

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 8 December 2020

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan

Purpose: To note the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan – ‘East Sussex Reset’

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) note the contents of the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan – East Sussex Reset, and the detailed action plan produced by Team East Sussex;**
 - (2) note the funding secured and realigned by partners to support the economic recovery; and**
 - (3) note that an update report on the progress in delivering East Sussex Reset will be presented to Cabinet in December 2021.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 In March 2020, the advance of Covid-19 (CV19) and the imposition of a national lockdown led Government into rapidly deploying a range of funding support packages (including grants, loans, furlough, self-employment support) with the intention to mitigate the impact on the economy.

1.2 East Sussex was no different in this respect, and whilst there are clearly ongoing challenges, many businesses across all sectors managed to resume trading, with employers and employees having found new ways of working virtually, improving productivity while balancing work and family life commitments. We are experiencing a second wave of CV19, causing the Government to initiate a second national lockdown across all of England, lasting four weeks from 5 November 2020 to 2 December 2020. Whilst a number of financial support measures will be continued/ reintroduced, more unwanted impacts will undoubtedly emerge as those support measures end. It is clear that there will be various forms of restrictions throughout the winter months and into the early part of next year.

1.3 In April 2020 the County Council agreed to coordinate the development of an Economy Recovery Plan with partners to provide a clear focus for the economy recovery effort once the initial Government schemes came to an end. The proposal was presented to Team East Sussex (TES), the county’s de-facto growth board, who were unanimous in their support for the plan. It is important to note that this is not a plan for the County Council, this is a plan for TES and partners to take forward. The plan intends to be complementary and supportive of other activities being progressed at a local level, including climate change and health and wellbeing initiatives.

1.4 The Economy Recovery Plan is an evolutionary document and is relatively short term, with the intention being to identify and deliver intervention over the next 12-18 months that will draw upon the various partners’ own recovery plans and pull everything into one place so that partners, businesses, residents and visitors can see the collective contributions being made towards resetting the economy of East Sussex.

1.5 The development of the plan has involved consultation with key partners across the county, with the process guided by a cross departmental working group leading to the plan being endorsed by TES on 30 July 2020, with the official launch of the plan titled ‘East Sussex Reset’ on 9 September 2020.

1.6 For the County Council, ‘East Sussex Reset’ demonstrates our commitment to meeting the County Council’s overarching core priority outcomes of ‘driving sustainable economic growth’, alongside ‘making best use of resources’ by working as one council, working in partnerships to ensure all available resources are used to deliver maximum benefit to residents and that we maximise the funding available to support activities.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 In developing East Sussex Reset with TES, the work was broken down into three distinct but interlinked phases. The first phase involved producing a context report of the CV19 pandemic and the challenges, impact on sectors/employment and the opportunities arising in the East Sussex economy. The second phase included undertaking a detailed 'consultation with stakeholders' which saw an engagement exercise with over 50 representative organisations, alongside key internal council departments to identify the common issues, opportunities, themes and priorities that would make a difference locally. The third phase involved an 'initial detailed action plan' to cover the next 12-18 months, with an accompanying summary document. All of the documents, including the context report, consultation stakeholder report, summary report and detailed action plan, can be found at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/tes/eserp. The detailed action plan is attached at Appendix A.

2.2 As the plan was developed we also worked with the established and extended TES family of partners, which included engaging with the regular forums that meet – Business East Sussex (BES), Culture East Sussex (CES), Developers East Sussex (DES), Environment East Sussex (EES), Locate East Sussex (LES) and Skills East Sussex (SES). In addition to these forums, consultation and engagement was held specifically with our County, Borough and District Council's economic development, planning and procurement colleagues, wider business and voluntary and community sector representatives, SELEP and Government representatives.

2.3 The outcomes of the above led to the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan having an agreed aim – *“to build sustainable prosperity for our businesses, voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and support residents to access new opportunities that drive economic recovery and resilience within a post Covid-19 landscape”*.

