



**East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station
Road, Melton, Woodbridge, IP12 1RT**

Scrutiny Committee

Members:

Councillor Stuart Bird (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Deacon (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Edward Back
Councillor David Beavan
Councillor Judy Cloke
Councillor Linda Coulam
Councillor Andree Gee
Councillor Louise Gooch
Councillor Tracey Green
Councillor Geoff Lynch
Councillor Mark Newton
Councillor Keith Robinson
Councillor Caroline Topping

Members are invited to an **Extraordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee**
to be held on **Thursday 18 February 2021 at 6.30pm**

This Meeting will be conducted remotely, pursuant to the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

The Meeting will be facilitated using the Zoom video conferencing system and broadcast via the East Suffolk Council YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/sSGnX5kmLrE>

An Agenda is set out below.

Part One – Open to the Public

Pages

2 Declarations of Interest

Members and Officers are invited to make any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Local Non-Pecuniary Interests that they may have in relation to items on the Agenda and are also reminded to make any declarations at any stage during the Meeting if it becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.

3 Review of the Economic Recovery and Regeneration of the District post Covid-19 ES/0676 1 - 25

Report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

4 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

To consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme

Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

There are no Exempt or Confidential items for this Agenda.

Close



Stephen Baker, Chief Executive

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18 February 2021

REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND REGENERATION OF THE DISTRICT POST-COVID19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Covid pandemic and associated severe restrictions on business operations has severely affected the national and local economy. Business closures and redundancies have resulted in unemployment almost doubling within the District and with the Furlough scheme still in operation further significant job cuts are inevitable. The Council’s response has focussed on the allocation of unprecedented levels of grant funding to local businesses, over £80m to over 6,000 businesses so far, to ensure short-term financial viability and maximising employment retention. ESC has also had wide ranging engagement with businesses, business networks and local partners to understand and respond to the challenges at a local and sector level and also to ensure that when allowed to open, our businesses and town centres could operate safely.

2. Whilst we are still in the midst of the response phase, we are also focused on the longer-term economic recovery. The Council established long-term and comprehensive economic growth programmes before the pandemic which focus on place, our key sectors and economic growth enabling themes such as digital infrastructure. These long-term economic growth plans are driven by the priorities within the East Suffolk Strategic Plan and the East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan and create a strong foundation that will drive the district’s economic recovery by enabling growth through our existing economic strength and new growth opportunities.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Wards Affected:	All East Suffolk wards
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Cabinet Member:	Cllr Craig Rivett Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Economic Development
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Supporting Officer:	Paul Wood Head of Economic Development & Regeneration 07798 797275 Paul.wood@eastssuffolk.gov.uk
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Covid pandemic and its associated trading restrictions, including national lockdowns have had a devastating impact on the national and local economy. ESC has been at the forefront of the immediate local response through the allocation of huge sums of grant payments to ensure the short-term viability of businesses in the District but also ensuring there is a longer-term strategic recovery plan in place building on our existing economic growth programmes and new economic opportunities.
- 1.2 This paper sets out the extent to which the pandemic has impacted on the local economy, the Council's immediate response to this threat and the long-term, strategic economic growth plans which will ensure we have strong recovery, which all members of the community can benefit from. This is based on the Council's economic objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan and the East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan and also the national economic policy agenda around 'Building Back better' and supporting the delivery of local and national objectives of achieving carbon neutrality.

2 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

- 2.1 The unprecedented trading restrictions imposed to control the spread of Covid 19 have had a huge negative impact on the national and local economy. In April 2020 the UK experienced a 25% contraction in GDP, the largest ever fall. For context, this reduction was six times greater than fall experienced during the 2008/9 financial crash, which at the time was the deepest recession since the 1930s depression. Whilst the economy did partially recover during the second half of the year, it is still 9% smaller than the pre-pandemic level and experienced a further fall in November following another tightening of restrictions.
- 2.2 This severe contraction in the economy has unsurprisingly led to a dramatic increase in unemployment at national and local levels. Within East Suffolk jobless totals increased by 96% over the year with the number of people being unemployed increasing by over 3,400 to just over 7,000, however we did perform better than the region and nationally where the increase was 120% . The extent to which businesses were and are still being affected can be demonstrated by the national Furlough and Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). At the peak, almost a third of employees in the District were furloughed and 62% of our small businesses had accessed SEISS.
- 2.3 These trading restrictions have also had a severe impact on the high street and retail in particular. 'Bricks and mortar' retail was already under pressure prior to the pandemic, however the restrictions have accelerated the trend in high street closures. In our two largest towns, Lowestoft and Felixstowe, there has been a sharp increase in vacant units exacerbated by the Covid trading restrictions.

3 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

- 3.1 In order to mitigate the impact of trading restrictions the government made a range of grants available to micro and small businesses who were forced to close or severely impacted. Councils have been responsible for allocating this funding. The first wave of grants was launched shortly after the first national lockdown in March 2020 and these included the Small Business Grant, the Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant along with discretionary grant funding for those businesses without a rateable value/ falling outside of the categories of the SBG and RHL grants.
- 3.2 During this first wave ESC allocated over £66m worth of grants to over 5,800 businesses. This represented a massive effort by the Council with Finance, Economic Development, Business Solutions, Audit and ARP working collaboratively to ensure as many businesses as possible received their grants. During the autumn and winter with the infection rate rising again the

government reintroduced stricter trading restrictions and we have experienced two further national lockdowns in November and the current one which commenced in early January. As a result of this further grant funding was made available to businesses in Suffolk in the form of:

- The Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRS) for businesses – a rolling grant for businesses forced to close or severely impacted by the trading restrictions. ESC has been awarded £16.6m so far.
- The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) for businesses without a rateable value. ESC has been allocated £7.1m and the Council were able to design this scheme at its own discretion within broad government guidelines. The Council’s approach was to develop the eligibility in a way that maximised the number of eligible businesses to provide the greatest level of support. Unlike other grants the ARG is designed to cover a two -year period and can include funding for longer-term business support measures.
- Christmas Support Payment – one-off £1000 grant for ‘wet-led’ pubs.
- Closed Business Lockdown Payments - providing businesses that are required to close in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector with a grant of up to £9k.

