



Cabinet

17 March 2021

Report of: Councillor Leigh Higgins - Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity (and Deputy Leader)

Economic Recovery Support Programme

Corporate Priority:	Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton
Relevant Ward Member(s):	All
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	N/A
Exempt Information:	No
Key Decision:	Yes c) Has significant impact on two or more wards in the Borough and on communities living or working in those areas
Subject to call-in:	Yes

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the Economic Recovery Programme for Melton and propose a comprehensive support package to support our local economy through the recovery period of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.2 This report provides a wider context to the reasons for these proposals and identifies the benefits they will bring to our economy as part of the recovery process.

2 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Notes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy, the Council's response to supporting economic recovery to date and the previous approvals obtained to progress the proposals identified in paragraph 5.3**
- 2.2 **Approves the proposals for the use of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding as identified in paragraph 5.4 and 5.5**

- 2.3 **Delegates authority to the Director for Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity, to agree detailed assessment criteria for each item of the grant support package in line with the Council's governance procedures.**
- 2.4 **Delegates authority to the Director for Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity, to make required changes to the outlined proposals following further consultation with stakeholders and government departments and following any extension of coronavirus related restrictions or funding packages that may be made available by central government.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton is a key priority in the Council's Corporate Strategy (2020-2024).
- 3.2 These recommendations have been compiled to cover the areas of most concern that have been highlighted by businesses and partners and which are likely to maximise benefit and impact over the next 12 months. These proposals will enable the Council to implement a series of support packages to assist businesses to bounce back from the negative impacts directly attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.
- 3.3 To enable the Council to adapt appropriately to the ever changing national, regional and local picture when it comes to the support it will need to deliver to help businesses survive and thrive over the next year.
- 3.4 These recommendations are considered to be the most appropriate support to key target areas and will support both urban and rural areas within the borough as well as our key sectors. Other support mechanisms have been provided to enable all businesses to develop and enhance their resilience moving forward through either diversification into new areas or creating resilience amongst their workforce.

4 Background

- 4.1 Since the first national lockdown came into effect on the 23 March 2020 the country has been either under national restrictions or within local tiered restrictions. This has significantly impacted local economies up and down the country with redundancies increasing and businesses having to postpone previously held growth aspirations and refocus on survival. Whilst there has been some examples of success during this period and growth in certain sectors the overall picture has been extremely challenging and not all businesses will have survived. Overall the economy has shrunk by 9.9% over the last year, despite the significant support which has been provided by government and administered locally. Support mechanisms have included grant schemes such as; Small Business Grants, CJRS, SEISS and low risk and easy to access loans. With recent announcements signalling the potential easing of restrictions, coupled with the success of the vaccination programme, it is now necessary to prepare for the recovery from the pandemic. To support this effort, the Council is progressing its plans to support the borough's economy during the recovery phase and beyond.
- 4.2 The local economy in Melton is dominated by sectors which have been particularly adversely impacted by the restrictions that have been in place over the last year. Tourism,

Retail, Leisure and Hospitality are all key sectors to Melton's economy and provide over 6000 jobs in the area. A significant proportion of these have had to be furloughed and many roles may be made redundant once furlough comes to an end. Alongside this there are many who would normally have undertaken seasonal work but have not been employed at all and this has had a disproportionate effect on the younger population (between ages of 16-25). At its peak 6000 jobs were furloughed in Melton which accounts for just circa 25% of the total jobs in the area. As of January 2021 Melton's unemployment rate stands at 4.1% and has done since Nov 2020. Latest claimant count comparable from November 2020 (released in January 2021) identifies a 120% increase on the same period compared to the year before. To give context the increase rate for same period across Leicestershire is 150% and for the East Midlands it stands at 106%

4.3 Following the easing of each lockdown, the Council has undertaken a significant amount of collaborative work with the Business Improvement District (BID) as well as Melton Mowbray Town Estate (MMTE) for the safe reopening of various sectors of our economy including the town centre and evening economy. Officers have been present in the form of COVID marshals as well as town centre ambassadors linking with the police and businesses to ensure safe return to 'normality'. Following the announcement of the Business and Planning Bill, the Council engaged with the County Council and businesses to make it easier for the businesses to get pavement licences to allow for outdoor seating for cafes and restaurants. The Council also made a decision to take a supportive approach to planning enforcement regarding erection of temporary structures and marquees that allowed the pubs and restaurants to extend their serving area into their gardens and car parks. Hand sanitisers were installed near community facilities and guidance was provided to businesses in a range of different formats to provide confidence to the customers for a safe retail and leisure experience.

