

FULL COUNCIL

7 JULY 2020

REPORT OF THE LEADER

1. COUNCIL UPDATE ON THE ECONOMIC STRATEGY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

1.1 Purpose of Report

To inform Council of matters of interest in relation to the economic strategy responsibilities of my portfolio. On this occasion, my report focuses solely on the development and delivery of the plan to support the Borough's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Economic Recovery Plan

1.2.1 Although the full extent of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global, national, regional and local economies will not be fully understood for quite a while, all the current indicators point to the impact being major and potentially long-lasting. Analysis by the Solihull Observatory indicates that Solihull's economy *may* be better placed overall than other areas to withstand the impact. This was demonstrated by its relatively strong recovery from the 2008/09 downturn due to its economic dynamism, well-balanced sector profile, and highly-qualified workforce.

1.2.2 As a Council we have taken the view that a local policy response is needed, informed by a robust understanding of, firstly, Solihull's economy within the regional, national and global context and, secondly, the specific opportunities and challenges facing the Borough.

1.2.3 Therefore, we have developed and are now delivering the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan. It has a combined focus on supporting local business and residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable to the economic effects of the pandemic. It also progresses our pre-pandemic growth plans with a renewed focus on inclusive and green growth in order to secure a sustainable and resilient recovery. It has been informed by the insights of partner organisations including the Chamber, Federation for Small Businesses and Solihull Business Improvement District, as well as the Council's own direct engagement with businesses and residents through its service delivery.

1.2.4 The Recovery Plan focuses on:

- (a) Supporting local businesses and residents, including targeted support for those in key sectors that have had lengthy shut downs (retail, hospitality and leisure), the self-employed, school and college leavers at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training) and those furthest from the labour market. This includes a targeted focus on health and developing resilience and skills to adapt to new business models, including digital opportunities;
- (b) Progressing, at pace, infrastructure investment at the UKC Hub including the development opportunities of the HS2 Interchange site, alongside development opportunities in Solihull Town Centre, at Kingshurst Village Centre and in Chelmsley Wood Town Centre; and progressing key work like progressing the Shirley Economic Plan and support for our High Streets.

- (c) A 'green economic recovery', supporting the Council's commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030. Climate change is an enabler and key consideration of the recovery which is why it must be a green recovery. The Council's approach to this is to develop a Net Zero Action Plan which will be a Solihull-specific set of measurable actions to enable transition to net zero for the Borough. The Low Carbon Energy Framework and the Net Zero Action Plan are key aspects of the Borough's Climate Change Prospectus and will be aligned to the Combined Authority's WM2041 Programme for Implementing a Green Recovery.

1.2.5 Immediate actions in the Recovery Plan include:

- (a) A programme of trialling cycling and walking measures to aid social distancing and access to local employment, schools and retail facilities. These form part of the Emergency Active Travel Strategy which is part of a suite of strategy documents required to reset how transport will be managed during the recovery phase and beyond. These will focus on the economic recovery and growth agenda, our Climate Change Prospectus and Air Quality Action Plan. They will also lead into further opportunities for Active Travel schemes as and when the Government release details of the £2bn investment programme it has announced.
- (b) Ensuring that businesses and residents are aware of the support that is available to them and implementation of the national support measures including the Small Business Grant Scheme.
- (c) The recovery of town and local centres. We have been working with Solihull BID, other local centre stakeholders, including Shirley traders, Visit Knowle, Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre and the Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP to develop and implement a Town and Local Centres Recovery Framework. Initial measures include the creation of a welcoming and safe environment to visit, ease of connectivity and accessibility, walking and cycling; communications to traders and consumers; and support to businesses to adapt their business models.
- (d) Boosting the recovery of the Borough's visitor economy as part of ongoing plans to develop the visitor economy locally. This includes a new 'Visit Solihull' website alongside an 'Open for Business' marketing campaign and support for tourism businesses to develop their capacity during the HS2 construction period and also the Commonwealth Games 2022.

1.2.6 The Solihull Plan complements the recovery planning work of the Combined Authority including the £3.2bn investment case for kick-starting the West Midlands' economy submitted to the Government on 23 June.

1.2.7 It was also reviewed by the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board on 11 June and Members can find a full version of the Plan itself with those [papers](#). It is now subject to continuous review to ensure our response is up to date.