

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD
11 June 2020

MINUTES

- Present: Councillors: M Parker (Chairman), J Ryan (Vice Chairman), M Parker (Chairman), M Brain, T Hodgson, D Howell, M McLoughlin, W Qais, J Ryan, P Thomas and C Williams
T Hodgson, A Hodgson, and M Brain
- Councillors in Attendance: Councillor I Courts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for the Economy
- External Guests: Melanie Palmer, Chief Executive Solihull BID
Robert Elliot, Solihull Chamber of Commerce President and Solihull Tourism Forum Chairman
Lee Osborne, Development Manager, Federation of Small Businesses
John Callaghan, Principal and Chief Executive, Solihull College and University Centre
- Officers: Perry Wardle (Assistant Director, Growth and Development)
Katie Judge (Economic Advisor, Growth and Development)
Rachel Egan (Head of Inclusive Growth, Growth and Development)
Clare Rudge (Business and Investment Officer, Growth and Development)
Paul Rogers (Democratic Services)

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. PUBLIC MINUTES

Councillor Ryan requested that it be noted that he had expressed the wish for the vision for apprenticeships and skills and training opportunities for SCH employees to be highlighted further within the SCH Delivery Plan document.

Having considered the draft Public Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th March 2020, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

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RESOLVED:

Subject to the above, to agree the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board Public Minutes dated 9th March 2020 as a true record.

5. SOLIHULL ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

The report was provided to the Scrutiny Board to facilitate Members with the opportunity to consider and comment on Version 1 of the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull (Appendices 1 and 2), which is being developed and implemented by the Council, with other organisations, to support the Borough's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Economic Advisor (Growth and Development) presented the report to the Scrutiny Board.

Members were advised that the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan had been developed to support both residents and businesses including targeted support for retail, hospitality, leisure, arts, tourism and town centres across the borough. The Recovery Plan also addressed provision of support for young people, vulnerable residents and families. The Recovery Plan also took account of:

- Progressing the Borough Investment Plan for UK Central
- HS2 interchange site
- Town Centre sites in the borough
- Green economic recovery, inclusive of the Council's net zero carbon plan.
- Added value interventions to maximise support for the local economy

The Recovery Plan had been informed by the Solihull Observatory and wider sources of data and intelligence and partner and business engagement. The Recovery Plan would continue to be informed by engagement with Council partners and businesses. It was intended to continue to refresh the Recovery Plan over the coming weeks and the Scrutiny Board's comments were sought as a part of the consultative process.

Mr. Robert Elliot, Solihull Chamber of Commerce President and Solihull Tourism Forum Chairman, informed the Scrutiny Board that he had been liaising with the Council on a weekly basis addressing the implication arising from the Covid-19 pandemic for the local Solihull economy. Members were advised that the Solihull Chamber of Commerce was comprised of 300 members and formed part of the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, which comprised 5,000 members. Since the pandemic, the Solihull Chamber of Commerce had been concentrating its efforts towards growing, informing supporting and connecting local businesses. Post Covid, the Chamber would seek to support 4 main activities:

- Well-Being (both business and home)
- Support Economic development
- Educate in the business sector

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- Deliver the eco pledge

Mr. Elliot noted the effective communication of the Recovery Plan was vital to its success. To date, the Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee believed that the support the Council had provided local businesses was good and that on-going support was extremely positive. However, moving forward the Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee would wish to see a positive return arising from the activities and funding employed to support local business to date in the borough.

The Scrutiny Board's attention was drawn to the future role of the business rates and furlough schemes and future government legislation in helping businesses move forward post pandemic. National taxation arrangements were also viewed as playing a key role in supporting future confidence in the business sector. The nature and diversity of the business sector in the borough was acknowledged and therefore the principal considerations of the Recovery Plan for the Chamber of Commerce were considered to be:

- The Recovery Plan had to be Borough Wide – A whole borough approach adopted towards inclusivity in the actions delivered through the Recovery Plan.
- Businesses – Need guidance and clarity as to what actions to take going forward.
- Parking Charges – Offering free parking in town centres may simply accommodate returning office workers, rather than support returning shoppers. Some further evaluation may be required.
- Social Controls – e.g. in high streets and town centres (social distancing etc.) will require continual review and assessment.
- Investment Levels – Will weekly priorities affect the growth trend for local business?
- HS2 – Viewed as significant growth opportunity by the Chamber of Commerce and one that must continue to be linked with Solihull's economic growth and development plans.
- Tourism: Solihull enjoyed high rates of tourism and its events were well attended. Again, public safety arrangements had to be reflected in public realm arrangements in town centres. The Tourism Forum and Chamber of Commerce supported any schemes to encourage 'think local' in shopping and consumer spending behaviours in the borough in support of the local economy.

