

<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>	At its meeting on 12th October 2020 the Commission agreed that it would be beneficial to receive updates from the Council's remaining Covid Recovery Cells. This is an update on the Economic Recovery cell
<i>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE</i>	To provide the Commission with an update on the work of the economic recovery cell.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 12th October 2020 the Scrutiny Commission resolved that 'the Scrutiny Commission received updates from the remaining Covid Recovery cells; Community and Economic. These would alternate, starting with an update on the Community Recovery cell at its meeting on 16th November 2020.' The Community Recovery cell report was presented to Scrutiny Commission on the 16th November, and this report is a summary report to provide an update to the Commission on the work of the economic recovery cell as requested.
- 1.2 The Economic Recovery Cell continues to meet, although the frequency of meetings has been changed over the period of recovery to reflect the intensity of the activities that are required. Due to the changing nature of the regulations and restrictions the cell is now meeting fortnightly, with sub - meetings and activities taking place on individual areas of work as required.

2. Report

- 2.1 The work programme for the cell is attached at Appendix A. Most of the activity for the cell is focussed on supporting businesses through the various requirements of the regulations in terms of both operational activity and financial support. The ongoing support for businesses in a post-covid environment is also being considered along with our partners at the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), which is leading on an economic recovery plan for the county and city.

2.2. The restrictions and regulations enacted by Government have required a significant amount of Council resources to be deployed in their implementation, at a Borough, county and national level, and the detail of the activity which has been followed in these key areas is outlined below.

2.3 Business Regulation, Compliance and Enforcement

Since the last Scrutiny Commission update, there have been significant changes to the regulatory controls that are in place for businesses to understand and navigate around.

Officers have been at the forefront of dealing with this crisis on a local, regional and national level. On a national level, the Head of Regulatory Services is part of the MHCLG Compliance Group, which involves MHCLG Policy officers, Cabinet Office, BEIS, Office for Product Safety & Standards, the Department of Health Bio-security Centre, Local Government Association and selected Local Authorities. This group meets on a weekly basis to discuss policy and legislation development and was fundamental in changes to local authority powers and the Covid Marshalls grant funding. Charnwood has been highlighted by both the Local Government Association and MHCLG for best practice case studies.

The Council's Chief Executive leads the Local Resilience Forum Compliance and Enforcement Group, which is attended by the Police, Trading Standards, Regulatory Services and Public Health across Leicester and Leicestershire to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach.

A Covid Compliance and Enforcement Group has been set up involving Regulatory Services, Leisure & Culture, Community Safety, Communications and the Corporate Improvement and Development Team. This group has co-ordinated local action and support for compliance. The Food and Health & Safety Team have been pivotal to this and undertaken some significant work to support businesses to ensure they are COVID Secure.

Charnwood has been placed under different tiers of lockdown at different times during the period, and these changing restrictions have meant a different set of regulations each time and communicating these changing requirements to businesses and the public has been a key challenge. The changes and the activity generated at each point are summarised below.

Tier 1 Restrictions (14th October 2020)

Charnwood was placed in the medium tier category and the lowest risk. Comms messages were sent out to all hospitality businesses, advising of the new regulations and what they needed to do to ensure compliance. Regulatory Services provided extensive telephone advice and sent business specific emails to those businesses seeking assistance.

The team carried out Covid Secure visits to pubs within the town centre and across the borough. Enforcement was carried out in a small number of pubs. A task force, comprised of the Police, Licensing Officers and EHO's was set up to deal with the small number of non-compliant pubs. Good compliance was achieved across most businesses and feedback was positive to this approach.

Tier 2 Restrictions (31st October 2020)

Due to the rising tide of cases, both nationally and within the borough, Charnwood moved into the high alert status. A new set of Tier 2 Regulations together with new business restrictions came into force within the borough. The response was to update as many businesses as possible with the new restrictions by email and telephone. The Food and Health & Safety team also dealt with an enormous number of business enquiries and complaints from the general public.

Lockdown 2 (5th November 2020)

The National Lockdown 2 was introduced through new regulations that changed the requirements on businesses. This involved communications and compliance checks being undertaken across the borough. During Lockdown 2 Regulatory Services have issued 3 Prohibition Notices and 7 Warning Notices on businesses who did not comply with the requirements for the closure of non-essential retail.

Local Outbreak Control

Regulatory Services has been involved with local outbreaks, involving a range of business premises, factories and schools. This involves assisting Public Health England (PHE) with investigations and ensuring covid controls are in place for business and isolation of positive cases is implemented. During October there were 18 recorded outbreaks. The largest outbreak was linked to a school with a total of 34 positive cases spread across all year groups and staff. Regulatory Services was involved in the outbreak control team meetings, providing support and guidance for the school.