- 3.3 Over 9,100 further payments totalling £18m (as of 20 January 2021) have been paid to businesses through these grants. Therefore, a total of over £84m has been paid out in grant funding to East Suffolk businesses since the beginning of the pandemic.
- 3.4 In addition to the Covid business grants the Council was also responsible for delivering the ‘Reopening High Streets Safely Fund’ aimed at encouraging a safe return to town centres following the first national lockdown. ESC was allocated £222K and following consultation with Town Councils from ESC’s 12 principal towns, a range of social distancing and other safety precautions were put in place including temporary road closures, social distancing signage, hand sanitisers and barriers to aid the safe return to the high street. The Council spent its total allocation on delivering these measures to support trading within our towns.
- 3.5 A positive legacy of these interventions is that some towns e.g. Woodbridge based on business and town centre user feedback are exploring permanent pedestrianisation schemes which will improve the town centre’s appeal and hopefully address falling footfall. Linked to the reopening fund’s objectives the Economic Development team commissioned the ‘Shop Local, Stay Safe’ social media campaign to encourage the use of local town centres in a safe manner.
- 3.6 As a result of the impact on businesses during the Spring and Summer of 2020 the ED team’s business engagement and support activity increased massively with enquiries at four times the normal, pre-pandemic level. Businesses were particularly focused on how to access financial support and how to operate in a safe manner. Furthermore, the Council’s East Suffolk Means Business portal provided advice on the full range of government and local support available and saw traffic levels increase by over 1600% at the height of the first lockdown. The team also had direct engagement with almost 7,000 businesses in 2020 representing a 118% increase compared to normal business support activity.
- 3.7 Support was also provided to local business associations who are the heart of their local communities and therefore have a unique insight into local business needs. This took the form of the £71k Business Association Development Fund to enable these local business networks to better support their local business community. Examples of support through this scheme included promotional activity, investment in digital technology and supporting the safe use of town centres.
- 3.8 ESC also provided specific sector support to important local industries such as the creative sector which has been particularly badly affected by the pandemic restrictions. Following engagement with businesses within the sector ESC established the East Suffolk Arts Creative

Forum to understand in more detail the specific issues and to collectively develop a support package. This brought together a wide range of performance and arts organisation as well the Arts Council and SCC and identified support in digital skills, marketing and promotion, place specific activities and additional funding all of which are now being progressed.

- 3.9 Further sector specific support came in the form of the Call4 Fish scheme which was developed in collaboration with and funding from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and the LEP. This project saw the development of website that connected the catching industry directly with the domestic consumers to mitigate the sudden loss of trade due to the closure of the hospitality sector. This project has now evolved to include sector specific business support to aid industry in the recovery phase.

4 RECOVERY

- 4.1 The imposition of extreme trading restrictions did require an immediate response in the form of huge injections of cash into businesses to maintain their viability, however there is also a need to focus on the longer-term recovery for the economy once restrictions are eased and ultimately lifted. The lockdowns and tiered restrictions have accelerated and exacerbated a number of trends which were in evidence before the pandemic such as the decline in ‘bricks and mortar’ retail and the move to online trading. As a result of our strong and diverse business sectors and the long-term economic development and regeneration programmes established before the pandemic East Suffolk is well placed to address the issues the Covid downturn has deepened and more broadly enable a strong economic recovery. These programmes whilst long-term and strategic in nature are also flexible enough to have been adapted and modified to take account of the changed economic landscape. The guiding principles for these programmes are set out within Economy Theme of the Strategic Plan and the priorities within the East Suffolk Growth Plan.

4.2 Town Centre Recovery

- 4.3 ESC’s approach to town centre revitalisation is delivered at a District wide level through the Towns Revitalisation Programme and associated Smart Towns Programme as well as through place-based programmes such as the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan and Felixstowe Vision.
- 4.4 The Town Revitalisation Programme was developed in collaboration with town centre businesses, users and Town Councils. ESC commissioned People and Places (a nationally recognised town centre consultancy) to undertake research into the opportunities and challenges in each town based around a range of measures to assess the ‘health’ of the place and business environment. The town stakeholder groups with support from ESC are now developing and delivering action plans based on this research to improve the attractiveness to both users and businesses and thereby the overall viability of their town centres.
- 4.5 The £1.2m Smart Towns Programme will see twelve towns in East Suffolk benefit from new technology including free Wi-Fi and footfall tracking, to help high streets and town centres recover from the impact of Covid-19 and maintain and grow their longer-term viability. Following a successful pilot in Framlingham last year, East Suffolk’s Smart Towns Project will now be rolled out to 11 other market towns across the district. In addition to the technology installation the project will also deliver a two-year branded digital growth programme, which will deliver diagnostics, digital presence support, data analytics, digitally themed workshops and showcases and a full digital advice service for local businesses as well as town councils and business groups.
- 4.6 The place-based towns redevelopment and revitalisation programmes include the Lowestoft Town Investment plan (TIP). This is an ambitious long-term strategic regeneration strategy for the town covering the town centre, historic high street, key employment areas linked to offshore energy and the port and South Beach seafront area. The TIP sets out a £0.5bn

programme of planned and future investments to transform the town by building on the towns existing economic strength in clean energy, marine science, tourism, heritage and emerging strengths in digital and culture. The delivery of this strategy will result in the creation of 2,600 jobs, 90 new businesses and £354m of private sector investment in the town.