Mr John Callaghan, Principal and Chief Executive, Solihull College and University Centre, advised Members that the college and university centre was addressing the digital skills gap, with investment and spending of £1M to support staff and students

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with on-going I.T. support. The college had invested £750,000 procuring JCB trucks for training purposes for the HS2 line and had further enhanced HS2 training through installing some track at the HS2 college site. Key headlines for the college and university centre at the present time included:

- An 80% conversion rate to jobs.
- £200,000 invested on a trial simulator for heavy plant machinery.
- Significant investment to date supporting HS2 skills and employment opportunities.
- IT Investment – Assessing future opportunities for on-line provision.
- Solihull Town Centre – Many students recognised as patrons of the town centre and seeking to facilitate arrangements to sustain continuing support going forward.
- Apprenticeships: Many sectors reports as having furloughed apprentices'. Whilst reported that some sectors beginning to revive, redundancies were being reported.
- The college was working in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority reviewing block release activity to support people into employment. For those people who have been made redundant/furloughed, re-training opportunities may present as a means to access new employment sectors.
- Working in partnership with other colleges and universities in the West Midlands region for the national rail college, with the Solihull interchange station and HS2 supply chain / procurement activity presenting significant employment opportunities.

Ms. Melanie Palmer, Chief Executive Solihull BID, informed Members that Solihull BID was a ring-fenced organisation which supported Solihull town centre only. The Covid-19 pandemic was recognised as being unprecedented. Subsequently, Solihull BID was re-setting its own business plan and working in partnership with the Council was replacing it with a town centre recovery plan. The Solihull BID recognised the need to look beyond the present and to collegiately with a range of partners including the Council, Chamber of Commerce, Colleges and Police. Ms. Palmer advised that a key point to note was that people will be working and shopping in the town centre in a very different scenario from that previously experienced prior to the pandemic.

The Solihull BID was taking a number of practical steps to support businesses in the town centre, one such example being provision of waiting benches outside shops, queuing boards for customers, marking of social distancing for shops and provision of

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communication leaflets for all retailers in the town centre detailing social distancing and new working arrangements. The BID had produced a video detailing the new arrangements for the town centre, which had received 17,000 hits to date. The Solihull BID website also provided a store opening tracker, updated daily, which had received 20,000 hits in 3 days from members of the public.

Ms. Palmer noted that car parking for the town centre was opening from 15th June at 50% capacity and believed that it should be limited to two hours free parking only in order to encourage returning shoppers and prevent parking capacity being taken for the day by office workers. It was expected that 70% of the retailers located in the town centre would re-open their premises on 15th June 2020.

With regard to respective sectors, Members were advised that whilst the office and retail sector was in a prospective recovery position, the hospitality and leisure sector was under threat, particularly due to the public realm 2 metre social distancing rule. Under the social distancing rules, hospitality businesses would not generally be in a position to generate adequate income to support their businesses when taking into account the requirements for social distancing (which has hospitality establishment capacity implications), deep cleansing requirements and rest room provision (i.e. closed). Similarly, the issue of the extension of pavement licensing in the town centre was significant for the success of some businesses. The BID was delivering a number of webinars addressing these issues directly for local businesses in the BID area.

Ms. Palmer reiterated that the key, significant message arising from the Recovery Plan had to be the importance of promoting 'local. Returning customers had to be attracted back to the town centre now via an attractive and well managed environment, through which public trust in terms of public safety arrangements could be reinforced. Public realm and place management was absolutely key in encouraging people to return to the town centre to experience social as well as retail experiences once more.

Mr Lee Osborne, Development Manager, Federation of Small Businesses, informed Members that he represented the Federation of Small Businesses representing Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull.

