

Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

13th November 2020

Subject: Covid-19 update report for Regeneration.

Purpose: For members to receive an update on the impact that Covid-19 is having on Carmarthenshire's economy, Businesses and communities.

To consider and comment on the following issues:

The Regeneration Services response to date to the identified impact of Covid-19 and the proposed recovery strategy.

Reasons:

The intelligence gathered clearly demonstrates that the authority and the local economy face an extremely difficult time in coming months as the effects of the Covid-19 crisis puts pressure on jobs and demand. It is therefore essential that the Council's response is in tune with the needs of businesses and communities across Carmarthenshire, taking advantage of opportunities to accelerate change to enable success in the economy of the future. Carmarthenshire's economic recovery needs to be realised as part of a new three-phase economic plan that includes restarting of the local economy followed by a revival phase and long-term renewal.

To be referred to the Executive Board / Council for decision: **NO**

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:- Cllr Emlyn Dole, Leader

Directorate:

Chief Executives

Name of Head of Service:
Jason Jones

Designations:
Head of Regeneration

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Report Author:
Jason Jones

Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

13th November 2020

Subject: Covid-19 update report for regeneration.

Purpose: For members to receive an update on the impact that Covid-19 is having on Carmarthenshire's economy, Businesses and communities.

1. SUMMARY OF PURPOSE OF REPORT.

The detailed report attached provides an assessment of the impact that Covid-19 is having on Carmarthenshire's economy and businesses, to identify what is important to them in the short, medium and long-term, so that going forward we can provide them with the assistance they most need. Evidence has also been gathered on the impact on unemployment in the county and the impact on our rural and primary towns. Intelligence has also been sought from developers and investors who have been active in Carmarthenshire to assess whether they are likely to continue to conduct business in the County in the future. The findings of this intelligence, set out in the detailed report attached, demonstrates that the authority and the local economy face a difficult time in coming months as the effects of the Covid-19 crisis puts pressure on jobs and demand.

A summary of Council's response to the identified impact follows:

Emergency Phase:

- Immediately established a Business Contact Centre as a support service. 5000 enquiries received during initial lockdown period of which 2507 businesses in Carmarthenshire have used this helpline seeking support.
- The Council has supported Welsh Government in the delivery of Economic Resilience Funding Phases 1 and 2 for Carmarthenshire businesses.
- The Council's business support teams have widely engaged with and supported our local businesses, many of whom are small and medium sized enterprises. As a result Carmarthenshire County Council has:
 - Made 4,086 payments under the business rates grant, totalling over £46 million
 - Supported 108 businesses with £270k of Welsh Government Business Start Up Grant
- 4 Area Action Teams were set up covering the entire county providing a volunteering service for our local businesses. For example, 1300 retail deliveries were undertaken by our Area Teams.
- Distributed 8,389 Food Parcels distributed to help support those Shielding, with produce provided and sourced through local companies.
- Provided a monthly food parcel to families of children eligible for free school meals. We have distributed more than 9,600 food parcels.
- provided foodbanks across the County support with the purchase of food through our

existing contract with Castell Howell.

- A county wide food directory was created and published on the corporate website - [website set up for Community Support](#) - highlighting services available within specific areas using location tags in order for people to be able to quickly identify what services are in their area.
- We set up dedicated Community response mailbox for members of the public and businesses to forward relevant information regarding their business/support group.
- Local food producers list was created and shared with local food grocery stores in order to highlight local food producers capable of supplying goods.
- CCC's Community Bureau, LEADER Team and ARFOR Team has supported £2.4m grants for businesses since March 2020.
- As a response to the economic shock of Coronavirus, consultants appointed by Carmarthenshire County Council to Undertake its 'Ten Towns Rural Growth Plan Initiative' have carried out new research to provide early insights for the local rural economy during the 'lockdown'. This insight will help Carmarthenshire County Council and others to understand the level of support local communities and businesses may need, as well as the role of growth plans, as the economy starts to reopen.
- Business questionnaire developed to look at current and future needs of local businesses and more than 450 businesses responded. This helped us inform the requirements of the Recovery Phase.
- Council commercial and industrial tenants were provided with an initial 3 month rent relief period (April – June). This support benefitted approximately 255 separate businesses, occupying over 400 properties in total.
- Carmarthenshire County Council set up a hardship rent relief fund for those businesses who were unable to access financial support from various Welsh and Uk Government schemes. Eligible businesses were able to obtain up to £1500 support to assist with rent payments.

