

Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 26 November 2020

Present from the Committee:

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor B Massey

Also in Attendance:

Cllr M Mackrory	Cllr V Metcalfe
Cllr A Turrell	Cllr M Buckley

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

There are no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

It was noted by the committee that this would be a joint meeting, with members of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee also invited to attend.

Apologies were received from Cllr W Schmitt

2. Minutes

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2020.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no requests to speak from members of the public.

4. Covid Update – Passenger Transport

Members noted report PSEG/13/20. Members additionally noted that the passenger transport team are due to return to the committee in January 2021 for an update on the upcoming passenger transport strategy.

5. ECC Economic Recovery Programme

The panel for this item was:

- Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
- Steve Evison, Director for Sustainable Growth
- Mark Doran, Director for Sustainable Growth
- Andy Burgess, Head of Economic Growth.
- Ricky Thackrar, Principal Economic Growth Officer

Cllr Tony Ball introduced the panel and officers proceeded to talk members through a presentation. Key points raised included:

- Unemployment - Essex claimant count has surged to over 5.6% or 50,575 workers as at October 2020. This is an improvement since the summer 2020 peak at over 70,000 but still considerably more than the 2.2% average across the previous 10 years.
- Most businesses have been able to trade again since Aug 2020 however the second period of national lockdown in November will have a further significant impact on employment.
- Nearly 40% of the Essex working age population are being supported by central government temporary fiscal measures.
- It is estimated that 18,000 employers are furloughing (27% of all Essex employers), and 108,000 employees are currently furloughed (12.8% of all Essex employees).
- Travel, Hospitality, Retail, and Leisure generate 15-40% of Essex GVA. Despite being buoyed by more businesses opening up to take advantage of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme in August and increased demand for staycations, these sectors continue to be significantly impacted with a disproportionate impact on coastal communities.
- Deprived areas continue to be the hardest hit but Covid is impacting traditionally prosperous places with Braintree (39.4%) & Epping Forest (38.5%) all experiencing furlough rates well above the national average (32%).
- But areas in deprivation are less resilient to economic shocks and likely to find it harder to bounce back, with Tendring & Harlow highly affected with 37.3% and 40.3% workers furloughed respectively).
- Unemployment is impacting all age groups but has had an initial disproportionate impact on those aged 16-24 with 13.7% or 10,700 of all new Essex claimants were aged 16-24 as of June 2020.
- In July and August 20, those aged 25 to 65 are now 2.5 times more likely than other age groups to work in a highly impacted sector or be furloughed.
- The framework for the economic recovery programme will take place in two phases: Phase 1 – Crisis response – Adapting to social restrictions and building economic resilience. Phase 2 – Responding to structural changes and investing in future prosperity.
- Since the move to tier 2, ECC has provided the following support to business:

- Continuous provision of Free Business Advice.
- Factsheet for hospitality to clarify rules and set out sources of support.
- Developed Business Adaptation Grant for Tier 2 focused on hospitality.
- Streamlined process for additional outdoor space.
- Marketing campaign Great Days Out, Close to Home.
- Held a number of business roundtables.
- Future support will include:
 - Engagement with chambers of commerce, BIDs and districts.
 - £2.2m in targeted funding for business adaptation.
 - Marketing to build consumer confidence.

Following the presentation members were invited to discuss the item with the panel. Key points raised by the committee included:

- Green investment – members enquired around investment in Green businesses and apprenticeships in green open space management and burial work in local town councils – Members were told that engagement on that level hadn't yet taken place, but any effort to tie into ECC's green overarching green agenda would be welcome.
- Kickstart programme – Members raised questions around the timings for the scheme – it was noted that the scheme would be moving forward in two waves, with an initial tranche of internal placements, followed by a secondary process where ECC becomes an intermediary body for local businesses. Additional resources have been brought on board to deliver the scheme.
- Business Support – members noted that the proposed business support function doesn't go live until April 2021. Concerns were raised around the businesses struggling now. Members were assured that the existing 'Back to Business Essex' service was continuing to operate and has adapted well to Covid pressures.
- Resourcing – Members raised concerns around capacity to deliver proposals in the CMA. Members were informed that further resource had been made available to aid delivery of services.
- Transport – members requested that officers and the Cabinet Member tie in with the passenger transport team to ensure that opportunities created by the economic recovery programme are accessible to all Essex Residents.
- Tourism – Members noted that the tourism industry in Essex relies heavily on volunteers to deliver schemes and events. It was noted that further support to tourist centres in the form of guidance and joined up working would be necessary for these sectors to succeed.
- Short term placements – Members raised concerns around the 'cliff-edge' created by short term placements, with the long-term job prospects of those placed in the scheme at risk. Members were assured that this would be monitored moving forward to ensure good conditions for placement holders. This is seen as a reputational issue for ECC. Historically, these sort of schemes often lead to full-time, permanent employment.
- Town centres – Members raised concerns around the impact of the pandemic on already struggling town centres. The panel shared concerns

and noted that the pandemic had clearly expedited an already growing process of retail moving away from the high street. Members were assured that officers were working with district partners to ensure that support and grant funding were in place where appropriate.

- Opportunities within the agricultural sector – Members noted that agricultural opportunities were a prime area for skills growth. Officers agreed in principal, and agreed to explore opportunities in agriculture and agri-tech.

Cllr Grundy thanked Cllr Ball and the panel for their attendance.

6. Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next committee activity day is scheduled for Thursday 17th December

7. Urgent Business

None received

8. Urgent exempt Business

None received

Close of meeting

The formal meeting was closed at 11.31