Member's attention was drawn to a national survey undertaken by the Federation of Small Businesses in April 2020, to which 400 responses were received from small businesses in the West Midlands region. Some of the key headlines emerging from the survey included:

- 4 in 10 businesses (41%) had closed since the pandemic outbreak.
- 36 % were uncertain as to whether they would re-open.
- Over 27% of businesses were struggling with repaying business mortgages / leases.
- 1 in 3 businesses were considering redundancies.

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- 1 in 7 small businesses were thought not to be claiming government support available through cash grants.
- Not all those eligible were accessing the self-employment scheme; similarly for recent business start - ups and those self-employed working from home.

Members were advised that the Federation of Small Businesses was keen to continue working in partnership with the Council, Solihull Chamber of Commerce and BID and regional Local Enterprise Partnerships in the region in delivering post pandemic economic growth and recovery.

Mr. Osborne agreed that the hospitality and leisure sector would face some difficulties in the future on its road to economic recovery and called for the 2 metre social distancing rule to be further reviewed by government on the grounds of cost implications, especially for small businesses. General availability and procurement of PPE was also highlighted as a cost issue.

An area highlighted as offering great opportunity for small business was procurement in the public sector, for example, through disaggregation of large contracts to encourage a wider array of potential bidders. Access for small businesses to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund would be welcomed. On-going Local Enterprise Partnership support for small business resilience was also welcomed by the Federation. With regard to apprenticeships, from the small business perspective more guidance as to how businesses could be supported to maintain apprenticeships, assist young people into employment and establish joint apprenticeships across different businesses would also be welcomed.

Councillor Courts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for the Economy, addressed the Scrutiny Board and informed Members that Council partners and other organisations had been consulted regarding the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan. The Leader noted that public confidence was an essential factor leading to the public returning to town centres and that the Council had to ensure it was doing everything in its power to build public confidence once more. The concept of 'think local' referenced in the Recovery Plan was essential to the wider recovery of the local economy. Skilling-up and re-training were recognised as significant factors in supporting people back to employment or changing career path, particularly for younger people in the present economic climate. The Leader recognised the positive work that Solihull College and University Centre was delivering in this area as well as the important role that the Federation of Small Businesses was delivering across Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull in supporting the small business sector with business advice and support.

With specific reference to the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan itself, the Leader noted that the plan contained great detail in addressing business recovery and was circulated for wider comment as early as possible. The essential role of promoting, engaging and communicating with other partners and organisations in respect of the plan was fully recognised by the Council and the plan supported a comprehensive approach to

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partnership working in this respect. The Leader also recognised the role Council officers had played in liaising with partners across a number of sectors in this regard.

The beginning of the Recovery Plan focussed on key priorities, as well as detailing specific role and objectives pertaining to place, specific business sectors, anticipated outcomes, actions and objectives, cross-cutting issues (e.g. climate change) and the role of engagement and communications in promoting the Recovery Plan with the Solihull business sector and public.

The Chairman thanked all those guests for their presentations to the Scrutiny Board. The Chairman further thanked Officers for the significant work undertaken over a short time scale in order to produce version 1 of the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan, noting that it was a significant, evidence based document which would influence much of the Council's future business over many years. The Chairman also noted that the Recovery Plan would be subject to frequent review and re-working to adapt to changing circumstances over the coming months.

Having received presentations, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a number of questions in relation to the detail in the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan, which in summary included the following:

Members sought further clarification for the relationship between the Recovery Plan and the Council's Green Prospectus.

The Economic Advisor informed Members that the borough had a climate change prospectus, which supported actions to mitigate climate change. The Recovery Plan would be informed by the climate change prospectus in light of the current economic circumstances. The Climate Change Prospectus detailed a wide range of actions addressing the climate change agenda, but that it was timely to review and identify new opportunities and changed circumstances arising. The Net Zero Action Plan was recognised as key over the summer of 2020. Green recovery in the borough would also be reviewed and aligned with the West Midlands Combined Authority actions for implementing a green recovery. This would be reflected in the Recovery Plan over the coming months.

