

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND SKILLS O&S COMMITTEE

1400 hours on 13th November 2020, Online Meeting – Actions

Present:

Councillor Lou Robson (Chair)

Councillors Nicky Brennan, Maureen Cornish, Chaman Lal, Simon Morrall, Julien Pritchard.

Also, Present:

Maria Dunn, Head of Development Policy

Ceri Saunders, Acting Group O&S Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site and that Members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Cllrs Zaheer Khan and Lucy Seymour-Smith.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ECONOMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY CONSULTATION

(See item No.4)

The Chair outlined the purpose of the meeting and the opportunity for the Committee to provide a formal response to the consultation.

Maria Dunn, Head of Development Policy talked Members through a presentation on the Covid19 economic recovery strategy and highlighted that a subsequent lockdown

since the strategy went out to consultation and changes in restrictions will have a significant impact. It was added that the furlough scheme has been extended and the impact of that is not yet known but redundancy is an ongoing concern. The Council is working with partners in supporting residents and businesses and the region has been disproportionately affected.

Members then made the following points: -

- A key part of the recovery will be the Council and partners supporting existing businesses, entrepreneurs and people coming forward with new business ideas including the use of new technology as part of this.
- Giving people and businesses the tools such as basic business survival and growth skills rather than the money. It is important that the Council and partners look at opportunities and think outside of the box.
- A key number of projects have been identified that have funding and others will require additional funding – how will this be monitored and what contribution will BCC make towards this and what will be the contribution from central government?
- Route to Zero (R20) and becoming carbon neutral has been identified as one of a set of priorities rather than a way of delivering the other priorities. It would make sense to have it as the centre point of delivery to address the challenge so that the R20 action plan could be utilised as the recovery plan working as hub rather than a spoke.
- Focus on a place-based approach for specific projects outside of the city centre especially those areas with the highest level of deprivation and least investment over the years. This needs to be emphasised in the priorities rather than the overarching vision.
- On key city centre projects, the strategy highlights reviewing office space however this has been countered by investment in building more office space for example at Snow Hill. In the current climate as there may be less of a requirement with more people working from home and continuing to do so in the future.
- Getting the correct building mix and making best use of Council owned land especially through the planning process in respect of city centre living and if more student accommodation was needed. In addition, with more people working from home there is a need to consider further support to local businesses and centres under the '15-minute city' concept.
- Further clarity is needed on what's new or different in the document as much of it has already been done or was already in progress.
- The sustainability of retail in both the city centre and local centres is a concern as both face stiff competition from online alternatives and what can be done to help them survive? Also, important to support local communities and particularly independent cafes and restaurants who have small premises to start with and due to social distancing guidelines have fewer covers resulting in less income and leaving them struggling to cover their costs.

- The arts and culture sector is not covered in the strategy and lack of support to the sector especially considering that the city will be hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2022. A key concern is that the city is losing talented people as arts organisations close and people are told to retrain.
- Digital inclusion and reskilling/access to new skills is key not only for school leavers but older workers especially those in poorer areas that will be hit disproportionately by the pandemic. Focus is needed on the long term unemployed and those coming back into the workforce following a break as in the case of women returning from maternity leave.
- Who are the Council's partners?
- How can members work with the licensing section and venues with late licenses if they are still curfew in place?
- Where will the Council find the financial contribution towards any of these plans?
- Are there other sources of funding once ERDF finishes and does the Council have the skills to access them?
- Support for grassroots sports organisations like smaller football leagues that rely on admission fees of people coming to watch events and support local clubs.

The following responses were made to the comments and questions raised: -

- There are opportunities for growth with the R20 agenda and retrofitting provides opportunities for new supply chains and a move into a new sector of the economy so that has potential to support SMEs. Discussions are taking place with Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) who are also bringing forward recovery plans to support SMEs.
- There is a need to monitor the strategy and that will be picked up in more detail following the consultation. In terms of council funding this will be awarded on a case by case basis for projects as they come forward.
- The R20 action plan will be presented to Full Council in January and that links into the recovery agenda. A link to community recovery that is a separate piece of work will be done and will be in the next recovery plan initiation and that will acknowledge the wider work done and the context of where they sit regarding each other.
- With regard to pushing ahead with projects such as building office space it should be noted that this are dictated by market forces. A review of office space involves looking at the role of the city centre and how buildings can be repurposed and used differently and allow some of that change to happen independently of the Council and planning consent.
- There is the opportunity to do things differently in respect of emphasising reskilling opportunities and where possible tap into new economies.

- More opportunities to shop locally and differently currently with people shopping more for necessity. It is difficult to fully understand what the long-term change and effect will be at this moment in time. Covid has accelerated online shopping and further work needs to be done to understand what this will mean for retail in the city centre and people's needs and will link into work on the reviews of the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) and Big City Plan.
- Acknowledge that there is a serious issue with hospitality and the Council has been lobbying regionally too in support of hospitality. In terms of small businesses and reduced cover spaces it is anticipated that this will be a short-term issue and will return although not able to put a timescale on it. Council service areas have worked together to allow hospitality venues to spill out onto streets to help with increasing covers and aide social distancing and this could perhaps be clearer in the strategy.
- The arts & culture sector does require further support, and this could be made clearer in the strategy. A lot of businesses in Birmingham have received government funding but some have not, and it could be clearer in terms of any opportunities around arts and culture. The strategy does focus on what the Council can do but will take on board as funding is limited but will see what support can be given.
- Currently a full assessment cannot be made on the extent of the city centre and student living need and demand. A strategic housing market area assessment as part of the review of the BDP will re-examine and manage that using recent trends in the housing market and demand via data from estate agents and vacancy levels.
- The Council's Employment Team does some good work on the addressing skills levels and needs including addressing digital inclusion to ensure jobs created in the city go to people locally and match people who are struggling to get back into work and this will be important in response to the Covid crisis.
- The Council is working with a variety of partners including the Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and GBSLEP. It is important that BIDs are engaged to do the delivery across the city and in the city centre and expect to hear their views as part of the consultation.
- The licensing issues raised are expected to be short term and therefore outside of the scope of this strategy however the points raised can be passed onto colleagues to see what support can be offered.
- No announcement has been made by Government as yet to replace ERDF. This is a concern and the Brexit Readiness team are looking at replacement funding streams.
- Support to grassroots sports organisations is outside the scope of this work however it will be raised with colleagues in the Neighbourhood's directorate.
- Support to businesses can be looked at and where we can add to the strategy and see what's available. Much of the funding from the government has been short term and officers have worked hard for these funds to be processed and distributed to businesses quickly and efficiently.

- Social housing with Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) projects within the strategy is a priority in terms of sustainable delivery (energy efficient housing) and creating jobs in the long term.

Members then concluded their discussion drawing out the key themes that would form the basis of their response to the consultation. It was noted that communication with residents and businesses was crucial including the visuals used in the document being predominately of the city centre and the message that sends to those who do not frequent the city centre for work or regularly for leisure or retail purpose.

RESOLVED: -

1. The report was noted.
2. A draft to be circulated to members for comment before submission.

5. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)

None.

6. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

7. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

RESOLVED: -

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 15:31 hours.