



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 13 October 2021

Covid-19 Business Recovery Update

Report of the Director - Development and Economic Growth

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report is to provide the Group with an update on the impact of Covid-19 on the businesses in Rushcliffe, the support that has been provided so far by the Borough Council, and what is planned for the coming months.
- 1.2. The report focusses on the work carried out specifically to support businesses, but much more has been done by the Council to support those impacted by Covid. Regular reports to Cabinet have set this out, most recently in the report to Cabinet on 13 July 2021.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) welcome the work carried out so far to support businesses in responding to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- b) endorse the proposed future activity;
- c) consider alternative opportunities to support businesses in Rushcliffe for further exploration by officers.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. Rushcliffe Borough Council have delivered a wide range of support over the last 18 months to local businesses as detailed in this report and supporting presentation to be provided to the Group.
- 3.2. It is important that Councillors have the opportunity to review the proposed future plans so they are aware what is being delivered in the area and can support as required. This scrutiny provides an opportunity for Councillors to make additional suggestions for areas of focus for the Economic Growth Team over the coming months.

4. Supporting Information

Impact of Covid-19

4.1. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the economy both nationally and internationally. Over the last 18 months, the Government has put in place support to try to mitigate the impact of Covid. This report provides some headline information about the impact of Covid in Rushcliffe (and the wider D2N2 area), further detail will be provided to the Group in a presentation delivered at the meeting.

4.2. D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership have a publicly accessible economic dashboard which tracks some key economic indicators on a monthly basis. The latest data available for Rushcliffe is for July and shows:

- Furlough (coronavirus job retention scheme (CRJS)) and self employment income support scheme (SEISS) claims have been falling since January 2021, latest data shows that there were 2,800 claims for CRJS and 2,500 for SEISS.
- Unemployment benefit claims have maintained a steady decline since the significant surges in March and April 2020. They are currently at 1865 which is a 22.6% decline on the same month last year.
- There were 571 business closures across Nottinghamshire (data only available at this level) in July 2021. This is a significant increase on the same month last year however there was a temporary suspension of company strike offs between April and September 2020 leading to artificially low figures for those months.

4.3. In addition to the data collected, the dashboard also includes information from the Decision Makers Panel (DMP) which is a monthly survey of small, medium and large UK businesses (approx. 9000 businesses aiming to be representative of the UK business population). For Rushcliffe it shows that:

- Employment is estimated to be 3.8% lower than it would have been without the impact of Covid-19
- Sales are expected to decline by 5.1%
- Investment is expected to decline by 6.2%

These are not expected to recover to pre Covid levels until 2022.

4.4. In addition to the data being collected by D2N2 and partners, officers at the Council have also collected more local information. This has been a requirement of funding secured that information about vacant properties and footfall counting has been done on a regular basis. More detail on this will be provided at the meeting to ensure the data is as up to date as possible; however, the latest data showed that:

- There are 15 vacant high street units across Rushcliffe
- West Bridgford, Bingham, Ruddington and Radcliffe on Trent had the highest footfall in August 2021.

Support provided so far by the Borough Council and partners

- 4.5. Since the start of the pandemic, the Borough Council and partners have provided a large amount of support to our businesses and residents. This has been reported regularly over the last 18 months to Cabinet, most recently in July 2021. This report focusses specifically on the support provided to Rushcliffe businesses.
- 4.6. The report is intended to provide a high-level overview of support provided to date, with more detail being provided by officers in a presentation delivered to the meeting.
- 4.7. The support provided has been delivered by officers of the Council and partners including Rushcliffe Business Partnership and D2N2 Growth Hub. Some of the activity has been funded by the European Regional Development Funding Reopening High Streets Safely Funding (RHSSF), which was extended and renamed Welcome Back funding (WBF). The Borough Council received an initial allocation of £106,000 in June 2020 and a further £106,000 in April 2021 to support the safe reopening of our high streets and town centres.
- 4.8. Since March 2020, the Council have:
- Set up a dedicated coronavirus business support webpage which has attracted approx. 40,000 views.
 - Distributed over £35.3m worth of business rates grants between April 2020 and May 2021.
 - Delivered a number of successful communications campaigns featuring local businesses including:
 - We are open
 - Eat out to help out (Government led initiative)
 - Shop Local Shop Safe
 - Rushcliffe Business Partnership switched its networking to virtual and hosted 24 sessions attracting over 500 attendees.
 - 10 business support webinars were held with expert consultants funded by RHSSF providing advice and support.
 - 24 businesses received one to one business support from retail and PR consultants, again funded by RHSSF.
 - Supported the safe reopening of our markets including the temporary relocation of West Bridgford Farmers Market to Bridgford Road car park.
 - Temporary Free car parking and Free after 3 in Council owned car parks.
 - Appointment of High Street Ambassadors to support the reopening of our high streets and be a visible presence to provide reassurance.
 - Enhanced summer events programme in West Bridgford to encourage people back into the town centre.
 - Delivered a Rushcliffe gift voucher initiative for residents to spend in participating businesses across the Borough.