A Member noted that the Recovery Plan had to be adaptable and closely aligned with the Council Plan. In respect of any interventions and related impacts arising the Recovery Plan, these required to be monitored and reported on a regular basis. It was queried in relation to the multiple inter-dependencies outlined in the Recovery Plan how these would be co-ordinated across Council directorates and partner organisations. The Scrutiny Board was advised that the Council had arrangements in place co-ordinating recovery activity, including all business and economic aspects. Furthermore, the interdependencies detailed led Council services and relevant business groups to identify and co-ordinate emerging trends, both internal and external, as a co-ordinated and cohesive exercise.

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A Member of the Scrutiny Board noted that key to the success of the Recovery Plan appeared to be the fostering of wider public confidence and that future Council messaging and communications had a key role to play in supporting town centre recovery across the borough. A variety of platforms would be required to communicate the objectives of the Recovery Plan to as wide an audience as possible. Specific consideration should be given to hard to reach groups in terms of how the Recovery Plan is to be successfully communicated. In terms of funding and resourcing implementation of the Recovery Plan, the Scrutiny Board questioned whether the Council had budget in place to commence implementing the Recovery Plan.

The Assistant Director (Growth and Development) advised the Scrutiny Board that the funding scenario was mixed. Longer term infrastructure plan funds were already in place, whilst employment and skills funds could be used from other projects in support of the Recovery Plan, for example, the Enterprise for Success funding. The Council also continued to seek further resources from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. Members were advised that officers were confident that short term actions detailed in the Recovery Plan could start to be delivered.

The Vice Chairman noted that the detail contained within the Recovery Plan, and its stated objectives, was impressive. Fostering public confidence had been noted as a critical to supporting a successful economic recovery, but it was noted that the Scrutiny Board and wider community in general required clarity to be provided with any information that was published for businesses and local community. The Scrutiny Board queried how smaller businesses were receiving information in order to access supportive funding.

Mr Osborne (Federation of Small Businesses) informed Members that he understood a number of Solihull businesses had successfully applied for business loans, but approximately 650 had not applied. Subsequently, the Chamber of Commerce was in the process of contacting directly the 650 businesses still to apply through the government's business loans scheme. Members were further advised that credible sources issuing information to local businesses would further support business confidence and recovery.

Councillor Hodgson informed the meeting that proposed car parking arrangements for Solihull town centre were scheduled for discussion at the Environment and Highways Cabinet Portfolio Decision Session scheduled for 23rd June 2020.

Councillor Hodgson noted that the Solihull BID store reopening tracker was an excellent tool on the Solihull BID website. With reference to the Recovery Plan itself, Councillor Hodgson noted that there was reference to Solihull, Kingshurst and Chelmsley Wood town centres, but this was not the case for Shirley town centre, and proposed that the existing Economic Plan for Shirley should also be reflected within the Recovery Plan. With reference to the Green Recovery response, Councillor Hodgson requested greater detail be provided in the Recovery Plan addressing this issue. In terms of monitoring implementation and outcomes arising from the Recovery

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Plan going forward, it was proposed that these arrangements should be detailed within the Recovery Plan and that some form of risk rating of the Recovery Plan proposals should also be provided.

The Assistant Director (Growth and Infrastructure) advised the Scrutiny Board that significant work was being undertaken by the Council in support of Shirley town centre. Some detail from the Economic Plan for Shirley was included in the Recovery Plan; for example, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP 'Shop Happy' scheme was scheduled to be launched in Shirley. The Council was also contacting businesses located in Shirley High Street to identify and discuss local business issues they were facing. A shop reopening tracker had also been developed for Shirley town centre and was available via the Council website. Members were informed that a key Council strategy for supporting town centres across the borough would be the Town Centre Framework. The Town Centre Framework strategy would review all town centre needs and would sit beneath the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan. The Town Centre Framework strategy would feature more prominently in Version 2.0 of the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan.

Measuring implementation and impact of the Recovery Plan was acknowledged as a very important point and Members attention was drawn to paragraph 3.25 of the report, which referenced the identifying of Recovery Plan milestones and output indicators in Version 2.0. It was also confirmed that RAG ratings were being developed as a management tool addressing resources and interventions for inclusion in Version 2.0 of the Recovery Plan. The work streams supporting delivery of the Green Recovery would also be reflected in the next iteration of the Recovery Plan.

Referencing the leisure and hospitality sector in light of the extended travel restrictions, the Chairman referenced paragraph 3.22 of the report, which addressed the Council's work to boost the recovery of the Borough's visitor economy, and questioned was the Council's response effective and whether forward plans were in place to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Commonwealth Games scheduled for 2022.

