

# Public Document Pack

Subject to approval at the next Covid-19 Recovery Working Party meeting

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## COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING PARTY

23 July 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bennett, Chapman (Chairman), Cooper, Mrs Cooper, Dendle, Mrs Haywood, Mrs Staniforth, Ms Thurston, Tilbrook (Vice-Chair) and Dr Walsh

Councillors were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

Apologies: Councillors

### 6. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Councillors and Officers to the meeting. He provided a brief summary of how the meeting would be conducted and the protocol that would be followed and how any break in the proceedings due to technical difficulties would be managed.

### 7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

### 8. MINUTES

The minutes of the Working Party held on 2 July 2020 were approved by the Working Party as a correct record true record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman when the offices were reopened.

### 9. THE COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

At its first meeting held on 2 July 2020, the Working Party agreed to investigate five core themes that are being used by the Government Recovery Group, working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the District Council Network (DCN) and County Council Network (CCN). The core themes used by the Government for their "Recovery Cell" are set out below: The themes are the same as the Government's Recovery Cell:

1. Business Communities, Sector and Innovation
2. Labour Markets, Unemployment and Skills
3. Hospitality, Visitor Economy and Rural Areas
4. Place Making and High Streets
5. Green Sustainable Recovery

The Chairman explained that the working party would use Appendix A of the notes of the meeting held on 2 July as the agenda for this part of the meeting. Accordingly, he opened the discussion to discuss each of the five themes in turn.

## **1. Business Communities, Sector and Innovation**

The Chief Executive briefed the meeting on the intention to investigate the approximately 3,500 contacts obtained under the recent Government Business Grants Scheme with the database on Arun Business Partnership (ABP) members in order to create a sound business directory for future contact and advice. Miriam Nicholls then briefed the meeting on the ABP, its aims and objectives and present membership. In answer to questions from members, Miriam explained some of the present constraints associated with the “static” nature of its website and the difficulty in getting venues of suitable size for meetings. Members expressed their desire that the resources available to the ABP should be sufficient to ensure that it was fit for purpose so that ABP could play an effective role in assisting the economic recovery of the District. It was generally felt that this could form the nucleus of the first recommendation to Cabinet. It was agreed that this point of discussion had been wide enough to absorb items 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.6 in Appendix A of the report.

The Working Party then considered item 1.5, the Horticultural Sector which was a significant employer within the District. Members were disappointed to note that there had, so far, been no specific proposals from Central Government on support measures for this important sector of our local economy.

With regard to the hospitality sector (item 1.7 Appendix A) Members noted that this would be discussed under section 3 of the Appendix.

Under item 1.8 “Culture” Members noted the recent Government announcement of a support package amounting to £1.57bn.

Moving then to item 1.9, Green Business and making businesses more aware of Green issues; Members noted the recent announcements of Central Government regarding the injection of funds to reduce the carbon impact of insulation and heating in homes, commercial premises and public buildings.

At item 1.10, Buying Local, Members noted that whilst there had been encouraging developments in this activity during “lockdown” the real issue was the extent that this would be continued given the current pressure for large Supermarket chains for suppliers to cut contract prices by 10%.

Moving then to 1.11 and 1.12 “promoting opportunities to graduates and employment opportunities for young people”, the Working Party discussed ways in which liaison with providers of Higher and Further Education in the District could be strengthened. One potential opportunity was to conduct a “skills shortage survey” across employers using the ABP in order to establish how the recently announced extra funding for Skills Academies and the “Kickstart Scheme” might be used most

effectively. This might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet. For future meetings this item will be amalgamated with Section 2, Labour Markets, Unemployment and Skills.

## **2. Labour markets, Unemployment and Skills**

Cllr. Bennett re declared his interest in student accommodation.

The Working Party noted the discussion already taken under 1.7 above.

A Member raised the issue of Arun offering apprenticeship opportunities to young people. After discussion this was widened to include “internships” and might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

It was noted that significant local employment opportunities could follow the rollout of the Government scheme on “green” insulation and heating for homes, business premises and public buildings. It was noted that Arun had only recently upgraded gas heating in its properties and scope for “greening” our housing stock was, therefore, potentially limited. Nonetheless this might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

## **3. Hospitality/Visitor Economy and Rural Areas**

The Working Party noted the recent announcement by the Chancellor that VAT would be temporarily reduced from 20% to 5% and the introduction of “eat out” vouchers.