Recovery Phase

- At its meeting on 29th June 2020, The Executive Board considered a report which provided an assessment of the impact that Covid-19 was having on Carmarthenshire businesses and identified what was important to them in the short, medium and long-term, so that going forward the Authority could provide them with the assistance they most needed.
- As a platform to the development and delivery of the County's Economic Recovery Plan, an internal Business, Economy and Community recovery group has been established to coordinate development and delivery.
- The council has secured Welsh Government Financial Support of £25k per primary town (Carmarthen, Ammanford, and Llanelli) through its targeted Regeneration investment programme to assist key stakeholders (Town Councils and BIDS) in those towns to support businesses. In addition, a successful bid to the EU's LEADER programme has

guaranteed an additional £100k for the 10 Towns Initiative.

- The Council has supported the Welsh Government in the delivery of the following funds for Carmarthenshire Businesses:
 - Childcare Provider Grant
 - Freelancer Fund
- In addition, the Council has established a Business Advisory Group with representatives from key businesses in Carmarthenshire. This direct line of contact between the Council and businesses stakeholders will be key going forward as we identify and respond to the challenges facing our business sector locally.
- A Recovery Action Plan has now been established focusing on 11 key areas, all of which are directly aimed at our economy, our businesses and our citizens.
- We have re-prioritised the Moving Rural Carmarthenshire Forward recommendations, which the Council published last year as part of our rural regeneration strategy and will now be focussing delivery on key areas that will aid COVID-19 recovery including moving ahead with the 10 rural towns programme, focusing on the local foundational economy, re-visiting skills and employment needs as a result of COVID-19, improving digital infrastructure and developing opportunities for local food and drink businesses.
- In the absence of seasonal festivals this year in the County, a digital Virtual Market – 100% Sir Gar – [Go for local](#) has been developed for local shops / producers to showcase their products. There will also be a series of digital events, again with aim to boost business leading up to Christmas.
- The council has extended its support to its existing commercial tenants and has offered a further rent discount of 25% (July – September) to those who can show a 50% or more drop in turnover compared with the same period last year. We continue to work very closely with all our business tenants, assisting with rescheduled payments if necessary, notifying when grants become available, and assisting them with any of their queries.
- We are administering Welsh Government funding to provide financial assistance to businesses that are facing operational and financial challenges caused by the national lockdown announced for Wales as a result of COVID-19. The purpose of the fund is to support businesses with cash flow support to help them survive the economic consequences of the restrictions put in place. The fund - [Firebreak: Enhanced financial support](#) - consists of two separate grants:
 1. Lockdown Non-Domestic Rate Grant
 2. Lockdown Discretionary Grant
- The Council is also looking to participate in the Kickstart Work Placement Programme - As part of the government's plan to increase job opportunities for young people, the new £2 billion Kickstart Scheme has been created to support hundreds of thousands of new, fully subsidised work placements for young people across the country. The 6-month placements are open to those aged 16-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. These will be available across a range of different sectors in

England, Scotland and Wales. The first placements are likely to be available from November. Organisations and businesses sign up for this programme will need to commit a minimum of 30 new job placements. There are not many businesses of sufficient scale in Carmarthenshire able to commit to this. The Council is therefore looking to support businesses who have fewer than 30 jobs on offer by acting as an intermediary to facilitate the required minimum 30 job placements across a number of businesses and also as an employer so that the Council can also offer direct placements. We have identified 68 companies who wish to participate in this scheme, accommodating 174 placements. Proposals are being submitted to Department for Work and pensions.

The attached report contains further detail on the impact of Covid-19 on Carmarthenshire's economy and businesses, the response to date to the identified impact and the proposed recovery strategy.

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| DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED ? | <p style="text-align: center;">YES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee 13th November 2020 -Detailed Report 2. An Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 on Carmarthenshire |
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IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Jason Jones

Head of Regeneration

| Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities | Legal | Finance | ICT | Risk Management Issues | Staffing Implications | Physical Assets |
|---|-------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| YES | NONE | YES | NONE | NONE | NONE | NONE |

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

The detailed report identifies several issues arising from the current crisis. In responding to these challenges, the Council will need to think long term, ensuring an integrated approach, involving and collaborating with stakeholders to prevent where possible business failures and long-term unemployment. This approach is fully aligned with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 five ways of working.

3. Finance

There will be a need for some financial resource to be made available to support some activities and initiatives to respond to the identified challenges. At the current time it is not possible to quantify the level of resource that will be required.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Jason Jones

Head of Regeneration

1. Local Member(s)

N/A

2. Community / Town Council

N/A

3. Relevant Partners

N/A

4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations

N/A

EXECUTIVE BOARD PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED

Cllr Emlyn Dole (Leader) has been consulted as EBM and is supportive of the report proposals.

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

| Title of Document | File Ref No. | Locations that the papers are available for public inspection |
|--|--------------|---|
| An Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 on Carmarthenshire | | Copy attached. |