

**REPORT OF**

**To: Head of Communities & Place**

**Subject: Update on the Team Devon Covid 19 Economic and Business Recovery Programme**

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021**

**Reference:**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:** To update members the Team Devon Covid 19 Economy and Business Recovery Programme and to discuss the next steps for delivery in Torridge

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This is the first opportunity to present to members the work of Team Devon during 2020 in response to the economic impacts of Covid 19 pandemic and what will be done to expedite recovery. Developed in partnership by local authorities, key public sector agencies, business and community stakeholders, the plan provides a single economic programme for the County to respond to the crisis and build back better our economy. It aligns activities to address our hardest hit places, communities and business sectors and take forward emerging new opportunities.

COVID 19 has had a disproportionate impact upon the Devon economy, its businesses and its residents, with strong indications that the next 18 months may be amongst the most challenging economically in living memory for many areas

The picture of the emerging impact across Devon is however complex, changing from sector to sector and place to place. 92% of Devon businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector for example were disrupted by the crisis between March and June 2020, but only 5% of business in the digital sector faced the same level of disruption. The impact of the latest national lockdown is likely to be similar or perhaps worse.

It is anticipated that the local impact of this economic downturn will vary greatly, from a 2-year dip and recovery period in Exeter, through to a 10% reduction and 5-year recovery journey for areas such as Mid Devon and Torridge. For some sectors, such as tourism and hospitality, the journey back to levels of income and employment experienced in 2019 may take a decade.

The challenge for Devon partners is twofold; to devise and deliver activity to alleviate and manage the overall impacts of COVID 19, managing and mitigating a once in a lifetime economic shock to the County's economy; and ensure the County has a support and recovery packages which can also address the need of the hardest hit, whether individuals, businesses, whole sectors or whole communities / towns. This will require a joined up, cross discipline approach to recovery over the next few years, with partners from every sector contributing towards securing and delivering a comprehensive recovery package for the people and businesses of Devon.



## 2. REPORT

The Team Devon programme focuses upon securing support and delivering action in four core areas:

- **Our People** – Ensuring that our workforce and our residents are supported through the current downturn and provided with the support they need to access good quality work and learning, reinforcing both their prosperity and that of the wider economy.
- **Our Businesses** – Supporting our business community through the current crisis, and enabling it to emerge stronger, more diverse and more resilient than on entry. In particular, seeking to reinforce our hardest hit sectors, such as Tourism and Retail, whilst still maximizing the impact of new growth opportunities for Devon.
- **Our Places** – Ensuring that no place or community is left behind through the current crisis, whether our rural and coastal communities which provide the backbone of our visitor and agricultural economy, or our core city and market towns which underpin our manufacturing, health and digital expertise.
- **Our Opportunities** – Ensuring that the County maximises the impact of emerging opportunities to drive recovery and set a renewed economic direction for the future, whether for our people, communities, business or whole economy.

In bringing forward this programme, partners within Devon are also mindful that recovery is likely to be an inconsistent journey, with a need for differing actions as the economic situation progresses and business and individuals needs change. As such, this plan splits its action into three core timeframes, which are:

- **Restart** – Focusing on activity which can immediately seek to address the worst impacts of the COVID 19 crisis and support our economy as it emerges from lockdown, whether around reopening and reorienting business; supporting displaced employees; or providing initial assistance for places to reopen.
- **Regrow** – Seeking to bring forward actions which will allow business and communities to return to the status quo, addressing both economic challenges and supporting wider efforts to close the gap between Devon's economy and the wider UK. This includes efforts to modernise and diversify our business community, our workforce and our approach to our environment; improve our places and quality of life offer; and set the foundation for future growth.
- **Reset** – Actions to change and enhance the trajectory of Devon's economy, seeking to build on Devon's sector and business capabilities, workforce capacity and environmental strength to return economically bigger, better and bolder than when the crisis began.

Whilst the Devon Partnership has set out a strong vision of the recovery they wish to see through this document, such action will not be possible without appropriate resources. Given the scale of the challenge faced, existing resources alone will not be enough to see Devon even return to its pre COVID 19 status. As such, this document is intended as a tool to be used in seeking additional support at the national, sub-national and local level towards its ambitions, seeking to align a package of enhanced funding and capacity across themes and organisations to improve outcomes for Devon's businesses, residents and communities.

Partners from all across the county believe that there is now an opportunity to restart, regrow and reset our economy in the face of the COVID 19 crisis, emerging a stronger, more dynamic location which can play its part for UK plc's resurgence, as well as close the gap for our



communities and residents. In achieving this ambition, every sector and individual has a role to play, from rebuilding our tourism trade to embedding our digital expertise; from supporting young people transition into work for the first time; to supporting a greener and more inclusive economy, that retains local benefits for all. With the right resource and commitment at all levels, Devon partners believe that they can build Devon back better.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS

#### Legal Implications

N/A

#### Financial Implications

N/A

#### Human Resources Implications

N/A

#### Sustainability Implications

N/A

#### Equality/Diversity

N/A

#### Risk Management

N/A

#### Compliance with Policies and Strategies

N/A

#### Ward Member and Leader Member Views

Cllr Hicks – 20/01/21

I welcome this update and will be working closely with the team on delivery of the next steps identified in the report.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Having said all of the above, and while good progress on delivery of actions that support the programme is being made, there has to be a recognition that we remain in the response or restart phase of dealing with the Covid Pandemic. The affect of this is that many resources available to the Council are currently deployed in the delivery of acute services that are estimated to be between 30-40% directly attributable to the immediate impacts of the pandemic in addition to normal work loads. An example is the extra work generated by the assessment, administration and reporting associated with the various grant schemes made available by the Government but distributed by the Districts/ Unitary authorities. To date Torridge District Council has distributed £32,000,000 of emergency grant funding to local businesses and this work is ongoing.

Teams have though managed to make grant application for external funding for recovery and taken various opportunities to improve service delivery that will have long lasting benefit in addition to delivering some of the most efficient and effective grant delivery services in the region (if not Country).

The Initial Next Steps:



1. To produce a prospectus of economic development projects that demonstrates the opportunities and needs of the District. This will be used to develop delivery partnerships with other agencies like the LEP. In addition we will develop the initial prospectus into a short-period Economic Strategy for northern Devon, in partnership with key stakeholders across the region.
2. Work with NDC and the LEP to deliver actions complimentary to 'Build Back Better', the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership's emerging Covid 19 Economic Recovery Plan. Point one above will be aligned to this.
3. Deliver the Getting Building Fund projects that have been approved following earlier interventions in the development of the Devon Programme. These include the Burrows Centre, Work hubs and Smart Biosphere pilot project.
4. Produce Business Support proposals to be delivered by Torridge and North Devon Council through North Devon + funded by the Additional Restrictions Grant allocation. The idea will be to create a legacy of well governed small businesses that are well equipped to exploit business opportunities, including to support start-up entrepreneurial opportunities.
5. To work in partnership with the Heart of the South West LEP to delivery the ambitions set out in the emerging Coastal Productivity Plan.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the contents of the report are noted and that periodic progress updates on Economic and Business Recovery are brought to this committee for the attention of members.

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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| Consultations:     | Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Governance, S151 Officer, Economic Development Officer, NDC Head of Place |
| Contact Officer:   | Head of Communities and Place  |
| Background Papers: | Team Devon Covid 19 Economy and Business Recovery Programme  |