On the strengthening of the hospitality sector and the visitor economy Members discussed the possibility of promoting the construction of more self-catering units for individuals and families. After discussion it was agreed that this would form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

Under “not spots! (item 3.3), the Chief Executive informed the meeting that there were no “not spots” in the District and this item was therefore deleted from the schedule. However, previous discussion of item 3.3, students from disadvantaged backgrounds had suggested that the local Education Authority (WSCC) should be approached as to the plans to continue with the supply of IT equipment to qualifying students. After further discussion the working party agreed that this might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

On “package bundles” (Item 3.4) to make Arun more attractive to visit it was noted that this work was already in train through Experience West Sussex.

Transport links and discounts for public transport were discussed under item 3.5 of Appendix A. Members felt that there should be a recommendation to Cabinet to

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“engage” with WSCC so that rural isolation issues could be better addressed for the economic and social benefit of disadvantaged and vulnerable elderly residents.

Under item 3.6, the Working Party then discussed the possibility of promoting a more localised form of AirBnB. It was agreed that further work was needed on this and it might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

The item at 4.5 of the Appendix (Sussex by the Sea) was then discussed under Section 3 as it was considered to be more appropriate under this section. The Chief Executive briefed on the meeting on the background to “Sussex by the Sea.” After discussion it was agreed that this would form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet.

#### **4. Place Making, High Streets**

On items 4.1 and 4.2 of Appendix A it was noted that there was nothing to add at this time.

Item 4.3 the “Belgian Model” was briefly discussed and it was thought that this might form the basis for a recommendation to Cabinet and see also 4.4 below.

On item 4.4, an addition was introduced so that it included “having more restaurants that are sea facing in order to take advantage of our location”. It was also noted that the District had carried out considerable work on the potential “Zoning” of the sea fronts at Bognor Regis and Littlehampton and the Working Party expressed interest in gaining a better understanding of the potential benefits arising from the work. It was agreed that Denise Vine would be asked to circulate a briefing note to Members.

Item 4.5 (Sussex by the Sea) had been moved into Theme 3, item 3.5 above.

On item 4.6 and 4.8 building property in town centres and planning roles, Karl Roberts provided an update on current proposals from Central Government to ease or abolish planning restrictions/procedures. Future progress might be directed to consideration of these issues by the Planning Policy Sub Committee via a recommendation to Cabinet.

Item 4.9 concerned links to Experience West Sussex details of which had been circulated to the Working Party.

Items 4.10 and 4.11 covered improvements to High Streets and Town Centres. The salient issue that emerged was the need to maintain a “community hub” facility and in villages to explore, with Parish Councils, the possibility of maintaining hubs based around Village halls. One of the critical success factors would be the use of electronic media for inbound/outbound communication and one Member expressed reservations about local abilities to do this given that not all villages had access to “silver surfers.” The Chairman undertook to look further into this and report to her outside the meeting.

On the need to provide shelter for rainy days when queuing was necessary one Member expressed her absolute opposition to the provision of “poncho’s.”

## **5. Green/Sustainable Recovery**

Under item 5.1 solar panels on properties, it was noted that the Government proposal also now covered the provision of carbon neutral insulation and heating to social housing. The recent upgrade to gas heating in the District’s housing stock meant that this would require detailed consideration.

On the electrical vehicle strategy (item 5.2), Members noted the recent decision of Cabinet to commit to the WSCC Strategy on provision of charging points for electrically propelled vehicles. It was also noted that when the Sustainability Manager was in place an action plan would be created to speed up the delivery of a green, carbon neutral, plan for the District including the provision of electric vehicles within the Arun fleet. This might also feature in a recommendation to Cabinet.

In discussing the sustainability of new houses (5.3), Members expressed the need to design new build to cater for a “design for life” so that as the population aged people to retain mobility and utility in their homes without the need for major alteration. More work was needed on this.

For item 5.4, discussion focussed on obtaining synergy from the various bio-diversity groups across the District. Philipps Dart had provided a list of groups. After discussion it was agreed that the means of obtaining better synergy might form the basis of a recommendation to Cabinet. It was also noted under 5.11 that cash flow should not impede our ability to encourage close working between these groups.

It was agreed that item 5.9 on geothermal boreholes would not be progressed further and neither would 5.10 on grants to the public.

## **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Working Party decided that a further meeting was needed in order to finalise recommendations to Cabinet on 21 September 2020. After discussion it was agreed that the meeting would take place on Tuesday, 8 September at 6.00 pm.

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanked Members and Officers for their input.

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(The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm)