

Economic Development Committee



Date of meeting: 22 March 2022

Title	<i>Recovery Plan Update</i>
Purpose of the report	To note
Report Author	<i>Keith McGroary Economic Development Manager</i>
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	<i>N/A</i>
Corporate Priority	Economic Development
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: <i>Note the report</i>
Reason for Recommendation	<i>Not applicable</i>

1. Key issues

- 1.1 Update on the Economic Development aspect of the Corporate Recovery Plan. The reference letters starting ER1 below relate to those within the Corporate Recovery Plan. The previous update for the Committee was on 25th January, so there has been limited opportunity and resources to move forwards in the intervening period, especially with the team focusing on delivering ARG grants to local businesses. The top priority for the Economic Development Team is to focus on processing grant applications so that the funds can be passported to our businesses before the deadline of 31.3.2022.
- 1.2 'ER1' *Continue to monitor, measure and understand how COVID has affected local businesses and adapt to respond to impacts.* Through the administration of the ARG the Team have been in regular communication with local businesses throughout the pandemic. It has been made patently clear that those businesses that have relied upon close interaction have struggled most and been in need of financial support. This would include businesses that have been involved within the events sector, beauticians and nail bars, sports amenities including personal trainers. The proverb states that 'necessity is the mother of creation' and some businesses have certainly taken that on board with the introduction of virtual gym sessions by Zoom or by spotting a new gap in the market for signage. Others have also struggled but have also been able to mitigate the loss of use of premises by creative thinking; restaurants are one case in particular, who quickly adopted home deliveries as a means of continuing their business and retaining employment. More recent feedback suggests that for many things are either returning to normal or indeed there have been cases where the equipment grant has been

applied, they are performing better than pre-pandemic. This is not to say we are out of the woods yet and it is clearly not a time to become complacent. The grants provided by the government cease after 31.3.22 and it will be sometime after this when we will be able to see a clearer picture with regards to the health of our small businesses.

- 1.3 A dashboard has also been produced and circulated to councillors; this illustrated the total level of unemployment in the borough, as well as within the 18-24 and over 50 age groups. Figures are then put into context by comparing Spelthorne data to the Surrey average. A new update will be produced in March 2022
- 1.4 'ER2' *Provision/signposting of advice and support*: The Spelthorne website has been continually updated throughout the COVID period; additionally, specific items of news, particularly regarding jobs have been circulated via our communications team through social media.
- 1.5 'ER3' *Keep under review the Council's discretionary grant policy*: A separate report in relation to the Discretionary Grant also known as the ARG (Additional Restrictions Grant) is provided for this meeting and covers this area.
- 1.6 'ER4' *Implement our new Economic Development Recovery Plan*: This has been absorbed within the Corporate Recovery Plan.
- 1.7 'ER5' *Continue to work with the Jobs and Recovery Task Group*: This group has met on 3 separate occasions so far and consists of representatives from A2D, Job Centre Plus, Brooklands College and Runnymede Council. The main purpose of the group is to share information and what projects or initiatives that each member of the group is working on so that there is the opportunity to enhance delivery through synergy whenever possible so that duplication of effort is reduced. The group has not met since July 2021 when restrictions were lifted but agreed to meet at a future date if there was a need to do so. No requests for meetings have been received since July.
- 1.8 'ER6' *Support/promote employment and training initiatives*: The official Youth Hub and I Choose Local launch event is on the 4th March at the Guy Salmon showroom in Sunbury. There are several businesses already engaging with the project who are looking to employ young people for example, McDonalds, Marriott Group, Footrace, Berkley Homes, Jaguar Landrover (Sytner Group) French Brothers.
- 1.9 'ER7' *Work with partners to bid for funding for a Youth Hub in the Borough*: We have run an Apprenticeship information evening for young people and their parents which was well attended. Number of young people assisted in first two months of the scheme (Dec / Jan): There have been 29 referrals; 7 have been helped into Education, 1 person has gone into full-time employment and 1 person has found a Kickstart job through scheme.
- 1.10 'ER8' *Set up pop-up-shop where budding entrepreneurs can test the market in advance of setting up a business*: This has proved extremely difficult to implement, especially with the many requirements needed to comply with COVID regulations as well as the various lockdowns that have taken place. The additional significant demand on officer time due to the processing of

ARG grants has meant that this initiative will need to be postponed until spring 2022.

- 1.11 'ER9' *Prepare and promote our new business incubator*: The operator of the Hub is Co-Tribe CIC and the doors opened for customers in September 2021. As Co-Tribe are a Community Interest Company a mandatory 80% discount and 20% discretionary discount has been applied to the business rates (full value £18k), which would have otherwise fell to SBC.
- 1.12 The pandemic has affected occupancy in the same way as many other offices, which has meant that there are not as many businesses as originally expected. Additional work to create additional office space (where a current demand exists) within the building is currently taking place and there is a waiting list of businesses that wish to occupy them. This should be completed by the end of March 2022. Since September the incubator has received in excess of £10k in monthly rent by current occupiers, this is expected to grow significantly in the next financial year.
- 1.13 'ER10' *Promote opportunities in the Borough for the development of 'green' jobs*: The new 2022-2027 Economic Strategy will include actions to support a greener economy. The ARG funding has actually contributed to reduced emissions through grants that have replaced old inefficient equipment such as a laundrette washing machine which cost £10,000.
- 1.14 'ER11' Promote 'shop-local' to our residents and promote 'buy local' procurement within SBC: The new 5-year Strategy will contain a number of activities with the action plan. A baseline is also being set with regards to the current amount of money spent by SBC in the borough so that we can measure the impact of changes made to procurement standing orders.
- 1.15 'ER12' *Provide additional frontline support for Ashford, Sunbury and Shepperton businesses*: The extent of support provided by the Town Centre Manager (TCM) has now expanded to include shopping parades throughout the borough. These have been visited and awareness raised with regards to the availability of the ARG grants. The TCM has also sourced and funded the Christmas Tree at Sunbury Cross and there is now a working group to enhance the festive lights this year. In his own time at the weekend attended a Meet & Greet in Ashford town centre to introduce the new PCSO for the town and to help raise awareness of council support for the High Street. There is work ongoing in collaboration with the SBC Communications Department to raise awareness of business in Sunbury Cross with regards to the Household Support Fund, as this has been identified as a location that could benefit from this funding.
- 1.16 'ER13' Work in collaboration with Staines-upon-Thames Business Improvement District (BID: The boundary of the BID has been widened to include the Thames Club, Staines Train Station and Fairfield Avenue. This will generate additional income as well as support for businesses situated in those areas. The BID Proposal document became available on 22nd February

and copies will be made available to the Committee for 22 March. A formal consultation with the whole of the BID Board took place on 22nd February with around 40 businesspeople from the BID area in attendance. The response was extremely positive, and in an earlier survey with BID businesses with more than 150 responses, there was not a single business who stated that they would be voting 'no'. Businesses submit their vote between 3rd and 31st March 2022 and on 1st April the result will be announced.

2. Options analysis and proposal

2.1 Not applicable

3. Financial implications

3.1 Not applicable

4. Other considerations

4.1 There are none.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 The impact on equality and diversity issues is considered at every action

6. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

6.1 Use of the ARG funding has potential to have a positive impact on the environment through new equipment which is greener and less polluting.

7. Timetable for implementation

7.1 In accordance with the Corporate Recovery Plan.

Background papers:

There are none.

Appendices:

There are none