

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	31 October 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Economic Recovery Plan Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Ben Hook
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Bayliss
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update Members on progress against the Council's Covid Recovery Plan and plan next steps.
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Non-Key
<b>Officer</b>	
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It be <b>RESOLVED:</b> That <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) the report be noted; and</li><li>2) work commence on a new Regeneration Strategy for the Council.</li></ol>
<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>	Funding associated with COVID-19 recovery has now come to an end.

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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.
3. The Economic Recovery Plan was further guided by the work Councillor Bayliss undertook in May 2020 in running a series of Zoom meetings with local businesses in the district to better understand where there were gaps in support. 35 businesses took part and offered feedback that supported the planning of the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund.
4. A report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny in October 2021 giving an update on the progress and actions in delivery of the Recovery Plan up to that point. Since then a further 5 months of project detail has been included in the Plan.

## Analysis

5. 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.
6. Returns for the Welcome Back funding were submitted by the deadline date of 31 March 2022, with all grant spending defrayed by that date. This final grant deadline marked an end to the COVID-19 recovery funding being used to support the ambitions of the Recovery Plan. No new COVID-19 related funding streams have been realised this financial year.
7. Since October the Government has moved focus away from COVID-19 recovery to a Levelling Up agenda with the launch of grants schemes including; Levelling Up Fund Rounds 1 and 2 and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which has just been extended to include the Rural England Prosperity Fund.
8. The Economic Recovery Plan is Attached at Appendix 1, the main additional points to note are:

### Supporting business:

9. **Rye Fisheries:** A feasibility study was commissioned by Rother District Council (RDC) to firm up a proposal to create a developmental kitchen at the Chapman's business in Rye, supporting local fishermen in the process. This has been completed and highlights the following:
  - Chapman's pledges to take all of the catch that a boat brings in, to provide their fishermen/women with greater financial stability, something that not all fish merchants do.
  - Before Brexit, Chapman's could export this fish efficiently to France and Belgium. However, since Brexit the market has changed, and the value of this catch is lowered due to higher paperwork demands.
  - Chapman's have decided that they want to use the left over catch to make their own soups, stocks, sauces, and ready-made meals. Their proposed project is to install a development kitchen on their premises to make these products onsite. This allows the spare catch that is currently going to waste to be used, and it adds value to this catch.
  - The project will safeguard and create jobs, upskill locals, support the local supply chain and support other work ongoing by Chapman's.
10. **Business Alerts:** RDC through its Communications Team will be launching the new Business Alerts that will provide information direct to businesses. Work will partner the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Locate East Sussex and Federation of Small Businesses to ensure that opportunities are clearly communicated District wide ensuring support reaches those in need.
11. **Rural Grants:** Through the COVID-19 Rural Grants Scheme we are able to support a number of businesses to expand and increase their offer, train staff and redevelop business plans. This was a one-off grant scheme, however, the drive to support rural business has continued and RDC are currently working with the LGA and consultants Urban Foresight on a rural economy strategy that will assess rural business need including:
  - Sustainability of the traditional land-based and agricultural industries

- Opportunities for diversification and economic growth in an area of 83% AONB status
12. The rural economy is a key growth opportunity and through this work the Council can ascertain what the emerging opportunities are for rural businesses in order to inform future Local Plan and economic regeneration policy.

#### Supporting events:

13. Welcome Back funding supported the first Bexhill After Dark festival in January 2022. Produced by 18 Hours Ltd in partnership with Arts Council England, Rother District Council, East Sussex Arts Partnership, De La Warr Pavilion and 1066 Country and supported by a wide range of local community organisations. This was the first festival of its kind in Bexhill and featured light installations, illuminated performances and community parades, presenting an inclusive programme of excellent quality art in the off season and was extremely well supported by the local community.
14. Welcome Back Funding supported new events during times of social distancing and the reintroduction of events across the District, some having been postponed for 2 years.

#### Supporting skills:

15. As part of Ambition 2, RDC worked with Bexhill College on an application to Arts Council England to support 6 graduate artists in the transition from education to work. The application allows subsidised workspace, dedicated one-to-one support from Flatland Projects, community engagement through workshops with local schools and an exhibition opportunity at Beeching Road Studios (BRS). The six artists were selected by the BRS Steering Group and have been working from the studios since June this year. They will be joined by artists in the main studios in the coming weeks.
16. Additional to support given by RDC for the Jobs Fair we were able to offer increased funding for the return event in March 2022 through Welcome Back Funds.

#### Supporting tourism:

17. 1066 Country Marketing commissioned a report from Blue Sail to review the impacts of 1066 Country Marketing on supporting tourism. The report details the effects of the pandemic on the sector and the measures that were taken to support businesses. The summary infographic is attached at Appendix 2.

#### New funding:

18. Since April 2022 RDC have applied for the allocated UKSPF grant of £1,000,000 over 3 years. A partnership group has been established, chaired by Councillor Oliver, to oversee the spend and RDC has submitted an Investment Plan for the Rother district. We are awaiting a decision.
19. A Round 2 Levelling Up Fund application has been submitted expanding on Rother's Round 1 application to include a community and leisure hub in Sidley. We await the result of the £19,192,000 bid entitled Bexhill; culture, community and skills.

## Next Steps

20. In light of the return to work post COVID-19, the Economic Recovery Plan has served its purpose in guiding our work through this time of crisis. Rother's last Economic Regeneration Strategy *Innovation, Inclusion, Inspiration* ran from 2010-2015. This now needs to be reviewed and refreshed following on from the Economic Recovery Plan.

## Conclusion

21. That the Economic Recovery Plan work is now drawn to a close and a new regeneration strategy and action plan be developed to guide the next 5 years of work.

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
Risk Management	No		

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Appendices:	
Relevant Previous Minutes:	CB20/64
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A