

COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT & RECOVERY SUB GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

The COVID-19 Economic Impact & Recovery Sub Group provides leadership to support the safe and sustainable recovery and renewal of Reading's economy in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, doing so in a way which meets the Council's wider policy objectives including place shaping and which addresses both new and existing challenges.

Objectives

The COVID-19 Economic Impact & Recovery Sub Group will advise the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on:

- The safe unlocking of economic activity, seeking out transformational recovery, funding and renewal opportunities in order to 'build back better'.
- Blockages and solutions to problems that may be preventing legitimate economic activity from resuming/progressing, or hindering necessary business adaptations in response to new realities (changing patterns of demand etc).
- How the Council can support a phased exit from lockdown which maximises the pace of economic recovery without compromising the health, safety and wellbeing of residents, consumers and employees.
- Managing communications about the re-opening of economic activity to give clear and consistent messages to businesses, residents and members.
- The learning from the COVID-19 response and its applicability to Reading's economic strategy, and to future business continuity, business resilience and emergency response.
- The potential for, and limitations of, the Council's role in economic recovery and renewal, with a view to ensuring that the Council complements, and does not duplicate, the roles of the Reading UK CIC and Thames Valley Berkshire LEP in particular.
- Understanding the economic impact of Covid-19 and responding accordingly in partnership with major employers, businesses and their representatives.
- Ensuring that the Council's commissioning and procurement activity support economic recovery and renewal in line with its Social Value obligations.
- Ensuring that the Team Reading values guide the Council's approach to economic recovery and renewal.

Priorities

The Group's work will focus on the following priority areas:

- **Delivering and accessing financial support for Reading's economy:** The Council has an ongoing role in allocating dedicated and discretionary financial support via various Government grant schemes for individual businesses and charities which the group will oversee. In addition, there is an increasing need for the Council to access, or support Reading's businesses in accessing, international, national and regional funds which may become available for recovery and renewal. The Group will maintain an overview of these and proactively identify, develop and pursue projects which are capable of attracting external funding to support economic recovery and renewal.
- **Delivering an inclusive economic recovery:** The Council has long-standing ambitions to ensure that the benefits of Reading's economic success are shared more evenly and that the gaps in economic opportunity which exist in Reading are narrowed. The Group will seek to ensure that the economic recovery is as inclusive as possible by equipping local people with the skills needed to meet the demands of the new economy; promoting the Living Wage and more secure employment; and promoting 'levelling up' to address deprivation and inequality.
- **Delivering a green economic recovery:** The council has long standing ambitions to better integrate environmental objectives into Reading's economic strategy, particularly in relation to climate change. The Group will seek to ensure that economic recovery helps reduce carbon emissions, waste generation and pollution to deliver 'clean growth'; stimulates sectors which support this ambition; enables active travel options; supports the safe recovery of public transport networks; and promotes electrification of the vehicle fleet and building stock to support net zero carbon ambitions.
- **Ensuring access to decent, affordable and sustainable housing:** The Council has a key role in ensuring that the housing growth needed to meet identified need in the Borough is delivered via public and private housing, but particularly through its own new build programme.
- **Delivering responsive and robust regulation:** The Council has statutory functions and policy obligations which impact on the wider economy from planning and development control through traffic regulation to food safety, environmental health and consumer protection. The Council's influence via these functions on the housing market, retail, leisure, hospitality and other key sectors of the economy can be significant. The Group will therefore ensure that these functions are discharged in a way which is responsive to the needs of the business

community, and recognises the needs of business to adapt to radically changed circumstances, while ensuring that necessary statutory compliance is maintained and that the health, safety and wellbeing of consumers and employees is not compromised.

- **Developing and facilitating access to business advisory services which support business and promote the Council's objectives:** There is a continuing need to facilitate businesses access to the rapidly changing landscape of Government policy advice and support for business, which the Group can oversee by ensuring accessible and timely signposting via its website and wider communication channels, in co-ordination with Reading UK in particular. There are also a wide range of business support services across the Thames Valley and the Group will work with the partner organisations operating these to ensure that the business support offer is clear, consistent, and reinforces the wider policy objectives of the Council.

Governance

The Group will report regularly to CMT and provide updates to the Leadership group as required. The Group will liaise closely with Reading UK, TVB LEP and other economic partners to ensure development of a shared vision for recovery, whilst recognising the distinct roles of these bodies and RBC respectively.

The CMT sponsor for the group is the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services.

The Group will provide regular updates to the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and seek their views/support as required to ensure a collaborative approach to economic recovery and renewal across the borough.

Membership

The Group's standing membership includes the following officers:

- Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services (Frances Martin)
- Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure, DEGNS (Donna Pentelow)
- Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, DEGNS (Giorgio Framalicco)
- Assistant Director, Environment & Commercial Services, DEGNS (Andy Edwards)
- Assistant Director, Housing & Communities, DEGNS (Zelda Wolfe)
- Business Development Manager, DEGNS (Marcus Hermon)
- Environmental Health Manager, DEGNS (James Crosbie)
- Head of Climate Strategy, DEGNS (Peter Moore)
- Strategic Communications Manager, Resources Directorate (Niki Barton)

- Recovery & Control Team Leader, Resources Directorate (Sam Wills)
- Executive Director of Reading UK (invited) (Nigel Horton-Baker)
- [Representative of Procurement - to advise on commissioning to support recovery in line with social value obligations]
- [Representative of Adult Care & Health Services TBC]
- [Representative of Brighter Futures for Children (invited)]
- [Representative from the Joint Trade Unions]

The Group is chaired by the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services. An Economic Impact & Recovery Lead will be appointed to coordinate the process, together with additional support provided by the Project Management Office in Corporate Improvement and Customer Services.

Meetings

The COVID-19 Economic Impact & Recovery Sub Group will initially meet on a weekly basis to coordinate and provide the read across with the work that is being undertaken in the main themes. Meetings will take place virtually until such time that meeting in person is possible.

The Group will remain in operation as long as there is a need for a recovery response to COVID-19. Meetings may become less frequent as the recovery progresses.

Sub-groups may be established by the Group as where specific areas of focus are required e.g. a Town Centre Steering Group.