

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

02 September 2020

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 BOROUGH ECONOMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY

To present an initial consultation draft and ideas for the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy for consideration by the Board and to agree a timetable for consultation and adoption arrangements.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The current Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy was adopted in June 2019 and covers the period up to March 2023. Good progress had been made on delivering initiatives to support our local economy for the period up to March 2020, with notable successes in the delivery of business support, the skills and work-readiness agenda, measures to support our town centres and securing funding for our priority projects. However, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy changed overnight – economic output plummeted (GDP dropped 6.9% in March and 20.4% in April), unemployment rates shot up, a large proportion of the working population were furloughed, and many of those that weren't had to swiftly adopt new ways of working. All of this was unforeseen at the time the current Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy was adopted, and so as we tentatively move away from reacting to the crisis as it unfolded and towards an attempted recovery from the lockdown, it is essential that the Borough Council reviews its strategy and pulls together an Economic Recovery Strategy that is fit for purpose.

1.2 Kent Economic Recovery Plan - Strategic Context

1.2.1 Since the beginning of the crisis, the Borough Council has been closely engaged with colleagues at Kent County Council (which has overall responsibility for recovery) and other districts and boroughs through the Kent Economic Recovery Cell. This group has been leading on the development of a Kent-wide Economic Recovery Plan, which at the time of writing this report is still under development. This plan will look at the medium term (the next 18 months) to set out actions that Kent County Council and its partners should undertake to support economic revival

and longer-term sustainability and resilience. At present, it is proposed that the plan has five 'channels' of activity:

- **Communications, Confidence and Trust** – providing better intelligence to inform our actions and ensuring collaboration and partnership to drive our activity
- **Open for Business** – taking action to build confidence and demonstrate that Kent is open and accessible
- **Supporting Business** – supporting resilient and innovative businesses to drive future growth
- **People** – enabling people to access work and skills and reach their potential
- **Investment** – planning and investing now for a sustainable future.

1.2.2 Following a short consultation exercise, there have been slight amendments to the plan. Whilst the five 'channels' of activity have been retained, these are now underpinned by three key principles, which are, in effect, cross-cutting themes. These three key principles are:

- **Cleaner and Greener** – contributing towards net zero and encouraging sustainable growth.
- **Productive and Open** – supporting productivity growth (through measures such as long-term skills development and technological innovation) and being open to new ideas, products and markets.
- **Better Opportunities, Fairer Chances** – addressing the uneven impacts of recession (such as youth unemployment) through an inclusive approach.

1.2.3 Proposed immediate actions include the extension of the Covid-19 helpline and the refocusing of the Kent & Medway Business Loan Fund (both part of 'supporting business'), developing temporary employment schemes and investing in apprenticeships (People) and further investment in broadband and digital technology (Investment). However, much of the more medium term activity will likely be dictated by evolving challenges and developing government policy, as such it is important that there is flexibility within the plan to respond to new circumstances.

1.3 Borough Economic Recovery Strategy

1.3.1 In pulling together an initial consultation draft for the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy, it is important that there is synergy with the Kent-wide plan, but that it adds value to what it is looking to achieve and responds to issues that are particularly pertinent to the borough. In addition, a clear link must be made with the Borough Council's Corporate Strategy First Year Addendum, which was approved at Cabinet on 03 June 2020.

1.3.2 As such, it is proposed that the consultation draft of the Borough Economic Recovery Strategy (which is provided as Appendix 1):

- i) Uses the economic vision as set out in the 03 June 2020 Cabinet Report regarding the Corporate Strategy First Year Addendum for the purposes of the Economic Recovery Strategy – **“Maximising the unique strengths of the local area to help create a resilient, dynamic and inclusive economy that fosters sustainable growth”**
- ii) Adopts the five channels and three key principles as used by the Kent Economic Recovery Plan.
- iii) Covers a shorter timescale than previously used for our Economic Regeneration Strategies in light of future uncertainty – from 2021-2023.
- iv) Includes the measures as set out in the Action Plan. This is a starting point and it is envisaged that there are likely to be other actions within the final version of the plan once it evolves into its final form/

1.4 Framework for Consultation and Adoption

1.4.1 If the consultation draft is approved for consultation, then it is essential that the draft Economic Recovery Strategy is exposed to external scrutiny prior to its formal adoption, in order to ensure that it is as accurate and comprehensive as possible. We will seek the views of our key economic partners including members of the West Kent Partnership, local business support providers, business representative bodies such as the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses, as well as individual local businesses in the Borough.

1.4.2 It is suggested that the consultation is undertaken for a four week period from 10 September 2020 – 08 October 2020. During this period, the following will be undertaken to ensure that the opportunity to provide comments on the draft strategy document is as easy and straightforward as possible:

- Direct email to database of key economic partner contacts.
- Inclusion of the consultation draft on the TMBC business webpages.
- Programme of social media messaging – Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Inclusion of an article in two editions of the Tonbridge and Malling Business e-bulletin, which goes out to over 600 business contacts.

1.4.4 Over the course of October 2020, all the comments received will be processed, and where appropriate, the strategy will be amended accordingly.

1.4.5 The intention will be to report on the outcome of that consultation, highlighting any amendments that have been made, and to seek formal adoption of the strategy at the board meeting on 03 November 2020. The timescale is tight, and so if there are substantive comments to consider, it may need to be put back to the February 2021 board meeting.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 There are no financial and value for money considerations arising directly from this report.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 Not applicable.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 That, subject to any comments from the Board, the proposals regarding the consultation draft of the Economic Recovery Strategy as set out in sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this report **BE APPROVED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

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