

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP UPDATE**

### **Executive Summary**

Councillor Ian Johnson, Chairman of the Economic Development Task Group, provided an update from the last meeting of the Task Group that was held on 25 June 2020:

“On 25 June 2020 the Task Group met to review a Framework for Recovery, the purpose of which was to identify the issues and challenges presented by Covid-19 to the Borough’s commercial centres as lockdown is relaxed by Government and to prioritise objectives. The Framework had been drafted with the assistance of Simon Matthews Associates who had been involved in the preparation of the Council’s Economic Development Strategy and had been submitted to the Executive.

The Framework identified the following main objectives

1. Introduction of measures to create a safe environment and ensuring through marketing and PR that people are made aware
2. Restoration of consumer/customer foot-flow to the commercial centres as soon as possible
3. Encourage Borough-based employees to transition back to pre-Covid workplaces
4. Identification and support to the business community, with particular focus on SME’s at risk
5. Engage and build capacity across key internal and external stakeholders
6. Planning for the stages of crisis through to recovery.

The Business Liaison team, though Woking Works, had been providing consultancy services on a variety of topics from health and safety in the workplace to government grants and loans, while the Woking Works website had been updated with an emphasis on promoting a business directory and the [www.wearewoking.com](http://www.wearewoking.com) website was being updated with information on shop re-openings. Business Liaison and Marketing & Communications teams have established a communications plan to co-ordinate these issues.

The physical state, involving cleanliness and signage of the town centre public realm, had been a key aspect of work by the Neighbourhood Services team and Serco, while Environmental Services had been advising businesses on safe restarts. The Finance and Business Rates departments have worked miracles in getting government grants to firms in a timely fashion.

As we have reached the recovery phase as re-openings expand on 4 July a lot of work will continue to be carried out to ensure standards are high and encouraging people to come back to the commercial centres. The final aspect of the Framework will be the transformation of the Borough.

By linking all the aspects of the aims of the different stages of the Framework through from Crisis to Recovery, Woking’s investment in the town centre provides an opportunity to look beyond Covid-19 to how the town might need to adjust the offer in light of the enormous increase in online shopping and the impact on traditional high streets.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 JULY 2020

The staff have been extremely busy supporting business in difficult circumstances and as we recover from the immediate crisis we do need to think strategically into the future as to how we can maintain resilience and at the same time create a destination where people want to live and work.”

### Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

**RESOLVE That** the update be noted

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.
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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Date Published:** 3 July 2020