

Local Economy Policy Development Advisory Group
30 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillors: Chris Brown (Chairman), Matthew Allen, John Blackall, Jonathan Chowen, Billy Greening, Gordon Lindsay, Colin Minto, Jack Saheid and Belinda Walters

Apologies: Councillors: Roy Cornell and Mike Morgan

Also Present: Councillor Tony Hogben

1 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 5 May were received.

2 **SCOPE OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

The Cabinet Member gave an overview by way of a slide presentation laying out the current scope of council activities to support the local economy. New PDAG Members were also welcomed to this first session for the municipal year.

After considering the presentation, Members agreed that some key areas affected by Covid-19 were not adequately covered by the Corporate Plan, suggesting that a broader approach was required that included not only retail but also leisure, hospitality, and the arts sectors.

Other areas of discussion included skills improvement and life-long learning, especially in relation to young people and the work of the Y-Wish Hub and the Journey to Work programme. All agreed these are important initiatives to help in the recovery.

With many businesses now offering flexibility in working from home, it (WFH) could be a risk to the District's town centre lunchtime economy, particularly in retail food. Concern was expressed that some of these outlets may never recover and ultimately close. However, Members also reported on the rapid rise of mobile food vendors, especially in the smaller towns and villages within the district. It was widely agreed amongst Members that a permanent move to WFH, together with the rapid growth of online retail, will have other longer-term consequences to all towns and cities.

As a counter to this, Members agreed that 'co-working facilities' were an idea to explore further.

Other suggestions put forward were to investigate relocating some of Horsham town centre business parks to north Horsham, thereby reducing heavy good vehicles through the town centre and avoiding local schools and to look again at pop-up and vacant commercial units.

3 **INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

The Cabinet Member provided an overview of the Economic Development Team, including an organogram indicating the roles and responsibilities within the department.

4 **COVID RECOVERY PLAN**

The Head of Property, Facilities & Local Economy gave an update on government grants that had been provided to help business communities affected by the pandemic, including the additional restrictions grant (ARG) and the Welcome Back Fund.

It was reported that a further grant funding round will be taking place to allocate the balance of the ARG that remains (c£1.2m) this needed to be allocated by the end of July and if this was achieved, further funding would be available from Central Government. Members encouraged Officers to publicise information on how to apply before the deadline.

Several Members suggested that HDC's Communications team should be used to alert the business community to the deadline, and to further clarify some of the confusing wording used within the grant's application pack.

5 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

There were no items on the current Forward Plan for noting nor any other business.

The meeting closed at 6.43 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN