
**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON 9 JULY 2020**

EGSP.33/20 CARLISLE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RENEWAL POST COVID-19

The Corporate Director of Economic Development submitted report ED.26/20 which outlined the challenges presented by the move out of the Covid-19 lockdown towards economic recovery and renewal. The report outlined the impacts of Covid-19 on the economy; a framework for recovery; business support measures; areas for transformation / renewal, and an update on a number of funding bids and the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. The report also contained a Mott MacDonald technical report, actions plans and maps.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Would the stakeholder engagement being undertaken by Mott MacDonald include smaller businesses?

The Corporate Director responded that Mott MacDonald were currently scoping the extent of the stakeholder engagement. The Carlisle Ambassadors was made up of small and medium size enterprises, that group was being engaged with in an effort understand the impact of the pandemic on the economy with a view to tailoring appropriate support.

- Had the Council any indication of the number of retail premises that may not re-open?

The Corporate Director stated that such data was not yet established, however, it was reasonable to expect that Carlisle, due to its large catchment area may not be so affected by store closures as other cities. Discussions with management at The Lanes indicated that some retailers, rather than close their outlets, would look to downsize premises in order to retain a presence in the city centre.

The Member further asked whether there was any indication on the likely loss of rental and rates income.

The Corporate Director responded that such information would emerge from work currently being carried out by the Council to assess the economic impact of the pandemic, but was not currently available.

- The Council had dispensed £30M of grants to support businesses impacted by Covid-19. Were those businesses who had received a grant to report to the authority on matters relating to relocation or business contraction?

The Corporate Director explained that the business grants were a central government scheme, therefore the Council had distributed the grants on its behalf. There had been no requirement for those issued a grant to provide information relating to relocation or business contraction. The government had recently announced further funding through the payment of £1,000 to businesses for each employee who was returned to work after being furloughed and retained for six months. It was unclear at this stage whether the Council would be involved in the work to distribute those funds.

The Chair asked whether the Council was concerned that scheme to retain furloughed workers for six months may delay a number of job losses?

The Corporate Director responded that it was not possible to predict such an outcome currently, she hoped that there was sufficient resilience in the economy to limit the number of required job losses. Businesses and residents needed time to adjust and the Council remained committed to providing support.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder reiterated that data analysis of the impact of the pandemic was ongoing and that Officers were working behind the scenes in a proactive way to support the local economy.

- Was it known when flights from Carlisle Airport would resume?

Logan Air, the operator of flights at the airport had latterly taken on the flight routes of the former carrier Flybe. As a result, the recommencement of flights at the various airports from which it operated was being phased. The Corporate Director also understood that the Civil Aviation Authority also required airport staff to undergo refresher training prior to re-opening.

- In light of recent news reports about the impact of the pandemic on university funding, a Member sought confirmation that the Council would continue to support the University of Cumbria.

The Corporate Director responded that University was in discussions regarding the Borderlands' Citadels Project and it was confident that it had developed a strong Business Case. Moreover, it was looking at ways of securing student admissions and was also considering how working online may facilitate that. Delivering courses that would meet the needs of businesses in the district had been a strong element of the University's Business Case.

- How were the Place Managers expected to work?

The Town Investment Plan would focus on a particular town, the Place Manager would provide leadership and support to communities and businesses.

The Chair noted that a part of the leadership role would relate to telling the story of the town, when the closure of the area around the Central Plaza had taken place, businesses were given funding to support them in marketing and telling their own stories. She asked if it was possible for similar support as part of the Covid-19 response.

The Corporate Director welcomed the idea. She noted that there were different levels of story telling / marketing: at County level, the city, individual businesses. The Council had put together some information packs and promotional material aimed at increasing investment and tourism to the district.

- The report outlined a number of project funding bids that the Council had developed, in relation to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, was it considered that would need to be updated or supplemented as a result of the impact of the pandemic?

The Borderlands Partnership had been in discussion with central government which was keen to speed up of the funding process so as to provide a financial injection to the economy. As a result, the Partnership was already considering which of its projects were closest to being ready for implementation so that it may look to make a submission to draw down the relevant funding earlier than scheduled. In relation to the Towns Fund, it was feasible that work may be implemented this financial year.

A Member asked whether there had been any indication on the Future High Street Fund bid (FHSF) and the Towns Deal.

The Corporate Director advised that the Council had a good reputation in central government for project delivery and feedback on both projects had so far been positive. The next submission to government on the FHSF was to be made at the end of July 2020.

In relation to the Towns Deal, a plan and strategy would need to be developed with a programme that tied into the strategy, following which Business Case(s) would be developed.

The Panel discussed the importance of residents' confidence in coming to the city centre as a means of economic growth, as well as the language used to describe the different phases of recovery and renewal.

- What level of funding would the Borderlands Place programme provide?

£3.5M was available through the Place Programme and it was hoped that the monies would provide seed funding to be matched by other organisations.

- A Member noted that the Market Hall had been put up for sale, he asked what the Council's role in relation to the facility would be going forward.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder responded that it was too early to comment on the matter.

- A Member was pleased to see that the report had highlighted the importance of environment and cycling provision. He felt it was important to ensure the appropriate facilities in terms of route information and storage were provided.

The Corporate Director noted that there were plans and projects in relation to cycling in the Borderlands Destination Programme and that the Towns Deal Board were looking to deliver a cycle/walk scheme. The St. Cuthbert's Garden Village project also had strong elements of cycling and walking provision.

A Member commented that cycling provision should cater for all types of cyclists and cycling equipment, not just those for the able-bodied. With regard to potential pinch points on cycling routes in the city centre, he suggested that one-way system be implemented.

Appendix 1 made reference to a review of safe cycle stores, a Member requested that Longtown and Brampton be included.

The Corporate Director explained how that consideration would be included in the various regeneration projects set out in the report and the future Transport and Movement Study of the city.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the assessment criteria for the Rural Towns Fund, the Regeneration Manager gave an overview of the measures which were both quantitative and qualitative. He confirmed that a review of some of the criteria may take place and that a report on the Fund was to be submitted to a future meeting of the Council's Executive.

- The Mott MacDonald report made reference to the Council potentially needing to intervene in land and property markets in the future, a Member requested further detail on the matter.

The Corporate Director clarified that those comments pertained to the Council's Economic Strategy, and the need to consider what action the Council may need to take, in a leadership role, to facilitate development.

- Did the Council have a schematic illustrating broadband coverage in the district?

The Corporate Director explained that Cumbria County Council was the authority responsible for digital provision.

- Had the Council had any feedback about the arrangement of people queueing to access retail stores in the city centre.

The Corporate Director advised that she had not received any feedback on the matter.

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the re-opening of the Shop Mobility Scheme, the Corporate Director advised that the scheme's return was imminent.

- The draft recovery plan appended to the report referred to the use of questionnaires to determine the need for information in the retail and hospitality sectors. A Member asked whether the results of those surveys would be fed back to the Panel?

The survey work was currently being undertaken and would form part of the evidence base use to support economic recovery. The Corporate Director considered that would form an important strand of the Panel's work going forward.

- The report detailed a number of future projects that would be delivered in the medium term. A Member asked if there were any shorter term projects to support economic growth.

The Corporate Director stated that in terms of the projects in the report, every effort was being made to draw down funding at the earliest opportunity so that they may be implemented. The Council's Development Management Team were also supporting economic activity through its work with the construction sector.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report.

RESOLVED – That report ED.26/20 be noted and that the Panel look forward to further reports on economic recovery, Post Covid-19 being submitted to future meeting of the Panel.