- 4.7 The TIP also represents the bid for £24.9m from the Towns Fund which ESC, on behalf of the Lowestoft Place Board, were invited to bid for by MHCLG in 2020. If successful this will see catalytic investments in and transformational development of a new Cultural, Station and Historic quarters of the town in addition to improvements to the port gateway and the south beach areas of the town (see Appendix A).
- 4.8 An announcement on the Towns Fund bid is due in February 2020 and if successful this will enable significant economic growth in the town and town centre which has seen significant decline in recent years. This will complement recent huge and planned investments in the town such as the £146m Gullwing Bridge, £67m flood protection scheme, Scottish Power's £25m operations and maintenance base, £20m full fibre project, £16m redevelopment of CEFAS and the £12m Energy Skills Centre at East Coast College. The massive scale of this public and private investment means that Lowestoft will be well placed to recover strongly from the Covid economic downturn and more generally from decades of economic decline.
- 4.9 The recently completed Felixstowe vision sets out a significant economic growth and development programme for the town initiated and driven by ESC. The vision highlights the growth opportunities through the North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood scheme; a mixed use scheme including a regional destination leisure centre, housing and employment scheme; significant ESC investment and developments along the seafront to broaden and grow the visitor economy e.g. the £1m Martello café and wider south seafront public realm scheme, the town centre e.g. through the establishment of the Felixstowe Business Improvement District and support for the diversification of the high street and the Landgaurd peninsula through the further enhancement of this tourist attraction.
- 4.10 The vision provides a framework of committed and planned investments that build on the town's strong visitor economy, the need to reinvigorate the town centre and support the continued viability and growth of its key employer the Port of Felixstowe. This strategic and long-term approach to growth in the town puts it in a strong position to enjoy a robust recovery from the current economic downturn.
- 4.11 ESC is also working closely with local stakeholders in Leiston through the Leiston Together partnership to deliver a range of economic and community development projects within an overarching town development plan. This includes supporting local partners in the development and delivery of town centre regeneration scheme. Likewise, ESC has and continues to provide support to Southwold Town Council in the delivery of its Enterprise Hub project. This includes support through the Funding and ED teams to secure a £1m grant from the Coastal Community Fund, having senior level representation on the project board to drive the project forward and providing support from various Council teams such as Assets and Planning.
- 4.12 **Sector Based Recovery**
- 4.13 The East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan also adopts a sector-based approach to economic growth and identifies the following key sectors where East Suffolk has a competitive advantage and significant opportunities for growth exist:
- Low and Zero Carbon Energy
 - Ports & Logistics
 - Digital

- Visitor Economy
- Culture/ Creative
- Agriculture, Food & Drink
- Marine

- 4.14 East Suffolk is fortunate in having world leading and diverse sectors and maximising the growth opportunities within these industries will be critical in achieving a strong recovery. Across each of these sectors the ED team are delivering growth enabling programmes which will be crucial in supporting the wider East Suffolk economic recovery.
- 4.15 In the energy sector we are working closely with local and regional partners to deliver a Sizewell C economic programme which provides a once in a generation of opportunity to capitalise on the huge potential economic growth of one of Europe's largest ever civil engineering projects. This involves the development of long-term programmes to maximise local economic opportunities in:
- Employment
 - Workforce skills
 - Supply Chain
 - Inward Investment
 - Innovation
- 4.16 If Sizewell C gets the go ahead it will result in £20bn investment, the creation of 8,500 jobs at peak construction, 25,000 roles over the lifetime of the project, 1,500 apprenticeships, 900 long-term operational jobs and a £100m pa boost to regional GVA. ESC's focus is to maximise the opportunities from this huge investment for local people to access the higher skilled / paid roles, local businesses to secure supply chain contracts, secure inward investment in the local area from the SZC supply chain, invest in skills development to enable local access to these roles. In addition to the focus on the 10 – 12 year construction period, ESC and partners are developing plans to secure a positive economic legacy beyond construction. This includes the creation of a skilled workforce for other significant development projects e.g. in offshore wind; the development of a significant outage sub-sector and an energy campus.
- 4.17 The decision on whether to consent SZC will be made in 2022 and if it does go ahead construction is anticipated to commence in mid 2023.
- 4.18 Offshore wind is the other major energy growth sector in East Suffolk. In recent years we have seen over £6bn invested in offshore wind off the region's coastline with a further £122m invested in long-term operations and maintenance (O&M). This includes Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) £25m O&M base at Lowestoft which created 150 jobs. Our region is the main focus for offshore wind development and a critical part of the governments objective to achieve Carbon neutrality by 2050 and accounts for 44% of the UK's installed offshore wind capacity.
- 4.19 Further huge growth in this sector is anticipated with SPR's EA3 wind array consented and EA1N and EA2 currently going through the DCO planning process. Operations and maintenance for the consented offshore wind schemes could be worth a further £1.3bn pa for the region. Lowestoft Port has established itself as a key centre for O&M through the siting of EA1's O&M base at Hamilton Dock. ESC is working closely with ABP to support the development of their outer harbour which will provide significant commercial space to service the growth in the offshore wind sector.

