

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	2 November 2020
Title:	Economic Recovery Action Plan
Report of:	Ben Hook, Head of Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bayliss
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To adopt the Rother Economic Recovery Action Plan
Decision Type:	Key
Officer	
Recommendation(s):	Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the Rother Economic Recovery Action Plan be approved and adopted; AND It be RESOLVED: That the Economic Recovery Steering Group report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months on progress against the actions set out in the Plan.
Reasons for Recommendations:	To provide a framework for the work programme of the Regeneration Team.

Introduction

1. Following the UK's six month lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Council began to gather information on how this has affected businesses in Rother. In June 2020, Cabinet asked that an Economic Recovery Steering Group (ERSG) be set up to consider the impact of the crisis on the local economy and agree a recovery strategy and action plan to be recommended to Cabinet and Council, that articulates the activities that the Council is able to undertake within our existing resources and powers and how we can support partners, businesses and third sector organisations to recover.
2. Following the gradual easing of the lockdown measures from June 2020 onwards, businesses began to reopen whilst adhering to social distancing measures. These measures have had a significant effect on the financial forecast of many businesses as it has reduced capacity and, in some cases, has required significant capital spend for businesses to be classed COVID secure.

3. East Sussex County Council commissioned consultants to write the East Sussex Recovery Plan on behalf of Team East Sussex (TES), the local federated board for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). The Districts and Boroughs have been consulted throughout this process and the TES plan has guided the development of Rother's own Economic Recovery Action Plan (ERAP).
4. Rother District Council (RDC) set up a Member led ERSG to focus on the ambitions articulated in the county-wide plan and to form an appropriate local response in the form of an action plan.
5. The county-wide plan, titled; *East Sussex Reset Six missions: Recovery as opportunity*, was formally adopted by TES in September. To ensure consistency, the Rother plan reflects the headline ambitions set out in the county plan, but with local targets and actions reflecting local needs and priorities.
6. The Rother ERAP will become the principal work plan for the RDC Regeneration Team as the Council continues to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and the implications of the virus on the economic prosperity of the district.

Analysis

7. The ERSG has held three virtual meetings; the first to review evidence including data gathered at national and local levels and consider the emerging county-wide plan; the second to consider local priorities and actions within the county-wide framework; and the third to sign off the final version of the Rother ERAP. A copy of the ERAP is attached as the Appendix 1 to this report.
8. The ERAP sets out six broad ambitions, reflecting the format of the county-wide plan. These are:
 - 1) Thinking local, acting local.
 - 2) Building skills, creating jobs.
 - 3) Fast-forwarding business.
 - 4) Better places, fuller lives.
 - 5) Cleaner energy, greener transport.
 - 6) The future is digital.
9. Conversations with businesses have identified some key areas for improvement:
 - lack of adequate connectivity;
 - immediate cash flow, some of which was eased though the Government grants and furlough;
 - job retention, again eased by furlough but still a significant challenge; and
 - risk to supply chains.
10. Nationally, unemployment has risen sharply between March and July with 2.7m claiming Universal Credit up 117% according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), with the youngest, oldest, and manual workers worst hit. This does not include figures for those furloughed, a scheme which comes to an end in October following which the unemployment figure will rise again.

Unemployment will continue to be a key challenge throughout the recovery period, as the long-term effects of lockdown and continued restrictions on business operations become felt, along with changes to the support offered by Government

11. Business advice and guidance has been available through the Growth Hubs and online, with the Growth Hubs monitoring and reporting regularly on the numbers and types of enquiries received.
12. Numerous local businesses have been supported through the various rates relief and discretionary grant funds administered by this Council, with a total of £26,305,750 in grant funding administered benefitting a total of 2,312 businesses. In addition, the Council agreed to defer rent payments for a large number of its commercial tenants to assist with their cashflow during the lockdown period.
13. The tourism and hospitality sectors have been particularly hard hit by lockdown measures. Our partnership work with 1066Country Marketing meant members of that organisation were given up to date information, guidance and signposting which members tell us was an important pillar of support for them. Through the Partnership we were able to feedback to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) issues around those that had slipped through the grant net and were unable to claim support which was later amended.
14. A COVID Culture forum was set up with weekly Monday meetings, allowing Districts, Borough and County officers to understand the impact on the cultural sector and respond to the DCMS with evidence of the effects of the pandemic in East Sussex.
15. Throughout discussions there has been a drive to maximise the opportunities that the situation presents and make the most of the low COVID infection rate that was seen in Rother during the first peak. As described in the county document “looking forward we believe we can create change and opportunity, not just recover”.
16. Whilst we know that at national level, cities are finding the need to work from home is having an impact on city centres, there is anecdotal evidence that smaller high streets are benefiting from commuters being based locally, bringing spend and a sense of community back to towns and villages.
17. The ERSG has also expressed the desire to extend the scope of the aspirations set out in Ambition 5, to embrace environmental impact across all ambitions and in all our projects.

Conclusion

18. The Rother ERAP will need to maintain a degree of flexibility as the long-term economic impact of the pandemic becomes clearer, and as the Council and partner agencies continue to work to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positive impacts of COVID-19.

19. Cabinet is recommended to adopt the Rother ERAP, which should form the basis of the work programme for the Council's Regeneration team over the next two years.
20. The ERSG will continue to meet at six monthly intervals and a report created for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to update on progress being made.

Financial Implications

21. There are no additional financial commitments against the ERAP actions.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	1 – Economic Recovery Action Plan
Relevant Previous Minutes:	-
Background Papers:	-
Reference Documents:	-