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

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COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING PARTY

8 September 2020 at 6.00 pm

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

[Note: Councillors Ms Thurston and Dr Walsh were absent from the meeting during consideration of the matters contained in the following minutes – Minute 11 to 13 (Part on the discussion on Theme 1)].

11. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers to the third meeting of this Working Party.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting of the Working Party held on 23 July 2020 were approved as a correct record and it was agreed that these would be signed by the Chairman at his earliest opportunity.

14. THE COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

The Chairman briefly reflected on the last two meetings of the Working Party held on 2 and 23 July 2020 and stated that there had been meaningful discussion looking at the key themes that should be fully examined to confirm how the Council should move forward into its recovery stage. The work undertaken to date had been collated into a data sheet containing five key themes which had been updated further for this meeting and which the Working Party had identified should be explored. The Chairman confirmed that he wished to have placed on record his thanks to Gemma Stubbs for her assistance in bringing this work together.

The Working Party then focused on a list of recommendations that had been formulated from discussion held at the last Working Party meeting which if agreed, would become formal recommendations for Cabinet to consider at its next meeting to be held on 21 September 2020. In view of the number of recommendations proposed, the Chief Executive suggested that once the Working Party had confirmed these, it might wish to also place them into an order of priority.

The Working Party then worked through the recommendations which are as set out below – these were theme by theme:

Theme 1 : Business Communities, Sector and Innovation

1(i) That a reliable database of skills shortage is compiled so that the District can effectively play its part in recovering and continuing the economic wellbeing of business and residents in the future. The Arun Business Partnership should be involved in this process (*Items 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. 1.4 and 1.6 in Appendix A*).

1(ii) That a further study is initiated into the convergence of the results of the survey of skills shortages with the extra Government funding for “Skills Academies” (*Items 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. 1.4 and 1.6 in Appendix A*).

These recommendations were agreed by the Working Party.

Theme 2 : Labour Markets, Unemployment and Skills

2(i) That the “Climate Change and Sustainability Manager” (when appointed) should fully engage with local enterprises in the drive for improved “green” insulation and heating for homes, business premises and public buildings (*General Comments Section in Appendix A*).

The Chairman invited further input and Councillor Dr Walsh reported on his attendance, earlier that afternoon, at a meeting of the Coast to Capital LEP involving the Group Leaders of neighbouring local authorities. That meeting had discussed the main themes felt to be essential to instigate recovery being Stronger; Smarter; and Greener, so this recommendation was very relevant.

Councillor Dendle stated that the wording should be strengthened to illustrate the level of engagement that would be required with businesses to develop products. It was acknowledged that business would need to be on board to drive improvement in areas such as ‘green’ insulation, but it was also essential to equally push for businesses to develop new ‘green’ products to achieve climate change goals.

Discussion developed on the actual role of the new Climate Change and Sustainability Manager in terms of how exhaustive the Job Description was or would be and if it could accommodate Councillor Dendle’s query. Questions were asked about how the postholder would quantify local enterprise; what this would involve; and that this could be difficult to compile in the absence of a business directory.

Further questions were asked in terms of whether the JD for this post had been confirmed; and when would the appointment process commence as it was critical that the specification contained exactly what the Council wanted this post to achieve. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Job Description and Person Specification had been agreed and so recruitment was progressing.

The Working Party still looked for reassurance in terms of what the post would achieve and what had been included as key aims and objectives. Close working with the Business Partnership would be key to achieving main goals and accessing grants.

It was felt that the wording in the recommendation needed to reflect the Council's aims for the applicant to also consider other emerging innovations. It was pointed out that the work of the Climate Change and Sustainability Manager would, at time, cross over with the work of the new Commercial Manager when recruited to work on entrepreneurial green issues.

Revised wording to the recommendation was then proposed as set out below – deletions are shown using ~~strike through~~ and additions shown using **bold**:

“the “Climate Change and Sustainability Manager” (when appointed) should fully engage with local enterprises in the drive for ~~improved~~ economic recovery including “green” insulation and heating for homes, business premises and public buildings **and other emerging innovations and new products**.

The Working Party agreed the amendments to this recommendation.

Theme 3 – Hospitality/Visitor Economy and Rural Areas

3(i) The Planning Policy Sub-Committee consider how the provision of higher numbers of self-catering units for families and individuals in the District might be increased (*Item 3.6 in Appendix A*).

This was agreed by the Working Party.

3(ii) The Council supports the emergency provision of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils and students during lockdown and formulate a policy statement. It is also recommended that Cabinet seeks clarification from West Sussex County Council about any plans they have to continue the supply of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils in schools or colleges (*Item 3.5 in Appendix A*).

