

Rother District Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18 October 2021

Title: Economic Recovery Plan Update

Report of: Melanie Powell, Principal Regeneration Officer

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To update Members on progress against the Council's Covid Recovery Plan

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) the report be noted; and
 - 2) any further recommendations be referred to Cabinet.
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Introduction

1. In November 2020, Cabinet approved the Council's Economic Recovery Action Plan, setting out the actions that the Council will take to support local economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Minute CB20/64 refers). This was subsequently adopted by the Council in December 2020.
2. This followed the work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group which was established in June 2020 to consider the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy and agree and recommend a recovery strategy and action plan for Cabinet and full Council approval. The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress and actions to date in delivery of the Recovery Plan.

Progress to date

3. A copy of the Economic Recovery Action Plan is attached as Appendix 1. The Plan sets out six broad ambitions: thinking local, acting local; building skills, creating jobs; fast-forwarding business; better places, fuller lives; cleaner energy, greener transport; and the future is digital.
4. The right-hand column in Appendix 1 summarises the progress and activity against each action point. Particular points to note are:
5. Supporting Business
The Reopening the High Street Funding from Government was extended to become the Welcome Back Fund and a total of £236,675 allocated to Rother to support temporary measures to ease businesses back after lockdown. The first tranche was used to support local promotional campaigns in Battle, Rye and Bexhill and the second phase has funded additional toilets at Winchelsea Beach and increased litter bins and collections over the summer; support for events; training to businesses; additional footfall data.

Attached as Appendix 2 is an evaluation of the #ShopLocalBexhill campaign run in Bexhill Town Centre over the Christmas period in 2020.

6. Skills and Workforce

The Hospitality sector saw issues around filling vacancies which still continue. Recruitment to public facing jobs was also challenging in the context of some hostile customer behaviour who were unwilling to follow venue guidelines. Since the summer, skills shortages are becoming evident in a number of sectors.

7. Social Media for Business workshops were offered to businesses across Rother by Let's Do Business to help reach customers and develop brand awareness. Further training sessions are to be offered in the Autumn.

8. Events were supported with an online training programme to support event organisers and promoters in Rother, delivered by 18 Hours. Half way through the programme it has:

- Supported an average 15 people per session.
- So far have covered: Concept development and feasibility/COVID safety for events/Programming/Finance and fundraising.
- Upcoming sessions will cover Marketing and Audience Development, Diversity and Inclusion, Environmental Sustainability, Monitoring and Evaluation.
- Has involved three guest speakers: Applause Rural Touring/The Fundraisers.
- Is developing a network of community events organisers: Participants working with us, calling us with queries, working with each other.

9. Attached as Appendix 3 is a case study showing how a local business has responded to changing demands by developing their online sales.

10. Tourism and Culture

1066 Country have been working to a COVID Recovery Plan, updated as Government guidelines change. The summer of 2021 has required a fine balance between encouraging staycationers to the area, against the problems of 'over tourism' as seen in Cornwall and the Lake District. The campaign sought to encourage visitors away from the tourist 'honey-pots' whilst also guiding people to the safest lifeguarded beaches.

11. This summer has seen a shift in demographic of visitors to the area with an increase in numbers of millennials visiting and repeat booking for next summer; a trend the National Coastal Tourism Academy thinks is set to continue.

12. The Sussex Modern campaign has continued to promote Sussex celebrating its modernity, culture, wine and landscape in partnership with its 36 partner organisations. Key themes over summer 2021: #StayYourWay campaign promoting self-curated visits to encourage longer dwell time; competitions and giveaways; an out of home campaign targeting London and Sussex.

13. The 1066 Country Walk has now re-launched bringing new life to this 31-mile footpath. Bespoke sculptures and new signage, seating and information boards

will guide visitors along its path unearthing the history of William the Conqueror. The route, which begins at Pevensey, passes through Battle, and ends at Rye, has been transformed thanks to a European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development grant of more than £160,000 to support rural tourism infrastructure.

14. Improving Places

The De La Warr Pavilion's (DLWP) vision to level-up Community, Creativity and Skills in our region was a basis of the Council's £17 million Levelling Up Fund application. Building on its legacy of culture-led regeneration, the DLWP's capital project centres around a series of objectives for the Pavilion which, if met, could dramatically impact the local landscape.

- DLWP to excel as a visitor destination of international quality with a radically extended events programme offer.
- Protect, enhance and safeguard the important heritage asset.
- Ensure regeneration and deliver environmental efficiencies.
- Deliver an integrated, inclusive and needed learning offer.
- Further the vision for aspirational creativity and the role as a community asset.
- Bring vibrancy, inspire communities and address structural challenges in Bexhill.
- Deliver COVID-19 recovery at pace and level-up for the benefit of our communities.

15. Low Carbon (mostly medium and long term)

The impact of staff working from home has been a significant boost to carbon reduction targets. The Council quickly established new working practices to facilitate this change which continue to be used.

16. Connectivity

Information on the Government's Rural Gigabit voucher scheme continues to be rolled out to parish councils across the district. A case study of a local business taking advantage of the scheme is attached as Appendix 4.

Conclusion

17. COVID remains a significant threat to public health, and whilst the vaccination programme has lessened its impact and allowed for the lifting of lockdown restrictions, the virus will remain in the population for the foreseeable future. There also remains the ongoing risk of mutations that are resistant to the current vaccines, which could necessitate the re-imposition of restrictions.
18. Lockdown restrictions have forced changes to the way people work, shop and spend their leisure time. In some sectors this has accelerated existing trends (such as online shopping); in others it has required businesses to re-align their business models to meet new demands and realise opportunities. With the end of furlough and the temporary VAT reduction on tourism and hospitality from the 1 October 2021, we will get a more realistic sense of what the landscape looks like going forward. As international travel reopens, we can start to predict patterns for summer 2022.

19. Skills shortages have become apparent in a number of sectors and whilst there is ongoing debate as to the causes, with Brexit also considered by many to be a key factor, these could have lasting implications on the capacity of those sectors. The hospitality sector is particularly at risk in this regard.
20. The increase in home working is a trend that is likely to continue, with lasting impacts on traditional commercial and economic centres and on travel-to-work patterns. This will have knock-on implications on the demand for office accommodation in particular, and the way in which that space is used. The Council's longer-term strategies will need to take account of these structural changes.
21. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the report and invited to make any further suggestions for consideration by Cabinet.

Financial Implications

22. The majority of the activities are being delivered within existing budgetary and staff resources. The Council is also making use of external funding such as the Re-opening High Streets Safely Fund and Welcome Back Fund.

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
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	1 - Rother District Economic Recovery Action Plan 2 - #ShopLocalBexhill Campaign 3 - The Kitesurf Centre Case Study 4 - Russet Farm Case Study
Relevant previous Minutes:	CB20/64
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan – East Sussex County Council