2.4 The plan identifies six 'missions' as set out below, which have revised the priority outcomes under the County Council's Plan on its core priorities for Driving Sustainable Economic Growth to reflect the circumstances and impact of CV19:

- Mission 1: Thinking local, acting local
- Mission 2: Building skills and creating jobs
- Mission 3: Fast forwarding business
- Mission 4: Better places, fuller lives
- Mission 5: Cleaner energy, greener transport
- Mission 6: The future is digital

2.5 Each mission has a series of detailed actions and identifies who is best placed to support this delivery, the timescales and resources involved and the key outputs. The full detail of all missions and actions is provided in the East Sussex Reset detailed action plan document. The plan will evolve and cover the next 12-18 months leading us into the future East Sussex Growth & Recovery Strategy. The plan will need to take into consideration any impact of a second wave (and any further waves) and UK's exit from the EU in January 2021.

2.6 In light of our financial pressures, we have been careful not to create any additional pressures on the County Council, and in the main the plan reflects what resources we are able to draw upon, albeit there is a small pressure identified to meet the requirements to oversee the coordination, monitoring, reporting, implementation and delivery by the County Council and partners of the agreed plan.

2.7 One of the principal benefits of the plan is that it identifies interventions that will be used to secure external funding from other sources, mainly Central Government and SELEP, as a result of programmes being released very quickly requiring short turnarounds with bids to be submitted by the County Council and partners. For example, SELEP has recently approved two CV19 recovery funds, namely the allocation of £2.4m to Business Support and £2m to Skills with a series of packages included within them, along with £1m towards Sector Support initiatives. We expect Central Government will continue to seek business cases and funding bids requiring very short turnaround times, as was the case with the recent Getting Building Fund where in just under four weeks East Sussex secured £11.2m. Moreover, partners have themselves made financial commitments, most noticeably East Sussex College Group with £1m being applied from their Adult Education Budget this year as a direct response to support skills and employment opportunities.

2.8 Cabinet should also note the recovery work that the Sussex Resilience Forum is undertaking, with two subgroups on Skills and Culture/Tourism. This work looks at areas for joint collaboration and sharing of good practice, with the latter subgroup looking at the potential of a pan-Sussex tourism approach.

2.9 TES agreed to produce a business-friendly brochure funded by resources from the County Council to get across the key messages to businesses and other stakeholders about what the plan will deliver. The East Sussex Reset business brochure is attached at Appendix B. The business brochure has been widely circulated and picked up in local media and on social media channels. Further articles and distribution has been achieved with our business representative organisations (Federation of Small Business, Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Alliance of Chambers in East Sussex) and throughout the TES family of partners so as to maximise its reach to ensure businesses are clear about the missions and specific actions in the plan.

2.10 The need for an effective economy recovery plan has never been greater. As the plan was being launched in September, the headline statistics showed:

- 68% of businesses in East Sussex were furloughing staff, and 30% had accessed loans, grants and or business rates relief.
- A sharp increase in people claiming Jobseekers Allowance and Universal Credit (and searching for work) in July 2020 at over 47,000 people. The number of people on Government support schemes (furlough and Self-employment support) was 99,500 people in July 2020, which is 31% of the working age population.
- In terms of the total number of job losses, experts were predicting that this would not become apparent until the current Government schemes cease (initially from the end of October but now continuing) and more probably into the New Year.

2.11 From the above it is clear that the role of the County Council in supporting the recovery and resetting of the economy is not just an immediate priority, but one that is ongoing for the foreseeable future.

2.12 An update report on the progress in delivering East Sussex Reset Plan will be presented to Cabinet in December 2021, providing the opportunity to reflect on the progress and achievements, and on what has not worked so well. This will enable the foundations to be laid by the East Sussex Reset plan and allow us to look ahead to developing an East Sussex Recovery & Growth Strategy 2022+.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The County Council working with Team East Sussex, the county's de-facto growth board, has in response to the CV19 pandemic developed with partners an economy recovery plan termed 'East Sussex Reset'. The plan was launched in September 2020 and looks to identify interventions that will support businesses recover and reset, while supporting those unemployed to gain new skills and employment.

3.2 Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan – 'East Sussex Reset' and that this is an evolving document with the intention to coordinate activity amongst partners over the next 12-18 months and aid in both securing external funding mainly from Government and SELEP, while unlocking local partners' resources and funding. Already significant initial investment of over £45m has been secured to deliver the plan.

3.3 Cabinet is also asked to note that an update report on the progress and achievements in delivering East Sussex Reset will be presented to Cabinet in December 2021.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All Members.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/tes/eserp/>