- 4.20 We are also directly investing in the adjacent PowerPark area to provide new commercial space to capitalise on this sector growth and induce business investment. By providing modern and flexible employment space required by the sector we can further anchor the O&M cluster in Lowestoft. In support of this growth the Energy Skills Centre at East Coast College, Lowestoft provides a world leading training environment for local young people and the existing workforce to develop the skills needed to access highly skilled and well paid jobs.
- 4.21 ESC is also a key partner in the East of England Energy Zone (EEEZ) partnership with GYBC, SCC, NCC and the LEP. The focus of this group is to market the inward investment opportunities the Lowestoft/ Great Yarmouth sub-region has in the offshore energy sector. This joint approach and pooling of resources allows us to promote the sub-region nationally and internationally to secure business investment.
- 4.22 The focus of ESC's work to exploit the economic opportunities from offshore wind is the creation of appropriate, fit for purpose commercial space and promoting the investment opportunities nationally and globally. This sector will see strong growth for at least the next two decades and the short-term growth will be a significant contribution to the recovery in East Suffolk.
- 4.23 East Suffolk also has major strengths in the Ports and Logistics sector with Felixstowe Port, the country's busiest container port and the Port of Lowestoft which is seeing major growth linked to the offshore wind sector. ESC's economic growth strategy seeks to enable growth in the wider ports and logistic sector and a major project linked to this is the bid for Freeport status focussed on the Felixstowe/ Harwich ports cluster. ESC in collaboration with Hutchison Ports (operators of Felixstowe and Harwich ports), Harwich Haven Authority, the LEPs and county councils covering Suffolk and Essex, Tendring DC, established Freeport East as the group to produce a bid in response to the government's Freeport programme which was launched in early 2020.
- 4.24 10 Freeports will be established across the UK which will provide a range of tax, customs and planning incentives to drive economic growth. The government established this programme to capitalise on the UK's exit from the EU, contribute to the 'Levelling Up' agenda and more latterly to support the covid economic recovery. Freeport East has identified three tax/ customs sites within the proposed Freeport zone which will be the focus for new economic activity. One of these three sites is proposed to be in East Suffolk at the Port of Felixstowe's logistics park. This will see direct and significant business investment and employment growth within the district and combined with two further sites within the Freeport zone at Harwich International Port and Gateway 14 in Mid Suffolk will drive growth within the ports and logistics sector more generally which East Suffolk will benefit from. ESC has been a key player in developing the Freeport East partnership and progressing a robust a bid, which if successful this will provide further economic growth in one of our key sectors and directly contribute to the District's economic recovery.
- 4.25 Digital is a further key sector for East Suffolk with world class assets at BT's Adastral Park, its global hub for research and development. Adastral Park also hosts Innovation Martlesham (IM), which with over 100 companies is the country's largest technology start up incubator. ESC (as SCDC) was a joint founder of IM and has continued to support its development.
- 4.26 ESC is making a major investment in digital through the Lowestoft Full Fibre project. It has invested £2m into this scheme to ensure all the town's key employment sites can access the new ultrafast broadband network resulting in every residential and commercial property being able to connect to the new network. This will enable business growth through the attraction of new businesses to the town to take advantage of world leading broadband speeds and enable growth within existing business. More generally it will act as a further strong promotional tool which the ED team will employ as part of their wider inward investment campaign.

- 4.27 The ED team are working closely with local business networks develop a business engagement and awareness raising campaign that will promote the business benefits of the new network in order to maximise take up of the new service. The first phase of the new network is anticipated to go live in spring 2021.
- 4.28 Alongside the Smart Towns programme (described at 4.5) this represents a major investment by ESC in digital to drive economic growth which will start being realised in the coming months and thereby demonstrating a further major contribution to the post Covid economic recovery.
- 4.29 The marine sector is a further major contributor to the District's economic performance. The importance of the district's two major ports has already been covered, however further important sectors exist in marine science and fishing. The CEFAS laboratories in Pakefield, Lowestoft represent a world class marine science centre and following its recent £16m redevelopment it now employs 400 people in highly skilled roles, an increase of a third since the modernisation programme. As part of the Lowestoft TIP, ESC has been working closely with CEFAS to develop a marine science campus which could potentially be based in Lowestoft high street taking advantage of one of the large vacant retail units and thereby meeting the Lowestoft Masterplan ambitions for this area.
- 4.30 The campus concept is seeking to bring together CEFAS, academia and business within marine science sector to create a dedicated, networked academic marine science campus bringing students from the further education sector into town to learn and develop their expertise in marine science. This will support and grow the town's existing marine science capabilities and will have strong links with other marine related sectors such as offshore energy and the Port of Lowestoft. Whilst still at an early stage it is anticipated that tangible progress will be made in the next 12 months providing further long-term growth potential to support the economic recovery.
- 4.31 ESC has also been leading on the creation of a growth strategy for the fishing sector to take advantage of the opportunities that leaving the EU presents for this sector. With local, regional and national partners the Renaissance in East Anglia Fishing (REAF) partnership was established, chaired by Peter Aldous MP and produced the REAF strategy. This strategy makes a series of recommendations which would enable Lowestoft to re-establish itself as a significant regional fishing hub. To achieve this the plan identifies the need for port infrastructure investment, changes to national fishing policy, access to finance, training, greater collaboration between regulators and improved data transparency. The strategy has been well received by DEFRA and discussions continue on how to deliver the recommendations, which would see growth in both local catching and processing sectors contributing to the wider recovery.
- 4.32 Tourism is a further key sector for East Suffolk accounting for 15% of total employment and worth almost £700m pa to the district's economy. The covid restrictions have particularly impacted this sector due to prolonged enforced close downs and restricted trading. In response ESC has jointly funded two tourism surveys with local authorities and tourism bodies across Norfolk and Suffolk to identify the extent of the impact and more importantly what support is needed locally over and above national support programmes. This resulted in the development of a £0.5m marketing campaign 'Unexplored England' jointly funded by Suffolk and Norfolk councils and the Cabinet Office. The campaign encourages tourists to 'visit safely' in the 2021 season and will now focus on the summer season due to restrictions being anticipated to last well into spring. Central Government were particularly impressed with the scale of collaborative working in the region and hence the level of their investment. The Visit Suffolk Coast DMO, funded by ESC, will be a major conduit for this campaign.