Other outbreaks included 2 butchers within the borough, which subsequently closed for 14 days. A small number of pubs also closed, due to positive cases amongst staff and customers. Regulatory

services offered support and guidance to the businesses involved, including advice on risk assessments, hygiene, self-isolation protocols and liaising with PHE.

Stewarding Project

SIA Stewards have been used as part of the businesses compliance work for the hospitality sector, including pubs, restaurants and Cafes. The stewards have been trained to provide basic covid information and signposting for grant and financial help for businesses. The Stewards have been out during weekends and during changes to the Tier controls. Any issues noted were followed up by enforcement officers. The stewards have had a positive impact with business and their presence has helped businesses and the public follow the covid guidelines.

Stewards are being planned to support the compliance work in the run up to Christmas, for events monitoring and hospitality sector checks at weekends. This is now funded through the Covid Marshalls grant.

2.4 Supporting the Local Economy

In September the Council launched the Shop Safe, Shop Local campaign to encourage people to shop locally and highlight the measures taken to ensure the safety of shoppers. The campaign is funded by the Reopening the High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) which is backed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Council has been allocated £165,000 but this needs to be drawn down against spending which meets the criteria that have been sent. All funding needs to be spent by 31st March.

A Christmas campaign was launched in November which encouraged people to shop safe in local high streets and using local shops online. To support this, the Council commissioned the creation of an online portal for local businesses. The businesses can sign up for free and sell their goods online, paying a very small fee per transaction in line with other online selling platforms. The fee is usually a few pence. Within a week of launch, 34 businesses had signed up and were being added to the site. The traders manage their own profiles and add their own goods and technical support is available from the provider. The cost of the site will be covered by the RHSSF funding.

Preparations have also been made for the return of retail following the lifting of the National lockdown on 2nd December, most of which is funded through RHSSF monies. Interventions include the production and installation of a new range of street and floor graphics to remind the public of the Government's key safety messages, and the temporary appointment of two High Street Ambassadors.

The High Street Ambassadors start work on the 30th November and will have a presence on the high streets across the Borough until the end of March 2021. In addition, High Street Helpers will continue to be employed on busy shopping days. The High Street Helpers played a very important role when the students returned to Loughborough in September by providing information from a stall in the marketplace, promoting safe practice. Literature produced in the summer is currently being updated in line with the latest Government guidance and will be distributed on high streets from 2nd December.

The Council continues to work closely with the Loughborough BID who have played an important role in supporting business and encouraging good practice. The BID is currently gathering information on businesses who wish to extend their opening hours, offer take away or click or collect services in the run up to Christmas, which will in turn help the Council direct its resources.

Economic Regeneration

The impact of the pandemic on the local economy is closely monitored in association with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) which publishes regular (broadly monthly) Business and Economic Intelligence Updates providing details of trends in claims for Universal Credit as a proxy for unemployment, levels of furloughed personnel, people registered for the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), job postings and details of business closures and incorporations. Links are provided also to the Leicester Shire Rutland Statistics and Research (LSR) web site which affords access to interactive data on economic performance and weekly bulletins tracking the incidence of Covid 19 cases and deaths.

While it is apparent that the full economic impact of the pandemic has been masked to a degree by the schemes introduced to support businesses and employees, that data has been used to identify key trends and to inform potential interventions currently being developed under the leadership of the LLEP in partnership with local authorities and other agencies within the framework of an Economic Recovery Action Plan. The plan is due to be approved by the LLEP Board on 1 December. It will analyse the immediate economic shock of the pandemic, create short term economic recovery plans (to December 2021) and develop a longer-term economic recovery strategy to 2030. It will address the following priorities:

- Business Recovery
- People, employment and skills
- Green recovery
- Innovation, science and technology, and,
- Infrastructure

Cutting across the priorities are four “golden threads” which will be embedded in the recovery actions:

- Place: development of place-based deals and implementation of recovery plans for our city, towns and rural areas.
- Green recovery: accelerating our sustainable and clean growth and exploiting our natural capital assets.
- Digital: ensuring effective infrastructure, skills and transformation, and
- Inclusive growth and wellbeing: ensuring economic recovery is distributed fairly across society.

At the same meeting the LLEP Board is due to give consideration to the establishment of a COVID Investment fund utilising £1.6m from the Growing Places Fund with a potential supplementary contribution from reserves to provide an investment pot of up to £2.5m. The criteria accompanying the potential fund will be shared with partners across the Borough.

Services already delivered by the Council which are supportive of the Action Plan priorities will be mapped against the plan along with any new initiatives as they are developed, including those which are expected to be facilitated through the Town Loughborough Deal Investment Plan.

