

## WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S SUPPORT OF LOCAL BUSINESSES DURING COVID-19

### Executive Summary

In April 2020, Woking Borough Council's Business Liaison Team, alongside Cllrs Kevin Davis and Ian Johnson, worked with Matthew's Associates to draft a Framework for Recovery for the Borough in response to the Covid-19 crisis. The Framework identified issues and challenges presented to the Borough's commercial centres by the Covid-19 crisis. The report recommended a wide range of options to consider, to support micro, small and medium sized businesses, and to attract residents, workers and visitors back into the Borough's commercial centres.

The publication of the Council's Economic Development Action Plan in September 2021 (Executive Committee) recognized that businesses were now in a position of post-pandemic recovery. The Action Plan is an interim measure to take us to the end of 2023, when an updated Economic Development Strategy will be adopted.

Between March 2020 and December 2021, the Council supported local businesses by distributing financial assistance quickly, giving business support and advice as well as frequent communication with businesses. The Council distributed £27,381,704.44 in grants to local business made available by the Government.

Business support and advice services were made available to all businesses based in the Borough and included one to one advice session and workshops, with 53 business attending. Officers from the Business Liaison Team proactively engaged with business across the borough to understand how they had been impacted by the pandemic and to inform them how and where to get support.

The Business Liaison team, working with colleagues in Marketing, Finance, Revenues and Benefits and other local partners created a business facing messaging campaign across our communication channels – offline media, e-newsletters, the Woking Works and WeAreWoking websites, email and social media to help keep business up to date with grants and business support on offer as well as news and updates about changes to Covid-19 restrictions. Alongside this, a campaign promoting local businesses has been running continuously, showcasing the range of businesses across the borough.

The Council's support for business continues into 2022. Alongside the support and advice services led by the Business Liaison Team, two further grants (announced in December 2021) will be available for leisure and hospitality businesses impacted by the omicron variant.

Following the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2022–25, the Council has earmarked further funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant, wider business to seek a partner to introduce a Digital Centre of Excellence supporting a "green tech" incubator hub.

### Recommendations

The committee is requested to:

**RESOLVE That:** the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

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- Background Papers:** Framework for Recovery Annual Report April 2020 – March 2021  
Economic Development Action Plan Report April 2021 – November 2021
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- Date Published:** 11 February 2022

## WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S SUPPORT OF LOCAL BUSINESSES DURING COVID-19

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In April 2020, Woking Borough Council's Business Liaison Team, alongside Cllrs Kevin Davis and Ian Johnson, worked with Matthew's Associates to draft a Framework for Recovery for the Borough in response to the Covid-19 crisis.
- 1.2 The Framework identified the issues and challenges presented to the Borough's commercial centres by the Covid-19 crisis. The report recommended a wide range of options to consider, to support micro, small and medium sized businesses, and to attract residents, workers and visitors back into the Borough's commercial centres once the different restrictions were lifted.
- 1.3 The Council provided a wide range of business support both directly and through Woking Works, as well as helping businesses access government support, providing advice and help with a range of issues. During this period, Council officers:
  - Had over 650 interactions with businesses including one-to-one support with business advisers and support for strategy, business plans and marketing as well as start-up support and continued to engage with businesses throughout 2020/21.
  - Directly contacted business owners and business managers on the high streets and villages across Woking Borough with advice and support
  - Contacted individuals with specific needs, such as office space requirements and provided advice on grant applications or other government initiatives.
  - Supported the #WeAreWoking campaign, to encourage customers back onto the high street and to 'shop local'
  - Invested in our High Streets and commercial areas with multiple Covid secure measures such as providing free sanitiser, public awareness signage and an enhanced cleaning regime
  - Accessed the Welcome Back Fund resources to further enhance the public realm, introducing additional safety precautions, such as screens separating outside diners, additional cycle racks and other measures to make the environment cleaner and more accessible
  - We worked with both local and county Chambers of Commerce to ensure key information was disseminated to Borough businesses
- 1.4 Through the Woking Works business support service, the Council delivered a range of well-attended webinars on topics requested by businesses, including re-engagement with customers after lockdown, digital skills, employment law, return to work advice, resilience of businesses, IT security, organisational well-being of staff, marketing and social media workshops.