There was numerous discussion on this recommendation in terms of whether it was necessary to formulate a Policy statement; should this be an action for the Council in any case in or out of a pandemic; and what was the amount and type of equipment disposed of and to who. The Chief Executive explained that the Council did have equipment that could be passed onto disadvantaged pupils and that this project was handled by WSCC. He would liaise with Becky Shaw to obtain further details on how this worked and whether this was a permanent initiative.

The Chairman suggested that the Council should formulate a policy for the District so that this could be passed onto WSCC as Education Authority to action. The Working Party unanimously agreed that any scheme should continue on a permanent basis but was not sure of the need to compile a policy statement to undertake such work. The Working Party finally agreed the recommendation subject to the removal of the need to formulate a policy statement and also to remove reference that such a scheme only be operated during lockdown confirming it as a permanent and much needed scheme.

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The revised recommendation was confirmed as – deletions shown using ~~strike through~~ and additions shown in **bold**:

The Council supports the emergency provision of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils and students ~~during lockdown and formulate a policy statement.~~ It is also **therefore** recommended that Cabinet seeks clarification from West Sussex County Council about any plans they have to continue the supply of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils in schools or colleges (*Item 3.5 in Appendix A*).

3(iii) To seek the approval of the Council to seek a Commercial Buyer of the Sussex by the Sea brand (*Item 4.5 in Appendix A*).

Subject to some minor queries, the Working Party supported this recommendation. Questions asked were whether this would be an outright sale or a majority stake sale. The point was made that the Council should drive some of the agenda and through this vehicle be able to attract more commercial traffic into the District. The Chief Executive reminded Councillors that they would receive a presentation from Blue Sail who were undertaking a review of the Council's tourism function. This recommendation would sit behind this work and also the work of Experience West Sussex in terms of industry support and trade development. The Director of Place confirmed that work on this review was still ongoing and so he anticipated that it would probably be a further 4-5 weeks before there would be a report ready for Members to consider.

Following some further discussion, this recommendation was agreed.

Theme 4 : Place Making, High Streets

4(i) To seek clarification from the Planning Policy Sub-Committee on the impact of the emerging changes from Central Government to "ease" Planning Law and Procedures (*Item 4.5 in Appendix A*).

The Director of Place was asked for an update on the White Paper. This was difficult to do, only to say that it would be a real challenge to understand the scale of changes and what these would mean for the Council. The Director of Place confirmed that he was not sure what this recommendation was asking the Sub-Committee to do because the changes anticipated within the White Paper had not yet come into effect. The only changes that had very recently been made were around the simplifying the use of classes and as these had only been effective for a matter of weeks, it was too early to be able to form a view and so it was felt that this recommendation was premature and perhaps should be delayed. Following discussion, the Working Party agreed to delete this recommendation for now but remembering to take a re-look in a bout one year's time.

4(ii) To commission a consultative exercise with Parish and Town Councils to establish their capability and willingness to continue to provide Community Hubs for the future to ensure that community/social support gained during the emergency are not lost (*Item 4.9 in Appendix A*).

The Chief Executive was confident that Town and Parish Councils would continue to offer their willingness to this and so there was really no need to conduct a consultative exercise with them. He felt that the wording to this recommendation could be simplified to reflect this and it was suggested that the wording “commission a consultative exercise” be deleted and replaced with “To consult” with Town and Parish Councils This change was supported by the Working Party.

Councillor Mrs Cooper raised a concern that some Councils did not have an action plan in place to conduct this work and it would be if they could learn from others what did and did not work well. It was agreed that this would be kept under review.

The revised recommendation was confirmed as – deletions have been shown using ~~strikethrough~~ with additions shown using **bold**:

To ~~commission a consultative exercise~~, **consult** with Parish and Town Councils to establish their capability and willingness to continue to provide Community Hubs for the future to ensure that community/social support gained during the emergency are not lost (*Item 4.9 in Appendix A*).

4(iii) To review previous strategies for the two seafronts by:

- Re-examine the 2016 Bognor Regis Seafront Delivery Plan and prioritise a series of deliverable interventions and actions
- Re-examine the 2014 Nine Big Ideas for Littlehampton, Concept Investment Plan and the 2016 Seafront Greens and Promenade project ideas and identify ways to progress the recommendations into deliverable projects.

This recommendation was agreed by the Working Party.

Theme 5 – Green/Sustainable Recovery

5(i) To note the emerging heightened importance of the appointment of a Climate Change and Sustainability Manager to deliver a green, carbon neutral plan for the District including the business case for the provision of electric vehicles within the Arun fleet (*Item 5.2 in Appendix A*).