One such new initiative, subject to LLEP Board approval, will be the “Restocking the Business Base” programme, supported by Cabinet on 19 November 2020. That project aims to contract Loughborough University to deliver a two year programme to engage highly skilled individuals displaced by company closures and shrinkage attributable to the pandemic, together with cohorts of entrepreneurial university leavers, to equip them with complementary skills to establish and grow successful new businesses better prepared to survive in a post Covid era. The greater part of the funding for that programme (£313,760) is provided by the accrued uplift in retained business rates from the Enterprise Zone sites within Charnwood.

Efforts will continue to develop a more targeted package of support for businesses in the Borough, subject to the availability of resources. Early efforts to gain a better insight into the impact of the pandemic on our own businesses through the promotion of a questionnaire survey produced only a very modest response. A separate work stream is seeking to develop more effective proactive channels for communicating with our top 200 businesses, along with the production of a regular programme of briefings, events and publications to keep them engaged in a bilateral dialogue and help inform further appropriate interventions to aid economy recovery.

Regular meetings are scheduled with Job Centre Plus / Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to share intelligence, build understanding

and explore opportunities for joint working. Council networks have been used to raise awareness of the DWP's Sector-based Work Academy which seeks to prepare young people for work and apprenticeships or entry to the "Kickstart" programme designed to assist 16-24 year olds into employment. The Council is actively engaging with Loughborough College in its application to become an accredited "Kickstart Gateway" to facilitate and co-ordinate access to the scheme for individual employers offering fewer than the threshold 30 vacancies necessary for direct entry to the programme.

2.5 Town Deal

In August 2020 it was announced by the government that the Borough Council would be eligible to receive £750,000 'upfront' funding for a project, or projects, associated with the Town Investment Plan which was being prepared as part of the Town Deal process. The project which has been prioritised, in consultation with the Town Deal Board, is a Careers and Enterprise Hub.

The project is being led by Loughborough College and will be delivered in partnership with the Council and Loughborough University. The Council recently purchased the freehold of 20 Market Place (formerly Crawshaw's butchers) and under a licence arrangement the College will fit-out the building and operate the facility.

The Hub building will be a place where people can access learning, training and business support services. The Hub will have two overarching elements: Skills (led by the College), and Enterprise (led by the College with support from the University).

The Skills element will be attractive to people in who are not traditionally participants in learning and development. It will provide flexible (including weekend and evening) access to skills advice, learning related employment opportunities, including apprenticeships and the Government's new Kickstart initiative and involve the direct delivery of bite size and introductory units of learning to all audiences on a structured and drop-in basis.

The Enterprise element will facilitate and encourage business start-ups and business growth in the town. It will bring together problem solvers, innovators and aspiring entrepreneurs into one space. People with business ideas will be able to access specialist expertise and facilities at Loughborough University by initially accessing services at the Hub. The Hub building will provide an anchor for collaborative enterprise activities, facilitating interaction and engagement between the university and local communities, and a place where advice can be sought on the formation of new enterprises.

Good progress is being made in the implementation of the project. In order to meet the requirements of the government's funding for this project it will need to be up and running by the end of March 2021.

Loughborough Town Deal Board submitted its Town Investment Plan to MHCLG on 26th October 2020. The Plan contains projects led by a number of organisations, businesses and the Borough Council. The ask of Government is for £31.7 million. If that amount of money were to be secured, consultants Third Life Economics Ltd estimate that it could lever investment into Loughborough worth approximately £110 million. MHCLG is currently appraising the TIP and it is hoped that Heads of Terms for delivery of a town deal can be secured by the end of March 2021.

3.0 Business Grants Payments

Charnwood has been provided with funds of £2.4 million for the National Restriction Support Grant and £3.7 million for the Additional Restriction Grant (this funding is expected to cover the period 5/11/20 – 31/3/2022). In addition, as we move into Tier 3 restrictions further funding will be provided to cover Local Restrictions Support Grants.

The Council has created an online application process for businesses to apply for the funding and a dedicated team is now in place to process the applications and make payments to businesses as quickly as possible. Since the opening of the scheme on 19th November, over 580 businesses have already been paid grants to the value of £875,000.

4.0 National Tiers from 3rd December 2020

- 4.1 On Tuesday 24th November the Prime Minister's announced the end of national restrictions on 2nd December, and the return of the tiers. Charnwood was placed in Tier 2 before the national lockdown started but the revised tiers are different and will bring new regulations and enforcement requirements. On Thursday 26th November, it was confirmed that Charnwood is in Tier 3. A verbal update will be given at the Commission meeting regarding the impact on businesses as a result.

Background Papers:
Officer(s) to contact:

None
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