4.4 **Business Grants**

A significant part of the Council's effort to support economic recovery has been the distribution of grants money provided by the Government in a timely way to the businesses that needed it the most.

- Since November 2020 over £4m has been paid out across 8 schemes to over 600 businesses on top of the £10.7m given out during the first lockdown March-June 2020.
- £512,000 of the Additional Restrictions Grant has held back to provide support to businesses during the post pandemic recovery Period (explored in further detail in Section 5 of this report).
- £55,000 of overspend for LRSG Open scheme has been supplemented by funding from the ARG scheme as the amount received was deemed insufficient to provide the level support required to businesses over the December 2020 period.
- Despite the good progress being made to pay businesses the grants they are entitled to, there is still 32.4% of the funding allocated to the Council that is yet to be claimed by businesses in the Borough. To encourage further applications the Council plans to develop a communication campaign for all schemes. This will include: direct emails to potentially eligible businesses, press releases and social media posts.

4.5 Some surveys have been undertaken over the last 12 months into the specific impact of Covid on the Melton economy and its businesses. These surveys overwhelmingly highlighted that they key areas of support that businesses believed they would need to support them throughout, and beyond, this period would be related to provision of grant

funding. This has been reflected in the suggested programmes albeit it was targeted at key sectors and specific areas of business development.

There will be further surveys undertaken over the next year and it is important that the Council is able to adapt its proposed schemes to reflect any changes in support requirements highlighted by businesses as a result of these.

4.6 **Key areas to focus on for supporting recovery:**

- Supporting key sectors that have been most directly impacted by the pandemic; including:
 - Tourism, Hospitality and Retail
 - Food production, manufacturing and retail (restaurants and pubs etc.)
- Workforce, skills and employment: At its peak there were over 6000 jobs furloughed in the area. This equates to just under 25% of the areas overall workforce. There is the expectation this will lead to a significant amount of redundancies once the Governments Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme comes to an end. It is important that businesses are able to retrain their remaining staff to better suit the needs of their business moving forward.
- Business support: Encouraging an innovative business support eco system that encourages indigenous business growth whether it be through:
 - Providing intensive support and advice to start up, pre start or businesses in their first year of trading to provides them with the tools that will give them the best chance of success as possible.
 - Supporting businesses throughout the borough to diversify into new areas of trade
 - Encouraging and enabling channel shift to online sales as well as those made through bricks and mortar to supplement a businesses income and give them a wider potential customer catchment area.
- Protecting the mental health of our business owners: this year has been increasingly difficult for business owners and we want to make sure there is a visible support service available to business owners who would like to make use of this service.

4.7 In addition to the above there are other impacts on the Council's finances which will directly impact its ability to deliver services which need to be considered. By supporting the economy in the manner identified in section 5 it is expected these impacts will be softened. These are;

- a) Potential business rate loss as a result of failing businesses in the borough and reduced growth.
- b) Changing shopping trends. This could have a direct impact on car park income, as a result of fewer trips into our town centre less often, unless the centre is able to adapt to meet changing consumer needs. Predicted immediate upturn in evening economy as people get back outside again will have a minimal impact on car parking income as it is expected this will lead to the car parks being used largely outside car park charging hours.
- c) Potential loss of leisure income: whilst not something that can necessarily be impacted by any of the activities outlined below there may be an impact on the amount of income received via leisure usage in the future. This is because people have got used to exercising outdoors so we may see a drop of in leisure income. This makes utilising the

ARG funding more pertinent as any support that can be provided to protect business rates income or increase usage of our car parks through developing a more vibrant and engaging town centre and more resilient economy will offset this potential loss.

- 4.8 One of the few areas where the coronavirus has had a positive impact is around encouraging businesses and organisation to work from home. This has led to fewer movements in travel which has had a beneficial impact on the environment and shown businesses they are able to function and even increase productivity when allowing their staff to work flexibly. However the down side of this is that it has shown businesses they can reduce their physical footprint. This is expected to have a significant impact on areas such as town centres and office parks with office space being difficult to let. This could have an adverse impact on how our town centres function in the short to medium term.

5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 The Council has a leading role in supporting the borough's economy to bounce back over the next 12 months and beyond. All funding to provide support during the pandemic has been provided to Local Authorities and Central Government has been clear that the Council will be able to hold a proportion of the ARG funding back in order to provide direct support to businesses during the recovery period. The Council is a key intermediary between the wider support available through the LLEP and other partners and will provide a central role in ensuring the support provided on the ground is complimented by support available through partners. This means ongoing engagement is being undertaken with partners to ensure the proposed services identified below are able to have maximum impact.
- 5.2 The ARG funding was provided to Local Authorities to support businesses that were unable to access grant support through any of the other schemes that were available. This funding was to be utilised to provide support directly to businesses during the first lockdown in November, any subsequent restrictions or lockdowns after this period and throughout the recovery process up to 31st March 2022.
- 5.3 Due to this the Council has had to consider the balance between ensuring adequate funding was provided to support businesses versus ensuring enough funding was held back to meaningfully support the economy to bounce back during the recovery period. The Council has notionally set aside £512k, 34%, from its total Additional Restrictions Grant allocation to introduce a comprehensive package of economic recovery related programmes and projects to support our economy over the next year. Two of the proposed projects have already received sign off through separate approval processes. These are:

- a) £40,000 - recruitment of a Senior Economic Recovery Officer (coronavirus response) role.

This has been approved under delegated authority and this role has been developed to lead on the provision of existing grants but to also develop and manage the schemes and programmes proposed in this report.

- b) £100,000 – Rural Diversification business grant scheme.

To enable businesses in rural areas to apply for grants of 50% of project costs or up to £10,000 (which ever is the least) towards supporting the delivery of a diversification project to develop their business, make their income streams more resilient, support the

tourism, hospitality and/or leisure sectors or provide additional services to their community. This has already been approved by the Council as part of the budget for 2021/22.

5.4 The remainder of the projects and programmes proposed as part of the Council's Comprehensive Economic Recovery Package are identified below. The development of the following proposals below seeks to respond to the issues set out in section 4.6 - 4.8 to support the local economy during the recovery period.

a) £7,000 – extension to existing 0.6FTE Economic Development officer role for a day a week.

This will be an additional resource for a year for existing Economic Development officer to specifically deal with and support business enquiries relating to ARG programmes. The coronavirus pandemic has led to a significant increase enquiries being received by businesses and this will need to be picked up through additional officer hours.

b) £40,000 – provision of targeted sector specific support.

1-2-1 expert support to key sectors in the borough to enable businesses in these sector to adjust to any future or new requirements in customer of industry expectations i.e. adjusting to the 'new normal'. These sectors are likely to focus on;

- The tourism and hospitality industry, with support being provided around how to benefit from the predicted increase in 'staycation' holidays and how to adjust to the new standards customers are likely to expect when they are visiting.
- Technical support to businesses in food and drink production, manufacturing and 'experience' sectors to enable them to adjust to new consumer trends, expectations and standards.

c) £50,000 - Town Centre recovery grants.