- 4.33 On the basis that the tourism sector can fully reopen in the summer this campaign will be expected to increase visitor numbers and particularly targets those people who haven't previously considered Norfolk and Suffolk as a visitor destination.
- 4.34 ESC is also directly investing in its own tourism assets. In Lowestoft this includes the £720k redevelopment of the East Point Pavilion to transform a tired and inefficient building on the seafront into a modern attraction for community and cultural activity, pop up businesses, and food and drink offering. Further visitor economy investment is taking place at Jubilee Terrace with a £1.6m scheme to replace the beach chalets and in Felixstowe the new £1m Martello Café is currently under construction and due to open in July and is part of a much wider investment planned to take place in the South Seafront area.
- 4.35 This combination of enhanced promotion and direct capital investment in tourist attractions demonstrates ESC's commitment to supporting and enabling growth in this important sector. Once the visitor economy reopens these investments will enable the sector to contribute significantly to the District's economic recovery.

5. **ONGOING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DELIVERY**

- 5.1 The ED team continue to operate their core business support, inward investment and skills development programmes which support business to grow and invest in the District. Whilst this is ongoing activity the focus is on enabling economic growth and therefore will strongly support the economic recovery.
- 5.2 As demonstrated above, ESC often enables economic growth in collaboration with local, regional and national partners. In terms of the wider strategic support for the economic recovery it is a key partner in the development and delivery of the regional recovery plan. This covers areas such as responding to redundancies, support for training, town centre recovery, tourism, infrastructure investment, supply chain development. Our own interventions contribute significantly to this plan and the ED team work closely with local and regional partners to ensure our businesses and residents can take full advantage of the support offered. It is also worth noting that our key sectors are of such importance that they will be a major driver of the regional economic recovery well beyond the district boundary.
- 5.3 The above demonstrates that ESC is engaged in a comprehensive programme of enabling economic growth that will support a strong economic recovery in the District, however that is not sufficient to ensure that all members of our communities can benefit from this growth. Therefore, we are also engaged in a number of inclusive growth programmes such as the East Suffolk Youth Employment Service, that supports young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) through specialist work coaches into training, jobs, education and volunteering.
- 5.4 We are also key partners in the government's Kick Start scheme to provide young people with a six-month work placement to offset the loss of many jobs and apprenticeships due to Covid economic downturn which has disproportionately affected this age group. These placements provide young people with skills, experience and confidence in the world of work so they are well placed to access permanent roles once the economy recovers rather than becoming long-term unemployed. In addition to the placements, job search and interview skills are part of the Kick Start package to further improve employment prospects.

6. **RECOVERY – FUTURE DELIVERY**

- 6.1 ESC is also exploring future opportunities to enable economic growth in the District that will contribute to economic recovery. As previously stated, the Sizewell C development provides a massive opportunity to enable local economic growth. ESC and its partners are exploring the potential to develop an energy campus linked to the construction of new power station that

would involve EDF as an anchor tenant, tier 1 suppliers and regulators. This would be based on a similar model to the innovations centres in Somerset linked to the Hinkley Point C new nuclear development, which has proved extremely successful. This would secure significant inward investment and associated local employment growth opportunities. We are also exploring a strong legacy beyond the construction phase of Sizewell C that would include a permanent site for businesses associated with the maintenance of the new power station.

- 6.2 ESC are also exploring opportunities to deliver economic growth linked to the emerging hydrogen economy which would further cement the region's all energy offer. This zero-carbon fuel source is gaining traction as a viable alternative to fossil fuels especially in larger vehicles associated with our ports that do not lend themselves to conversion to electric vehicles. Both ABP and Hutchison Ports are actively progressing the use of hydrogen in their assets furthermore, Sizewell B is seeking to become a major producer of hydrogen meaning that the district will be a major producer and user of hydrogen in the future. Additionally, ESC is also exploring the use of hydrogen within its vehicle fleet and leisure centres. As a result, the ED team are exploring the potential to exploit this activity within the District and develop a hydrogen cluster consisting of supply chain companies and research/ academia to be based within the energy campus concept described at 6.1. This would allow us to exploit the economic growth of this new sector whilst providing a further legacy to the energy campus beyond the construction of Sizewell C.
- 6.3 As stated at 3.1, the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme also has a longer-term business support element. In light of this, the ED team are developing a business support programme specifically focussed on supporting businesses/ sectors to recover. This programme includes:
- Business start-up grant scheme – reflecting the fact that there is an increase in business start-ups during and immediately following a recession.
 - Full Fibre voucher scheme – to ensure business have the best possible opportunity to connect to the new ultrafast network in Lowestoft.
 - Town centre recovery – supplement the current extensive work being undertaken to support town centre revitalisation.
 - Tourism promotion – provide additional local level tourism marketing and promotion to supplement the Norfolk and Suffolk campaign and support the hospitality sector.
- 6.4 A paper setting out these proposals in more detail will be taken to Cabinet in March with the intention that these additional business support programmes will be implemented during the spring and summer.
- 6.5 Securing external funding is critical to delivering the Council's economic development and regeneration programmes. ESC has an impressive track record in this area having secured £7.2m in the last five years. We will continue to pursue funding applications and currently have £27.1m worth of bids in the pipeline to deliver our economic growth programmes which will in turn support the local recovery. This will include accessing significant funding from the two new major funding sources being established by the government to replace EU funding and bring together a range of national funding i.e. the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Levelling Up fund. This will be in addition to the sector based, regional and local funding opportunities the Council will continue to pursue to facilitate the delivery of the Council's economic growth strategy.
- 6.6 It is also worth noting that the Council through the HRS, Capital and General Funds invests significantly in the District with anticipated expenditure in 2021/22 totalling £219.2m. This expenditure contributes significantly to economic activity and growth within East Suffolk.

