funding to support businesses through the business grants process has been undertaken by the business cell, to ensure this funding is distributed quickly to businesses who qualify and need financial support.

#### **2.5 Theme 3 - Managing a safe and welcome return**

The majority of the work in this cell has been around the reopening of the retail sector, and subsequently the hospitality and night-time economy. Areas of work have included ensuring that residents can safely access retail centres across the Borough and feel confident about the measures that are put in place to ensure a safe shopping experience. Activities have included enabling the Loughborough market to return through the re-positioning of stalls, queue management and social distancing measures. In addition, providing additional bicycle parking and enabling touchless access to car parks are all in progress.

The footfall in Loughborough town centre is being monitored, which will help visitors to identify the best times to shop and will give an indicator of when the town centre is becoming busier, making social distancing more difficult. Shoppers can then time their visits to less busy hours if they have any concerns.

The re-opening of other sectors is also in focus for this cell, and proposals are now being considered for the provision of the hospitality sector including pubs, restaurants and cafes, with the provision of outdoor space a major issue for many businesses. Once the

regulations have been issued for these sectors, officers will be giving advice and assistance to businesses to support a safe return.

## **2.6 Theme 4 – the Council’s Economic Resilience**

The focus of this theme is to consider the measures that can be put in place to support the organisation through the recovery phase. Central to this is the development of an economic investment strategy for the Council, revisions to the commercialisation agenda, review of existing strategic contracts and procurement processes and realignment of the capital programme to ensure the Council is best positioned to respond to the challenges facing it during the recovery phase and beyond. This will be a Council wide activity and will cross over into all of the recovery cells.

## **2.7 Theme 5 – Bringing back hospitality, leisure and the night - time economy**

This theme seeks to coordinate the activities of the BID, Police and the Council’s licensing, food safety, town centre, leisure, neighbourhoods and planning functions to ensure the hospitality sector and night - time economy can be brought back in a safe and managed way. It involves the consideration of open air seating, signage, high street helpers, queue management and events to support existing businesses and those reopening after lock down.

## **3.0 Longer term economic recovery**

- 3.1** It is anticipated that the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the global, national and local economy will be far reaching. Existing national data suggests that the economic downturn is the most severe ever and therefore full recovery is very likely to take a number of years. In order to identify the main challenges facing the economy of Charnwood in the coming months and years, the Council has commissioned Third Life Economics to undertake an Economic Impact Assessment, which will identify the key issues facing Charnwood across a range of sectors in the medium to longer term.
- 3.2** The economic impact assessment will identify structural changes to the local economy (such as sectoral closures), skills gaps, unemployment issues, and the challenges some sectors will face such as supply chain changes. Changing consumer and business demands post pandemic might also, in some instances, present new opportunities and localities should look to be flexible and innovative in how they can support new or different enterprise activities.
- 3.3** The Council will use this work to inform future decisions regarding strategies, investments and activities, and to support the work we are doing with the LLEP, our partner LA’s across the County, and

stakeholders like Loughborough University, the BID and the Economy and Skills Group of Charnwood Together.

- 3.4 Facilitating longer-term recovery from the pandemic will require an alignment of specific initiatives, such as the Loughborough Town Deal or shaping of future Capital Plans, to wider economic recovery planning and objectives.

*Appendices: Appendix A Work Programme*

Background Papers:

None

Officer(s) to contact:

Eileen Mallon

Strategic Director of Housing, Planning and  
Regeneration and Regulatory Services

tel 01509 634662

email [eileen.mallon@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:eileen.mallon@charnwood.gov.uk)