This would be a pot of funding that would be used to attract and encourage businesses to either stay or relocate to a town centre location. These grants would be fairly wide in their ability to support businesses but would expect to be match funded by the applicants. It is expected the funding could be used for projects such as:

- Shop frontage improvement scheme – business would have to demonstrate how this would increase footfall to their business.
- Relocation grant – for businesses looking to relocate or expand into the town centre. A grant to help them with the initial costs of opening up the store etc.
- Vacant premise refurbishment grant – to support landlords who have had long term vacant premises undertake refurbishments to the premise to make it more attractive to increase interest/enquiries (again will have to demonstrate this direct link to supporting a business).

d) £25,000 – Online business grants.

To provide a grant of up to £500 to independent SME businesses to enable them to develop or improve their online presence or enable the website to take online payments.

e) £100,000 – Business start up programme.

Holistic business support programme to enable new businesses that have either been started during the pandemic, started just before the pandemic or looking to start during the recovery period to get up and running. Programme will culminate in the opportunity to bid

for funding to help this happen – programme will be based on the following indicative programme (subject to conversations with relevant partners);

- 4 week course on the basics of running a business.
- 1-2-1 support (up to 8 hrs) to Develop a business plan outlining their business and how it will develop.
- For business plan where 1-2-1 adviser believes there to be a solid base for growth will then be invited to apply for the grant.
- Grant assessed by a grant panel consisting of the Council representatives and partner organisation and grant allocated.
- 1-2-1 support to continue over next 2-3 months (up to 4 hrs) to provide ongoing support.
- Monitoring and reporting to be set up to better understand successes of grant scheme.

There is some support to look at a Leicestershire wide business start up programme with contributions from all Local authorities to create a larger pot of funding. This is currently being explored in more detail and the Regeneration Manager is currently in discussions with County, LLEP and other LA areas to look into this further.

f) £25,000 - Upskilling workforce scheme.

A grant to support businesses looking to upskill workforce to develop more productive workforce or promote from within to support business growth or develop business resilience.

5.5 The projects below are those that we wish to deliver but are awaiting discussions with Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for further clarifications.

i) £25,000 – Mental health support for small business owners.

To explore working with key partners to provide a free at point of service resources for business owners who are suffering from mental health issues through this pandemic and during the recovery process. This project is currently being explored with contact being made with key partners to look at what types of services can be provided or supported through this scheme.

ii) £20,000 – support to taxi industry

Since the start of the pandemic the number of licenced taxis operating in Melton has reduced by over 30%. This will have a significant impact on the vitality and viability of evening economy in the borough with negative impact on individuals wishing to go out in the evenings and weekends and experience our leisure offer. Lack of availability of taxi service also has a detrimental impact on our rural and aging communities and their ability to access facilities in the borough. It is proposed to enable taxi drivers to apply for a one off grant to ensure they are able to continue to support our communities and evening economy.

iii) £TBD – ARG restart grant fund for those businesses not covered within the Government's restart grant programme.

The purpose of the Additional Restrictions Grants is to support those businesses that are unable to access grant support directly through the grant programmes set by Government. Following the announcement by the Chancellor that there will be a targeted restart grant

programme it is expected there will be a need for the ARG funds to be utilised to provide a grants scheme that loosely mirrors this but for those businesses that would not be considered eligible. The Council is currently awaiting the finer detail of this scheme from Government but would expect to set aside any ARG funding currently unallocated and any additional funding provided by government (if any is forthcoming) towards this programme to ensure our full allocation of ARG is spent by 31 March 2022.

