

## FULL COUNCIL

4<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2023

### 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.

##### 1.2. Economic Recovery and Growth

- 1.2.1 The consultation on the new borough-wide Economic Strategy closed on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The responses are now being considered before being summarised in a Consultation Report and informing the final draft of the Economic Strategy that will be presented to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.2.2 Our data for Solihull Town Centre has demonstrated a slightly slower start to the year in terms of footfall, but with a sustained upward trajectory that brings it now in line with 2022 levels. This is supported by continued new openings within Touchwood – including the new Mango store and the new independent Latin American restaurant Tio Latino.
- 1.2.3 Interest remains strong in the Solihull office market, with 2022 seeing four significant transactions over 10,000 sq ft - from Persimmon Homes, Hayfield Homes, Tarmac and the UK Telecomms Lab, which will be operated by the National Physical Laboratory (NPL). Birmingham Business Park was a dominant force over the year, with nine successful investments.
- 1.2.4 Blythe Valley Business Park, also secured four high profile office investments, including Ridge & Partners (Civil Engineering); Johnson Controls (Building Systems); SpaMedica (Medical Technology) and GKN Powder Metallurgy Holdings (Manufacturing).
- 1.2.5 Connexion II on Blythe Valley Park is almost complete and deals have already been secured. Lift and stairlift component specialist Reeley Ltd is taking 42,000 sq ft – a family owned SME expanding from Monkspath Business Park. Solotech (Innovative AV & Entertainment Technology) are relocating from Redditch. The remaining unit, Unit 3, has exchanged, so overall the scheme will be fully let.
- 1.2.6 In Solihull, we are now seeing newly refurbished office stock coming to market, which will change the dynamic. These schemes include AIR (35 Homer Road) and Portland House, Trinity Park (former Tarmac HQ).
- 1.2.7 We continue to shape and develop regional and local plans for business support, utilising the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and maximising opportunities to support the delivery plan of our new Economic Strategy. A new West Midlands website is to be launched this month, linking Solihull businesses into our Greater Birmingham and Solihull Growth Hub, through which companies will be able to access one-to-one specialist support to grow their businesses. Regionally there will be a new decarbonisation programme supporting our businesses in their journey to net zero, in addition to help to access appropriate finance and investment support.

- 1.2.8 Last month we launched a pioneering new pilot programme, with Solihull being one of five areas across the country supporting businesses to comply with new recycling regulations. Working with national agency WRAP and delivered through Sustainability West Midlands, organisations can access free online resources and one-to-one support to calculate the waste they generate, how they can recycle to save money and to also prepare for the new regulations coming into place. I urge businesses to get ahead by getting in touch. The scheme runs until the 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- 1.2.9 The past month has been extremely busy for our Employment and Skills team, with ten different organisations supported to recruit to vacancies or training opportunities. We were pleased to work with the Home Office for the first time, to help their recruitment into brand new roles; over 30 people attended an event at the Civic Suite to find out how to apply. We continue our work with Amadeus, one of the biggest employers at the NEC, where at one recent recruitment event seven customers were offered jobs on the day. This help is making a real difference to our residents; during the last quarter over 240 new customers were helped through our Council-led employment projects.
- 1.2.10 The Employment and Skills Team base their work out of the Solihull Recruitment and Training Centre in Chelmsley Wood. This is now the home of the new Digital Hub which helps residents to improve their ICT skills for work, as well as the venue for regular recruitment events and jobs fairs. Since January 2022, we have supported 638 new customers; 484 of these new customers live in North Solihull, and 199 (41%) are age 16-29.
- 1.2.11 Since January 2022, 153 customers living in North Solihull have moved into a positive outcome – education, employment, or training.
- 1.2.12 Since the Digital Hub opened in August, 78 customers have accessed help to improve their digital skills for work, 51 live in North Solihull. The 78 customers have so far completed 470 hours of digital support.