- Launched a digital grant up to £1,000 which provides high street businesses with financial support to develop their online presence, this has received 32 applications so far, 20 of which have been approved.
- Allocation of £10,000 for each of our larger six towns and villages from the Welcome Back Funding and support with developing ideas for eligible projects.

4.9. As the above shows, a lot has been done to support businesses in the Borough, particularly those on the high streets which is one of the areas most impacted by Covid due to extended periods of closure.

Proposed future plans

4.10. Throughout the pandemic, plans have had to remain flexible to ensure we are able to respond quickly. This remains true for the plans set out here for the coming months. These are based on there continuing to be no restrictions and also our understanding of the priorities in our area. This could change over the coming months, however, and we will respond accordingly. In addition, the scrutiny meeting presents an opportunity for Councillors to feed their ideas into these plans based on their insight for their areas.

4.11. Again, further detail will be provided at the meeting, but some of the plans for the coming months include:

- The appointment of a temporary town centre manager, this post has been filled but we are still in the early stages of their work and more detail will be provided on their plans as they emerge.
- Enhanced and additional events in West Bridgford and some town/village centres.
- Improvements to the visual appearance of town centres including additional planters and painting or bollards/fencing etc.
- Sharing of job vacancies on Council social media for local hospitality and other high street businesses struggling to recruit.
- Ongoing communications campaign including the ongoing promotion of the Shop Local Shop Safe messages.
- Exploring opportunities to increase the digital promotion of our high streets.
- Returning to in person networking for Rushcliffe Business Partnership in West Bridgford and Ruddington.
- Continue to build relationships with local businesses and inviting them to Growth Board meetings in order to gain a better understanding of local issues.
- Big Business Carbon Club to encourage our large businesses to act as champions and support their supply chains and SME's to deliver a green economic recovery.

4.12. Further details on the above and other plans will be provided at the meeting.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to present a risk to our local businesses and communities. By providing support as set out, the Borough Council are trying to mitigate the impact of it as much as possible.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

The temporary Town Centre Manager will be funded from Welcome Back Funding (para 4.7). The financial impact of Covid is being reported through the Council's Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reporting process. The Financial update for Quarter 1 was reported to Cabinet 14th September 2021. There are no other direct financial implications associated with this report.

6.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6.3. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications associated with this report. All support is available for all businesses in the Borough.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	The offer in our towns and villages is important to maintain and improve the quality of life of our residents. It is therefore important that the Borough Council does what it can to protect and enhance that.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on businesses in the Borough and the support provided and planned aims to mitigate the impact of Covid-19.
The Environment	Supporting a green economic recovery is a key element in the Council's recovery plan as well as our partners including Nottinghamshire County Council and D2N2 LEP.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Members of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee:

- a) welcome the work carried out so far to support businesses in responding to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- b) endorse the proposed future activity;
- c) consider alternative opportunities to support businesses in Rushcliffe for further exploration by officers.

For more information contact:	Catherine Evans Service Manager - Economic Growth and Property 0115 914 8522 cevens@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	Cabinet report on 13 July 2021 Covid-19: Update Report
List of appendices:	None