Mr. Elliot, Solihull Chamber of Commerce President and Solihull Tourism Forum Chairman, advised the Scrutiny Board that the Solihull hospitality sector was receiving significant support from the Council. Local tourism was as significant contributor to the local economy as that from significantly further afield. The Visit Solihull website was viewed as a significant tool for promoting the Borough and further content is under development. The tourism and hospitality opportunities presented for the Borough through the Commonwealth Games 2022, Coventry City of Culture and Birmingham Airport have been recognised, not least through ad hoc business opportunities arising through these outlying events and sites. Members were informed that the tourism sector in the Borough was well positioned and had the products and means to publicise and grow the sector in future years.

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With reference to the Recovery Plan addressing climate change, Members queried how other parts of the Council were involved with delivering the climate change element of the Recovery Plan; for example, SCH's role in reducing emissions.

The Assistant Director (Growth and Infrastructure) responded through noting that the detail in the Recovery Plan demonstrated the extensive contributions made by services across the Council as an organisation. As part of the consultative process, the Recovery Plan passed through the Council's Assistant Director's Group, which represented all services across the Council.

The Leader noted that climate change was detailed in the Recovery Plan as a cross-cutting issue for the Council and its partners and that it was a significant area of work for the West Midlands Combined Authority. A significant question to be addressed included how to integrate the climate change agenda across all aspects of the Council's services. The Leader further noted that many actions addressing climate change did not necessarily require significant investment, such as tree planting, extensive recycling amenities and reducing waste generally.

Having considered the report, Members of the Scrutiny Board put forward the following points of detail for further consideration as part of the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan Version 2.0:

- Strengthening of the link in the Recovery Plan between the role of business in supporting people in the local community who may be vulnerable/ in need of some support.
- Inclusion of KPI's addressing health and well-being and equalities.
- Raise the role of housing and house building and the challenges arising in addressing homelessness, to include how house building may support the local economy going forward.
- Amplify the point that the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan is intended to support the entire borough
- Explore further how the Council can convey the message to shop and invest locally, including exploring provision of local jobs for residents of the borough.

Having considered the report and subject to the above, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i. To note Version 1:0 of the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull; and,

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- ii. To receive for review Version 2:0 of the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull at the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for 22nd September 2020.

**6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD:
WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Scrutiny Board with detail to agree a work programme for the 2020/21 municipal year. The Scrutiny Board work programme will be reviewed at each meeting of the Scrutiny Board during 2020/21. Amendments / re-scheduling / re-prioritising to the work programme may take place at any time during the municipal year should Members of the Scrutiny Board consider it necessary.

Councillor McLoughlin noted that it was highly likely that the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull would guide much of the Scrutiny Board's future work during the 2020/21 municipal year and proposed that the following matters also be included in the 2020/21 work programme:

- Climate Action Plan (as a sub-section of the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull).
- Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- Delivery of Housing and the Housing Revenue Account headroom.
- Investing in the local economy.

Councillor Howell put forward the following issues for inclusion in the 2020/21 work programme:

- Focus on the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull actions to support local town centres, incorporating the concepts of the Local Green Plan and Think Local.
- Review of constraints within the planning system towards delivering climate change and embedding green infrastructure policies.

Councillor Williams put forward the following issues for inclusion in the 2020/21 work programme:

- Review of the Net Zero Carbon Action Plan
- SCH Housing – Affordability issues (mortgages/rent) for residents in light of the pandemic (include when reviewing housing themes).

Councillor Parker raised the following issue in respect of the 2020/21 work programme:

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- Skills Agenda: Recommend that the skills and training element of the Economic Recovery Plan for Solihull be drawn to the attention of the Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board as part of their work programming for the 2020/21 municipal year (specifically, review of availability and access to skills training for young people in the borough and available routes into employment).

Having considered the report, and taking into account the above contributions put forward by the Members of the Scrutiny Board, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- To include those subjects detailed in paragraph 3.4 of the report, and the subjects proposed by Members of the Scrutiny Board above, in the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board work programme 2020/21.

7. PRIVATE MINUTES

RESOLVED:

- The Private Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board
meeting closed at 8:10 p.m.