Service	Number of Businesses attending (Between June 2020 and September 2021)
One to One Business Advice Clinic	53
Social Media Surgery	25
Google My Business Workshop	48
Woking Works Webinar	43

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- 1.5 Following the Framework for Recovery, the Economic Development Action Plan 2021 – 2023 has been developed and adopted. The priorities and actions in this interim plan are in place to take us from the period covered by the current 2017 – 2022 Economic Development Strategy to the time when the new Economic Development Strategy is developed and published.
- 1.6 The Framework for Recovery contained aims with tightly focused actions under each of the four stages; Crisis, Pre-Recovery, Recovery and Transformation, many of which have now been completed for the first two stages. The aims for the recovery and transformation stages remain highly relevant to this action plan and have been incorporated into the Economic Development Action Plan 2021 – 2023 as appropriate. The business support and advice elements of the Framework for recovery have been continued in the Economic Development Action Plan, through priorities 1 and 2 (Focus on Business and Build on Our People and Skills Advantages).

### 1.7 Communications

At the start of the pandemic, a Coronavirus information webpage was created on Woking Works with the latest information on the support available to businesses from the Council, central Government, and local partners. This was updated regularly, as new measures were introduced or amended.

Additional support schemes from UK Government and local partners were promoted to businesses through the Woking Works e-newsletter and social media channels. These included the Kickstart Scheme (youth employment), and the Kick-starting Tourism grant, and Restart and Recovery grants, from Enterprise M3.

A social media campaign was developed to share messaging about business support schemes and updates from Government. Content promoting local businesses was also included in the plan, as lockdown eased, and different sectors were brought back i.e., non-essential retail in June and hospitality in July. Throughout 2020 and 2021, Woking Works continued to shine a spotlight on local businesses in different sectors and also celebrated longstanding businesses in the community. The content plan was flexible to allow for urgent posts to be created and shared. The campaign ran across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and also Instagram.

### 1.8 Business Support Grants

Information about central Government business support grants (i.e., the Retail and Hospitality Grant, Small Business Grant and the different winter lockdown/tier closure grants) and Woking Borough Council's Discretionary Grants were promoted across all Woking Works channels (email newsletter and social media) as well as to other support organisations. Officers liaised with the Revenues and Benefits and Finance teams to keep up to date with when the different grant schemes were open for applications. This also meant that officers were also able to provide ad hoc support for businesses who had enquiries about these grants.

Between March 2020 and September 2021, the Council has distributed over 4860 grants totalling £27,381,704.44 to local businesses across the different schemes. Below is a table which show the different grant schemes and the total amounts distributed.

March 2020 Retail and Hospitality and Small Business Grants	
COVID-19 GRANTS GRANT-SCHEME 1 (Small Business Grant)	£6,500,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS GRANT-SCHEME 2A (Retail and Hospitality)	£990,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS GRANT-SCHEME 2B (Retail and Hospitality)	£6,475,000.00

