

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 21st September, 2020.

Present: Cllrs Chris Barlow (Chair), Louise Baldock (Vice Chair), Pauline Beall, Julia Cherrett, Luke Frost, Mohammed Javed, Hilary Vickers, Alan Watson, Bill Woodhead MBE.

Officers: Garry Cummings, Chris Renahan (FD&BS); Peter Bell, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Gary Woods (MD).

Also in attendance: None.

Apologies: None.

PLA Declarations of Interest

11/20

There were no declarations of interest.

PLA Minutes

12/20

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meeting held on 20 July 2020.

AGREED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PLA Review of Business Support and Engagement

13/20

Members were presented with an overview of the Council's business support and engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic from Council Officers which included:

- Three types of business grants which were administered by the Council during the pandemic:
 - o Retail, Hospitality & Leisure (RHL) business grant
 - o Small business grant
 - o Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund
- The total number of grants given to businesses during this period was 2,811. The value of these grants was £31,937,000.
- Additional business rates relief administered by the Council.
- Business support guidance and advice. Officers highlighted that in one week the small team handled almost 600 calls.
- During the lockdown period, the team responded to over 1,200 emails and handled nearly 2,500 calls.
- The team received positive feedback from the businesses they assisted. Several businesses became aware of the team due to the pandemic.
- The team learned lessons on how to build stronger relationships with businesses following the pandemic.

Members were presented with an overview of the future direction of the Business Support and Engagement team from Council Officers which included:

- Recent Review and Rationale
- Moving Forward
- The four main areas of work for the new team:

- o Business Support
- o Inward Investment
- o Business & Economic Intelligence
- o Employment, Education & Skills

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- The Committee recognised and commended the team for their proactive work during the pandemic.
- Members were informed that the team worked remotely during this period and this brought additional challenges.
- Members questioned if a register of available property and land could be collated for prospective business owners. Members were informed that this work was ongoing, and the Place Development team gathering intelligence on land across the Borough.
- In terms of inward investment, Officers were also looking at ways to market the Borough and attract investment. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council continued to work alongside the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), though Members noted that TVCAs focus may be more on the South Tees Development Corporation, therefore it is good for the Council to prioritise this itself.
- Around 90% of businesses which were eligible for grants received them (placing the Council in the top 10 Local Authorities nationally). The team were unable to reach some businesses despite several attempts, and employing various methods, to contact them.
- The grants were funded by the national government but issued through the Council. So, there was no direct cost to the Council. Intelligence on the types and sizes of businesses which were provided with grants could not be obtained because this was a national scheme.
- The grants were not targeted at start-up businesses and were aimed at businesses which had been trading for a certain amount of time. The team assisted start-up businesses as much as possible.
- The pandemic highlighted the need for the team to be more active and to assist the people of the Borough with the development of skills and support during times of change. Future support for start-ups and aiding employment will be crucial in light of the impact of COVID-19.
- Members thanked the team for their assistance with Stockton BID businesses during the pandemic.
- The team have monitored accommodation markets and the impacts of remote working on future accommodation requirements for businesses.
- The team have stayed in contact with businesses which closed during this period. The team have also assisted new businesses.
- The team have always signposted charities and voluntary organisations to alternative avenues of support if they have been unable to help.
- The team have a targeted approach which has included support for specific groups at specific times. Concern for employment, education and skills opportunities for young people was raised. This was an area the team will focus on in the future.
- Members asked for any examples of work undertaken with groups that had protected characteristics. The team have frequently provided support to Tees Women in Business, though acknowledged the need for some future targeted support for BAME groups and disabled people. Members were encouraged to send suggestions to the team on ways to improve opportunities

for skills and employment provision for any groups they felt the team needed to work with.

- Focusing on young people would also be vital moving forward as they are likely to lose out the most from the pandemic due to their involvement with the hardest hit industries (e.g. hospitality). Work around employment, education and skills with schools, colleges and universities would therefore be a future priority.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

**PLA
14/20** **Work Programme 2020-2021**

Consideration was given to Work Programme.

Attention was drawn to the Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings (Task and Finish) review as an outstanding monitoring item. The Link Officer for that review would be contacted to see if there were any available updates in relation to the outstanding actions still to be achieved, though it was noted that the Grenfell public inquiry is still ongoing which may limit developments.

The next Committee meeting will take place on 19 October. It was agreed that the informal meeting on 19 October will also include a scope planning session for the Burial Provision Review.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

**PLA
15/20** **Chair's Update**

The Chair had no further update.

The Vice-Chair updated the Committee on the progress of the Planters in Residential Streets (Task and Finish) Review. The first evidence session took place on 10 September. Members received a presentation from officers on brick planters. This included maps and photographs of current planter locations. It was agreed that a second evidence session would take place in October or November to discuss the options around removing or maintaining planters.