7 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC PLAN?

7.1 The immediate response and longer-term economic recovery programmes set out in this paper directly contribute to the Growing Our Economy theme and all the priorities under this theme. The Economy theme is based on the East Suffolk Economic Growth plan objectives and priorities and provides the framework for all the Council's economic growth programmes.

7.2 The Council's economic growth enabling activities driving the recovery also contribute significantly to all the other Strategic Plan themes:

- Communities
 - by ensuring all members of the Community have the opportunity to benefit from economic growth through the inclusive growth programmes.
 - maximising health and wellbeing in the district since being in employment is strongly linked to better physical and mental health outcomes.
- Digital
 - through the Full Fibre and Smart Towns programmes which will contribute significantly to the installation of district wide digital infrastructure, effective use of data and skills and training priorities.
- Environment
 - through the focus on enabling economic growth in the low and zero carbon energy sector.
- Financial Sustainability
 - Promotion and enabling of economic growth will increase the District's business rates base which directly and positively impacts on Council finances.

8 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The economic growth programmes highlighted within this report have been the subject of Cabinet and Full Council reports where the financial and governance implications were addressed and approved. The funding for these programmes has either been secured from external sources and/ or from within the Council's budget. The new business support programme specifically focussed on economic recovery will be the subject of a Cabinet report in March. This report identifies no new requests for funding.

9 OTHER KEY ISSUES

9.1 This report has been prepared having taken into account the results of an Equality Impact Assessment which identified that the economic growth programmes covered in the report will have a positive impact on two of the nine protected characteristics. These characteristics are age and disability.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The growth and recovery programmes highlighted in this report have been developed in consultation with a wide range of partners and stakeholders from across public, private, voluntary and community sectors at a local, regional and national level.

11 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11.1 Not appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

That, having considered the report, the Scrutiny Committee is asked to make recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Written questions and answers
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BACKGROUND PAPERS – NONE

REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND REGENERATION OF THE DISTRICT POST-COVID19

Cllr Beavan

Q1: (a) *Section 3, Immediate Response, paragraph 3.2:*

What about online small businesses and the self-employed who have slipped through the net as these are also likely to be the engines of growth?

(b) *Paragraph 3.7 and Section 4, Recovery:*

How much fish has been traded? How can the in-shore fleet compete with large operators who still own so much of the quota?

A1:

(a) Two main Covid business grants are currently being operated by ESC. These are the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRS) and the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), the former is the so called 'mandatory' scheme and is aimed at businesses with a rateable value (RV). The latter is a discretionary scheme aimed at businesses who do not, for whatever reason, have an RV and the policy for this scheme has been developed at ESC's discretion, within broad government guidelines, to be permissive to ensure as many businesses in this category as possible qualify for grant funding. This is demonstrated by the ESC ARG scheme having a number of qualifying categories including one which is applicable to any business not meeting the preceding criteria. Applications of this nature are determined by the ARG Grants Panel comprising of senior officers from Finance, ED, Legal and a Strategic Director. Any decision to reject an application at this stage has to be approved by the Deputy Cabinet member of ED, Cllr Wiles. For information over 90% of applications referred to the panel are approved further demonstrating ESC's permissive approach to Covid business support.

It should be noted that due to the length of time the various Covid grant schemes have been operating we now have reliable details on the majority of eligible businesses and as such most payments are now made automatically without the need for an application. Furthermore, we continue to strive to reach those eligible businesses that have not yet applied through a proactive comms strategy using the traditional print media, various social media channels, elected members and direct contact.

(b) Call4Fish is a national campaign, originating in the south-west of England, and established as a direct response to Covid-19 and the initial lockdown. The aim being to re-connect the market for fish; enabling consumers to buy seafood safely, and to help UK fisherman and local traders.

In Norfolk and Suffolk, the project went one step further, building on the Call4Fish campaign and utilising the opportunity to talk with the catching and seafood sector to develop an understanding of their business, the impact of the pandemic on their business, and their ambitions for the future. This work doubled the number of Suffolk businesses registered on the Call4Fish website to 14 and had a similar success in Norfolk.

Whilst we have not captured the volume of fish traded through the platform, the project facilitated the creation of a detailed snapshot of the Norfolk and Suffolk fishing industry with more than 40 interviews being conducted, and 65 businesses expressing an interest in developing a sector specific network that works for the benefit of the fishing and seafood industry.

It is difficult to answer the second part of the question. Partly because the full impact of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement is poorly understood at this time, and secondly because the relationship between the inshore fleet and the large operators of the offshore fleet is not necessarily one of direct competition. The REAF Steering Group will be looking at these issues during the course 2021 and will be happy to supply an update later in the year.