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National Restrictions Grants (November – December Lockdown)	
COVID-19 GRANTS LOCKDOWN 2 NRSG MANDATORY A	£286,810.00
COVID-19 GRANTS LOCKDOWN 2 NRSG MANDATORY B	£272,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS LOCKDOWN 2 NRSG MANDATORY C	£162,000.00
Pub Grants (Tier restrictions December 2020)	
COVID-19 GRANTS WET LED PUBS - CHRISTMAS 2020	£7,000.00
December 2020 Tier 3 and 4 restrictions and 2021 National Lockdown	
COVID-19 GRANTS OPEN DEC 20: UNDER 15K	£65,847.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: UNDER 15K: DEC 19-JAN 4	£193,573.27
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: UNDER 15K-JAN 5-FEB 15	£489,244.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: UNDER 15K: FEB 16-MAR 31	£526,096.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: UNDER 15K-LUMP SUM	£976,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS OPEN DEC 20:15K TO 51K	£60,900.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21:15K TO 51K: DEC 19-JAN 4	£160,500.57
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21:15K TO 51K-JAN 5-FEB 15	£417,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21:15K TO 51K: FEB 16-MAR	£471,450.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21:15K TO 51K-LUMP SUM	£834,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS OPEN DEC 20: OVER 51K	£35,430.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: OVER 51K: DEC 19-JAN 4	£102,000.08
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: OVER 51K-JAN 5-FEB 15	£256,500.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: OVER 51K: FEB 16-MAR 31	£273,412.00
COVID-19 GRANTS JAN 21: OVER 51K-LUMP SUM	£513,000.00
Re Start Grant March 2021	
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 1: UNDER 15K	£162,687.00
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 1:15K TO 51K	£212,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 1: OVER 51K	£150,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 2: UNDER 15K	£1,376,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 2:15K TO 51K	£972,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS RESTART STRAND 2: OVER 51K	£666,000.00
COVID-19 GRANTS ARG - RESTART TOP UP	£433,312.00
Additional Restrictions (Discretionary) Grants)	
COVID-19 GRANTS DISCRETIONARY GRANTS	£697,400.00
COVID-19 GRANTS ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS (ARG)	£2,415,690.06
COVID-19 GRANTS ARG - WIDER BUSINESS SUPPORT	£228,852.46

### 1.9 Further Support

In December 2021, a further set of business grants were announced from Central Government to help support businesses in the Leisure and Hospitality sectors who were impacted the loss of footfall and cancellation of bookings due to the spread of the Omicron variant.

This grant is to support these businesses at what would have been a busy time for these business over the Christmas and New Year period. Additional funding for the ARG scheme has also been made available to help support businesses impacted by the omicron variant.

Applications for the main grant funding opened on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and will close on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2022. At time of writing, there have been 197 applications from local hospitality, leisure

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and accommodation businesses. Officers are reviewing how to distribute the ARG 'top-up' funding.

### **Digital Centre of Excellence**

Officers are seeking a partner to establish a Digital Centre of Excellence (DCoE) incorporating a business support service at its core is seen as crucial to establishing Woking as a technology hub which will focus on meeting the challenges climate change has brought to the planet. The Council's Woking 2050 Climate Change Strategy, the Economic Development Action Plan, and its Digital Strategy provides the overarching vision to putting Woking on the map as providing a sustainable environment supporting "green technology" (technology whose use is intended to mitigate or reverse the effects of human activity on the environment), cleantech, net zero/ neutral carbon companies.

It is important for the Council and the local economy to support growth and success, as well as encourage further business into the borough. The borough currently has 850 technology organisations. Creating a Digital Centre of Excellence around these organisations and expanding this number will further support its residents, businesses and wider community, by providing jobs, wealth and a reputation that Woking (recently voted the greenest Council in Surrey) takes the environment and climate change seriously.

## **2.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 2.1 The Framework for Recovery and Economic Development Action Plan 2021 – 2023 both inform the Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 The Economic Development Action Plan 2021 – 2023 acts as an interim plan to take us from the period covered by the current 2017 – 2022 Economic Development Strategy to the time when the new Economic Development Strategy is developed and published.

## **3.0 Implications**

### Finance and Risk

There are no financial implications resulting from this report

### Equalities and Human Resources

There are no equalities or Human Resources implications resulting from the report

### Legal

This report has been reviewed by Legal Services who have not raised any issues.

## **4.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 4.1 Local businesses were consulted upon the priorities for the Economic Development Action Plan through the Woking Community Forum. Responses to this were incorporated into the action plan.

In May and September 2020, the Business Liaison team Covid Impact Survey to get an understand of where businesses were, which has helped to shape the support offered to meet the needs of our local businesses.

REPORT ENDS