- 5.6 The above proposal allocates £432k of the ARG funding. This leaves £80k which has been set aside to allow the Council to increase the scope of any of these schemes if they become over subscribed or require expanding into new areas.
- 5.7 The proposed programmes for allocation of grant funding will require the Council to develop a set of detailed assessment criteria as well as an application and assessment process for each element identified above. The complexity of these will be determined by each individual scheme but will be designed to ensure the funds are easy to access whilst ensuring the Council are able to have enough information to make informed decisions treating all applicants fairly. These criteria and processes will be worked on by officers over the coming weeks, in liaison with the Portfolio Holder, to ensure they are in place for when the schemes are launched.
- 5.8 A couple of the suggested programmes relating to the provision of support services may require procurement. This will either be directly by the Council or by partner organisations on our behalf. For these projects the Council will either directly develop a specification in consultation with the Director and Portfolio Holder or work with our partners to ensure the specifications, and therefore the service provided, are reflective of the need identified within Melton Borough.
- 5.9 Other Activities being undertaken to support our economy:
- Website and Attractions Map design and development – A new Destination Melton website and attractions map is being developed to better showcase the areas tourism and hospitality offer to support this much affected sector of our economy. Work is currently ongoing to increase engagement with partners ready for a launch of the website before the summer period. As well as this the website will be utilised to showcase the areas attractiveness in terms of inward investment opportunities or business premises in the area to look to increase awareness of Melton Borough and what a great area it is to run a business.
 - Food Enterprise Centre – This project is currently underway. A project manager has been secured and the Council is working with key stakeholders such as the market operators and Brooksby Melton College to develop Melton as a key destination for food and drink production, experiences and technological advice for those businesses wishing to access support. Work currently underway is securing a consultant to develop a brand for the site to increase its awareness amongst the general public and showcase what it has to offer to the area in order to increase site visits to the site and wider town centre area. Next steps include undertaking an assessment of the site in terms of the infrastructure required in a post pandemic world to enable events to take place, to secure those that currently do and also attract others.
 - Town Centre Vision and Enhancement - The Council has allocated £50,000 for town centre enhancements. A sum of money will be set aside from this allocation for working with partners to develop a long term vision for the town centre. This will draw together many different projects and work streams that area currently taking place or due to take place in and around the town centre area. It is anticipated that by developing this

coordinated approach to shaping growth for the town centre the Council will be able to facilitate the establishment of a town centre that is fit for purpose over the medium to long term. The rest of the allocation will be for environmental and public realm enhancements to make the town centre attractive in readiness for reopening later in the summer.

6 Options Considered

6.1 Options considered related to the level of ARG funding the Council should seek to distribute during the immediate response relative to the amount retained for 2021/22 to support recovery and wider support packages. A range of options have been considered and after discussions internally and with colleagues from neighbouring councils it was decided that 34% (£512,000) would be an appropriate amount to hold back. It was agreed that this would then be reviewed depending of the level of direct ARG related grant funding distributed since 5 Nov 2020. The amount of spend is closely monitored and the amount that has been allocated directly to businesses through business grants has not yet exceeded the amount set aside for this purpose, and therefore the amount set aside for the recovery period and to support the programme of work set out above, still seems reasonable. This will continue to be monitored.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 Due to the timescales available to the Council (all money must be spent by 31 March 2022), and the need to ensure businesses receive support in a timely way, there has been no formal consultation on the activities outlined above. However these proposed actions have been compiled following 12 months of significant engagement directly with businesses, key partners and other organisations:
- 7.2 Internal consultation: The Regeneration Manager and wider team have had daily engagement with other departments that have direct day to day dealings with businesses, such as our regulatory and licensing team, to better understand the concerns and challenges being faced by businesses in specific sectors, specifically pubs, licensed premises and taxi companies. All of which are vital to a healthy, vibrant and successful evening economy in the area.
- 7.3 Discussions have also been had with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Industrial strategy to better understand their areas of concern or how they view the funding should be used to support businesses. These discussions are ongoing and evolving but all the information provided within those meetings has informed the activities outlined in this report.
- 7.4 Direct engagement with businesses. Over the past year members of the grant team have had over 2000 unique engagements with businesses which have often gone into detail about industry related challenges and also the unique challenges faced by the individual business. Whilst these concerns are hugely varied there are key themes which have been able to be aggregated through these discussions and these have directly informed the proposed schemes.
- 7.5 Work with partners: Since the beginning of the pandemic the council has led on the development of and supported partners and other organisations in the delivery of business webinars and surveys. These have been used to hear directly from businesses what their

main concerns are in relation to the coronavirus pandemic and how they will continue to trade once it is over. In addition to this officers have been in regular contact with organisations which represent local business interests to get a better understanding of how the Council can support the economy. The proposals in this report were discussed at the recent Place Board with opportunities for partners to feed in and comment.