Q2: (a) *Section 4, Recovery, paragraph 4.12, Sector based recovery:*

The high street in Southwold is still successful enough so are retailers right to be resistant to change ideas of pedestrian priority periods and encouragement of the high street as a place to do and meet rather than to buy?

(b) *Paragraph 4.24:*

Are we being successful in encouraging local young people to train and get jobs in the wind energy sector?

(c) *Paragraph 4.27:*

How does a free port help local business in practical terms?

(d) *Paragraph 4.30:*

Does this connectivity also include the old copper wires from the box to houses?

A2:

- (a)** In Southwold decisions that were made regarding pedestrian changes during Covid restrictions were made at a local level by Southwold Town Council and Suffolk CC in consultation with the business community.

Many high streets are evolving their offer as consumer changes have been accelerated further by Covid related trading restrictions and its widely recognised that retail is no longer the focal point of the high street. ESC enabled the original High Street strategy for Southwold to be developed by People and Places as part of the Coastal Community Team (CCT) Economic plan. Based on this work the Town Council appointed a Town Manager, who is working directly with the business community to develop the Southwold brand and offer and deliver a high street strategy.

Southwold has indicated through its Neighbourhood Plan, Town Council Strategy and CCT Economic Plan that it needs to extend the visitor economy to all year round to assist the sustainability of local businesses but there is also a desire to diversify the economy, so it becomes less reliant on tourism. The future role of the high street is key to achieving these objectives and locally led plans will be the driver for delivering a sustainable model for Southwold's high street.

- (b)** ESC is a lead partner on a small number of Stakeholder Groups whose main objective is to raise the profile of careers in the Renewables sector and plan activities which focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. The activities carried out range from supporting School and Further education career events to larger Skills for Energy regional events which are now virtual. ESC has hosted the Labour Market Information Stakeholder Group (LMI) which brings together academic institutions/ training providers in the former Waveney area with a focus on trends in employment. The information exchange includes highlighting current employment and apprenticeship opportunities to enable career managers in school to carry out their roles effectively. ESC has directly supported primary school programmes on Wind energy with over 300 Primary school pupils participating. There are also programmes in place in high schools which support pupils through awareness raising about the employment opportunities in the offshore wind sector and such programmes link through to Further education.

East Coast College (ECC) has operated the Energy Skills Foundation Programme for 16-19-year olds for a number of years which has resulted in young people going into careers in the energy sector including wind energy. In 2019/20, 25 young people from the Lowestoft area registered on the course. 78% moved into a positive destination, mainly into apprenticeships, in the renewables sector supply chain. In addition, the Offshore Skills Wind Centre at the college provides an opportunity for young people to enter renewable energy sector and in 2019/20 had a success rate of 92% of participants securing employment.

Due to demand ECC have increased the number of courses on offer for mechatronics, maintenance, wind blade training and electrical technician courses. Maersk Training joined the College to offer Global Wind Operator training in 2019 and the partnership has gone from strength to strength. The increase in the training offer is demand led.

All training opportunities at ECC are underpinned by the £10m world class Energy Skills Centre which opened in 2019. This centre was specifically designed to ensure that the local workforce could benefit from the huge investment taking place in offshore wind off the coast of Lowestoft. This offer was further strengthened through the partnership with Maersk Training which is globally recognised as providing one of the world's best training programmes in this sector.

- (c) The Freeport initiative allows successful applications to create up three tax and customs zones. Within each of these zones a range of business, tax, customs and planning incentives apply to attract new economic investment. This investment will lead to the creation of new businesses, additional employment and wider economic benefits through the local supply chain. Freeport East is a partnership of Hutchison Ports (operators of the Port of Felixstowe and Harwich International Port), Harwich Haven Authority, ESC, Tendring DC and the two LEAs/ County Councils covering Suffolk and Essex. The partnership was established to develop a collaborative and compelling submission for Freeport status. The partnership's bid for Freeport status, which focused on the Felixstowe/ Harwich ports cluster, was submitted to HMG on 5 Feb. The three tax/ customs sites nominated in the bid are Felixstowe Logistics Park at the Port of Felixstowe, Gateway 14 - adjacent the A14 within the Mid Suffolk DC area and Bathside Bay within Harwich International Port.

For East Suffolk the most direct local economic benefit will be derived from new business investment at the Felixstowe Logistics Park. This will lead to new business and employment creation on a site that has already received planning approval and is therefore 'oven ready'. It is important to note, however that all three tax/ customs sites combined will deliver substantial local economic growth through direct and indirect investment through the wider supply chain in the nationally significant local ports and logistics sectors which operates within the sub-region. The delivery of the Freeport East proposal will result in the creation of 13,500 new jobs within the Haven Gateway sub-region.

It is also worth noting that the business rates associated with any new economic growth in the tax/customs sites will be retained in the local area for further reinvestment in the local economy. Securing Freeport status also allows the area to bid into a £170m infrastructure fund and a further innovation fund both of which will result in significant investment in the local economy and drive further economic growth.

(d) The Lowestoft Full Fibre project will involve the installation of a completely new fibre network which will deliver fibre directly to residential and business premises – this is referred to as Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) broadband. This new network will provide ultrafast broadband speeds (up to 900mbps) which are far in excess of those that can be achieved through the existing copper-based network. The existing copper network will still be available to all properties in this area and if they form part of a ‘fibre to the cabinet’ (FTTC) system will be able to provide superfast broadband speeds in excess of 24mbps. The new network will also be competitively priced in order to maximise take up with broadband packages being similar in price to existing packages.

Q3: (a) *Section 6. Recovery-Future delivery, paragraph 6.3:*

What about social enterprises? Partnerships with the Council?