The Chief Executive explained to Members what it meant in terms of vehicle numbers for the Arun fleet. The Council’s contractors had responsibility for their own vehicles, only at the time of a tender could the Council make stipulations. For the Council’s waste contractor, as an example, there were no electric vehicles available to use for the disposal of household waste and nor was the Council aware of any forthcoming trials in this respect. In terms of the Council’s own fleet, this amounted to just a handful of vehicles and so it was suggested that reference to a business case for

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the provision of electric vehicles should be deleted. The Working Party was reassured that the new Climate Change and Sustainability Manager's responsibility would be to ensure that the Council would be carbon neutral by 2030, the provision of electric vehicles would be covered in the climate change action plan.

The revised recommendation was agreed as – with deletions shown using ~~strikethrough~~:

To note the emerging heightened importance of the appointment of a Climate Change and Sustainability Manager to deliver a green, carbon neutral plan for the District. ~~including the business case for the provision of electric vehicles within the Arun fleet (Item 5.2 in Appendix A).~~

5(ii) To commission a study aimed at gaining improved synergy from the numerous "bio-diversity" groups within the District so that better value is obtained from the District's contributions to their diverse interests and activities (*Item 5.5 in Appendix A*).

This recommendation was agreed by the Working Party.

Finally, the Chairman referred to the request that had been made by Councillor Ms Thurston to take forward an item on food security. Councillor Ms Thurston was invited to present her request.

Councillor Ms Thurston explained that the Government had issued recommendations following an independent review which looked at focusing on various areas in establishing a national food strategy. She believed that a food strategy for Arun should be included as part of the Council's recovery work focusing on building food resilience and tying in with other ideas discussed by the Working Party in terms of supporting the District's food suppliers and growers. The development of a district food strategy could encompass all such issues and involve building up links with producers. Councillor Ms Thurston referred to the Chairman's response to her which had outlined that it was perhaps premature to make any formal recommendations to Cabinet until the Government's White Paper and recommendations were published. However, she felt that if supported by the Working Party a recommendation could be made to Cabinet now to ensure that the creation of a food strategy, at the appropriate time, would not be forgotten. Councillor Ms Thurston therefore formally proposed the following recommendation to Cabinet on 21 September 2020:

"When the full and final recommendations from the Government's independent review are published the Council establishes a Working Party to consider a food strategy for local implementation".

This recommendation was seconded by Councillor Tilbrook. On the recommendation being put to the vote it was declared CARRIED.

Now that the Working Party's recommendations to Cabinet had been agreed, the Chief Executive asked if the Working Party wanted to consider putting the recommendations into an order or priority and if a timescale could be considered for each of the projects put forward. The Chairman confirmed that this task should be left to Officers to discuss with Cabinet Members or for Cabinet to confirm when considering the recommendations.

The Working Party then

RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That

- (1) A reliable database of skills shortage is compiled so that the District can effectively play its part in recovering and continuing the economic wellbeing of businesses and residents in the future. The Arun Business Partnership should be involved in this process;
- (2) a further study is initiated into the convergence of the results of the survey of skills shortages with the extra Government funding for "Skills Academies";
- (3) the "Climate Change and Sustainability Manager" (when appointed) should fully engage with local enterprises in the drive for economic recovery including "green" insulation and heating for homes, business premises and public buildings and other emerging innovations and new products;
- (4) The Planning Policy Sub-Committee consider how the provision of higher numbers of self-catering units for families and individuals in the District might be increased;
- (5) The Council supports the emergency provision of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils and students. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet seeks clarification from West Sussex County Council about any plans it has to continue the supply of IT equipment to disadvantaged pupils in schools or colleges;
- (6) Agreement be given to seek the approval of the Council to seek a Commercial Buyer of the Sussex by the Sea brand;
- (7) Approval be given to consult with Parish and Town Councils to establish their capability and willingness to continue to provide Community Hubs for the future to ensure that community/social support gained during the emergency are not lost;
- (8) Reviews take place on the previous strategies for the two seafronts to:
 - Re-examine the 2016 Bognor Regis Seafront Delivery Plan and prioritise a series of deliverable interventions and actions

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- Re-examine the 2014 Nine Big Ideas for Littlehampton, Concept Investment Plan and the 2016 Seafront Greens and Promenade project ideas and identify ways to progress the recommendations into deliverable projects;

(9) the emerging heightened importance of the appointment of a Climate Change and Sustainability Manager to deliver a green, carbon neutral plan for the District is noted;

(10) a study is commissioned aimed at gaining improved synergy from the numerous “bio-diversity” groups within the District so that better value is obtained from the District’s contributions to their diverse interests and activities; and

(11) When the full and final recommendations from the Government’s independent review are published the Council establishes a Working Party to consider a food strategy for local implementation

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman stated that the Working Party was being asked to consider if it required a further meeting.

The Working Party agreed that this very much depended upon the outcome of Cabinet on 21 September 2020 and so it agreed to not convene a meeting at this point.

(The meeting concluded at 7.00 pm)