

## FULL COUNCIL

13<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

### 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 Plan

- 1.2.1 Since my report to Full Council at the start of February, the first step of the Government's roadmap out of the lockdown was completed on 29<sup>th</sup> March ending the 'Stay at Home' order, but with many restrictions remaining in place. At this point, over 30 million people had received their first vaccine dose, a quite remarkable achievement. The second step, allowing for the reopening of non-essential retail, personal services, public buildings, indoor leisure and outdoor hospitality, due to be taken no earlier than the 12<sup>th</sup> April, will be subject to the four tests being met.
- 1.2.2 The Chancellor announced his Budget on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, extending a number of the existing support measures for individuals and businesses, including an extension to the furlough scheme until the end of September. The Budget was accompanied by publication of the Government's plan for growth – 'Build Back Better'. The Budget announcements included the welcome news of £50 million for infrastructure development at Arden Cross, including the multi-storey car park, which follows over 5 years of work by this council, as well by our partners in the region. There is still much work to do on this, but the news represents a great step forward to realising our vision for the area, to make efficient use of the land for homes and business.
- 1.2.3 Since my last report, the Council has continued to implement the national business support grants, including the local discretionary element, and has prepared to implement the new 'Restart Grants' for high street businesses, once they reopen.
- 1.2.4 The Council is continuing to engage and work with local businesses to ensure that they reopen safely. With Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council, we have launched a Business Pledge for all businesses, including shops and hospitality, to help reassure staff and customers that businesses and venues are operating in a COVID-secure manner. We are engaging with employers about their Covid testing plans and encouraging them to promote rapid and regular testing to their staff. We are supporting businesses to access the latest public health guidance and testing opportunities via our Solihull for Success monthly e-newsletters, social media comms and webpages.
- 1.2.5. We have been continuing to work with our partners to prepare for a successful reopening of our high streets. Using the £200,000 allocation approved by Cabinet in November from the Council's Place-Making Fund, we are working with our partners to bring forward 'street dressing' and marketing activities. Cabinet's approval of a further £240,000 for town and local centre recovery interventions will enable us, with our partners, to bring forward additional public realm enhancements, alongside investments in street cleaning and cultural and community events and 'Visit Solihull' marketing activity. These activities will also help ensure that Solihull is ready and looks its best for the Commonwealth Games next year

- 1.2.6. We continue to deliver support to our long-term unemployed residents, as well as those more recently unemployed. There is an updated regional redundancy support offer for businesses and employees, which will be widely shared after Easter. With Solihull Community Housing, we have identified 38 'Kickstart' placement opportunities for unemployed young people, which we will start recruiting to next month and throughout the rest of the calendar year. We are working with DWP on plans for a 'Youth Hub' at the Recruitment and Training Centre in Chelmsley Wood, where young people will be able to access employment support and training opportunities. We expect the Recruitment and Training Centre to partially re-open in spring, and fully re-open by early July.
- 1.2.7. Solihull has continued to attract inward investment despite the challenging economic conditions. Since my last report, additional investments, including an HQ investment in Shirley by e-scooter producer 'Silence', bring the total number of investments in 2020/21 to 26, including seven Foreign Direct Investments.
- 1.2.8. In summary, the Council is working with local businesses and our partners to ensure that our economy reopens safely as the lockdown restrictions are eased. We continue to support our residents through the pandemic, including bringing forward opportunities for young workers and developing our approach to inclusive growth. We continue to pursue a 'green recovery' through the delivering of our Climate Change Prospectus actions.