

FULL COUNCIL

8TH FEBRUARY 2022

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 & Growth

- 1.2.1 With the spread of the Omicron variant, the festive period saw increased staff shortages and customer cancellations. This is particularly affecting the hospitality and leisure sectors, with the Chancellor announcing a further support package. Nationally, retail footfall was down - 25% on pre-pandemic levels in the last week of December having been 16% and 18% lower through the rest of the month. Core, underlying economic growth is expected to remain modest in 2022 (source: pwc).
- 1.2.2 In Solihull, claimant unemployment has continued to fall – from 4.4% in October to 3.9% in December (from 10.5% to 9.4% in North Solihull) – below the regional and national rates of 5.5% and 4.5%. However, the number of claimants remains at a level of +41% (+17% amongst 18 to 24 year-old claimants) since before the pandemic.
- 1.2.3 We continue to bring forward opportunities for those experiencing particular barriers to employment, and I am delighted that our Kickstart scheme in partnership with SCH is progressing well. There are now ten people in Kickstart posts with a further eight awaiting a start date or offer. A further tranche of jobs went live in January, which we hope will be recruited to before the scheme closes in March. Data from DWP indicates that just over 1,000 Kickstart vacancies have been advertised in total in the Solihull area, 351 of which are live vacancies. Just under 500 young people from Solihull are currently in Kickstart roles.
- 1.2.4 The Recruitment and Training Centre in Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre remains open for face-to-face customer visits and is planning more recruitment events over the coming months. The official launch of Solihull's first Youth Hub at the Centre, by West Midlands Mayor Andy Street, is to take place in February. The Hub collaboration between partners in the Council, DWP and the voluntary and community sector is helping to provide a high-quality employment service for our jobseekers and businesses.
- 1.2.5 The Council is implementing the Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grants and top-up Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) announced on 21st December. We continue to disseminate guidance and support for businesses via our monthly 'Solihull for Success' e-newsletters and web portal. We also continue to engage with local businesses and support them to access the latest information relating to HS2, the NEC, the Airport and the Commonwealth Games through our business forums. Our Solihull Tourism Forum this month will also include an item on our employment and skills support for tourism sector businesses.
- 1.2.6 Supporting our town and local centres remains a priority, using our allocation from the Welcome Back Fund to provide face-coverings, to deliver digital comms and marketing

activities, and for engagement and signposting with high street traders.

- 1.2.7 Alongside this, we continue to support local businesses to reduce their carbon impact. This includes collaborating with the LEP Growth Hub to deliver a business support event focused on sustainability in early March.
- 1.2.8 Work is progressing on implementing the Solihull Town Centre masterplan including options for the station redevelopment and phase one of the public realm scheme, development of plans for Mell Square redevelopment, and to bring forward a mixed use scheme on the former Missoula Luna site as part of the plans for Eastgate.
- 1.2.9 There is continued progress at the UKC Hub. The UGC is developing design proposals for the multi-storey car park (MSCP) for the Interchange station and broader primary infrastructure is progressing well. The NEC and Arden Cross Ltd. are both planning to be out to the investor/developer market during 2022.
- 1.2.10 The Borough has continued to perform strongly in attracting inward investment. The Birmingham and Coventry branches of managed service provider Air IT have moved to new offices on Birmingham Business Park, which will become their West Midlands hub. Tilbury Douglas Construction Ltd. have relocated to Trinity Park. Control Equipment (UK) Ltd., a leading switchgear and control panel manufacturer, is establishing a new facility on Birmingham Business Park. Between October and December, 16 inward investments were made into Solihull, three of which were Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), and which involved the creation/attraction or safeguarding of 913 jobs. These figures indicate that the Borough is performing relatively strongly against pre-pandemic levels for inward investment.
- 1.2.11 In summary, the Council continues to work hard alongside our partners to support the safe recovery of the local economy, including by engaging and supporting businesses and residents. Our approach is in line with our commitments to inclusive growth and to reducing the Borough's carbon emissions to net zero by 2041.