- 7.6 All of the above discussions and engagements have fed into the comprehensive package of support that is recommended to be bought forward to have the most significant impact on our local businesses and enable them to survive and thrive over the next 12 months.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 A more in-depth timeline for development will be determined once projects have been approved. Key timescales are::

Activity	Date
Develop communications plan to promote planned programme of support to the local business community	April 2021
Develop Equalities impact assessment for the programme	March 2021
Develop governance documentation as well as project documentation (application process and assessment criteria etc.) to enable programmes to be developed and proceed	April 2021
Go live with grant schemes	May 2021
Quarterly updates and reviews on project spend	July 21, Oct 21, Jan 22
Schemes close	31 st March 2022
Reporting and monitoring of scheme outcomes and impact	March – May 2022

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The Economic Support packages outlined above are all proposed to be funded through the Council’s Additional Restrictions Grant allocation from Central Government which the council has received £1.479m. The Council is still awaiting the assessment by Government for the new burdens funding to cover any associated administrative costs of the scheme. Whilst administration so far has been covered by existing resources this is not sustainable in the longer term and a backlog of the businesses usual work is building. Consideration is being given to the use of this funding to support the administration of the schemes.
- 9.2 There will be some additional officer time required to support the delivery of these programmes but that is anticipated to be picked up through existing staff resources within the organisation.
- 9.3 An outline of the costs of each associated project can be seen below (projects in bold subject to further conversation with BEIS).

Project	Cost
Recruitment to Senior Economic Recovery Role	£40,000
Extension of hours for existing ED officer role	£7,000
Sector Specific business advice and support	£40,000
Rural diversification grants (approved through budget)	£100,000
Town Centre recovery grants	£50,000
Grants to get online	£25,000
Business start up support programme	£100,000
Grants to upskill workforce	£25,000
Mental health support (subject to BEIS approval)	£25,000
Support to taxi industry (subject to BEIS approval)	£20,000
Total Allocated	£432k
Unallocated (to be allocated based on scheme take up)	£80k

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

10.1.1 Detailed criteria for each grant support scheme will need to be agreed and drafted prior to awards being made. The governance processes contained within the Constitution will also need to be considered and complied with for each scheme/grant.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out for the complete package of support programmes that are approved as part of this process. An EIA will be submitted to the check and challenge group and receive sign off before grant and support activity is put into place.

12 Community Safety Implications

12.1 None

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

13.1 To explore green recovery and active travel as part of criteria for grant schemes.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 Human Resource implications – all employment requirements will follow our internal procedures and the responsible manager will ensure compliance is adhered to.
- 14.2 Procurement implications – all procurement will comply with the Council’s standard procurement procedures and this will be overseen by the responsible manager for the schemes alongside the Welland Procurement Unit.

15 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	ARG compliance - BEIS identifies an area of support proposed within the comprehensive support package isn't eligible to be covered by the use of ARG funding	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
2	Timescales not met – delay in programme delivery means funding has to be given back to BEIS by the Council	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
3	The support is not given to a key area of impact leading to failure of that business sector and criticism of the Council	Low	Critical	Medium Risk
4	Lack of take up from businesses	Low	Marginal	Medium Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low		4	1,2,3	
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	Ongoing engagement with BEIS to ensure they are satisfied with our proposals and that they are considered as being eligible for use of ARG funding. Should any doubts be raised ensure appropriate changes are made to projects in order to bring them into scope
2	Appropriate oversight: Monthly update reports identifying project spend against projections will be undertaken amongst other factors. This will enable the Council to identify and areas underspend and the potential reasons for these that could be reallocated to areas that are over subscribed to ensure funding is spent by the deadline date of 31 st March 2022
3	The grant proposals are informed by the enquiries made to the Council by businesses and sector representatives during the pandemic
4	If there is no business interest for any element of the proposed support package, the allocation will be diverted to other high demand areas in consultation with the portfolio holder.

16 Background Papers.

16.1 None

17 Appendices

17.1 None

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