A3:

ESC has a strong track record of working closely with the community and voluntary sectors (CVS), including social enterprises and community interest companies in delivering economic growth programmes. Furthermore, the Economic Development team directly support and promote the development of social enterprises. A recent example of this is working with Community Catalysts to promote a programme that offers support to local people to set up and run their own very small enterprise, offering help and support at home for older people and support for disabled people who want to live life their way. The Economic Development team brokered introductions with a number of business support providers, education establishments and complementary projects that could add additionality to the programme.

The First Light Festival is a further example of how ESC works closely with the CVS since the organising body behind this event is the First Light Festival Community Interest Company (CIC). Alongside achieving the economic related goals of increasing visitor numbers (especially amongst those who had not previously visited the town) to Lowestoft through a high-profile cultural event, the CIC also had a clear commitment to social/ community goals around increasing participation, health and wellbeing and inclusivity.

ESC also jointly funds a number of Place Based Initiatives (PBIs) across the District in Felixstowe, Leiston and Lowestoft. The objective of these groups is to provide a place-based focus for economic and community development. A key partner in each of the PBIs is the community and voluntary sector (CVS) in the form of Community Action Suffolk. This has allowed the development of place-based action plans to be fully cognisant of the ability of the CVS to positively influence and support the delivery of such objectives.

Further collaboration with this sector is demonstrated through The East Suffolk Youth Employment Scheme (YES) which is delivered by Inspire Suffolk on behalf of ESC. This scheme is aimed at supporting young people who are / at risk of becoming NEET i.e. not in employment, education or training. Such interventions are particularly important because the impact on the individual and the wider local economy of long-term unemployment is highly significant. Inspire Suffolk, who provide this service are a charity and this further demonstrates our collaborative approach with the community, voluntary and charitable sector in delivering economic growth and recovery.

The CVS also act as key stakeholders in a range of regeneration and development plans ESC has developed and is delivering. Consultation with this sector is vital in ensuring such plans and developments provide benefit to all members of the community. This sector has provided vital consultation feedback on a wide range of schemes including the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, town centre masterplan, Felixstowe South Seafront development.

Cllr Gooch

Q4: Of the businesses that ESC has helped with ESC grants of one kind or another, what feedback have we received from these businesses in terms of their mid to long-term viability?

A4:

The Covid business grants that ESC has and continues to allocate are focused on the short-term survival of businesses, whilst they are either forced to close or are operating under severe trading restrictions. The intention is to partially offset the loss of income these businesses have experienced as a result of such trading restrictions and maintain where possible a positive cash flow situation. It is not the objective of such funding to support longer-term recovery and viability. The ED team are currently developing a longer-term recovery programme to support the longer-term viability of businesses who have been severely impacted. This builds on our existing and successful economic growth programmes and also represents a response to particular demands we are seeing as a result of the economic downturn. Areas of focus for this programme include digital transformation and support, business start-up funding, town centre recovery and tourism promotion. Within each of these thematic programmes there are a series of grant funded projects aimed at enabling enterprise and increasing the competitiveness of local businesses, so they are well placed to take advantage of the economic recovery.

The ED team have received dozens of emails from businesses in receipt of Covid business grants expressing their thanks and gratitude. In many cases they highlight that these grants have provided the lifeline that will enable them to survive and retain employees until the end of the current trading restrictions.

It is worthwhile noting that during the course of the pandemic and during periods of lockdown the ED team (and other teams across the Council) have been receiving a number of enquiries from businesses wishing to invest and expand in the area. This has also included many start-up businesses e.g. in the Lowestoft HAZ there has been 10 new start-up businesses and a further 4 businesses have either expanded or developed. This new investment has been partly possible due to the focused support and investment the regeneration Team can bring to this area through the HAZ programme. A further demonstration of this demand, despite the Covid downturn is a strong flow of enquiries ESC is receiving regarding the availability of small units.

ESC has also been a partner in business surveys of Covid business grant recipients across the whole of Suffolk. Two surveys took place in 2020, during the first lockdown in May and then during in June/ July when restricted trading was allowed. The surveys focused on the impact on businesses and their prospects. Unsurprisingly, in both surveys the biggest impacts were loss of revenue, enforced closure and reduce customers due to social distancing. In the first survey 54% of business stated they would only survive 12 months or less on current levels of support, whereas by the second survey this had reduced to 27%, perhaps reflecting the end of the first lockdown. Further surveys were not undertaken following business feedback they had become the subject of too many surveys (other organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and tourism focussed surveys were also taking place) and their focus was on responding to multiple restriction changes and further lockdowns.

Q5: Regarding the now vacant stores/shops on the district's high streets, what communication do we have with landlords in terms of discovering their plans for leases, changes of use etc.?

A5:

ESC engages with landlords of vacant stores/shops where it is appropriate such as in relation to key regeneration projects that the council is directly involved with or through business/inward investment enquiries received into the authority. Planning will also consult with Economic Development and Regeneration if there is a change of use in relation to high street premises in any of our towns in East Suffolk.

Property owners and landlords are important stakeholders that are involved in the project management processes of the projects taking place within ESC regeneration programme. Therefore, in those areas with well-developed regeneration and development programmes i.e. Lowestoft and Felixstowe ESC have a good understanding of what is happening. In Lowestoft Town Centre through our engagement with property owners we are seeing a trend to turn vacant retail units into mixed use proposals such as residential and commercial (offices) or residential over a shop or restaurant/café. We would expect an increase in residential development in the town centre. Examples of ongoing dialogue include engagement with the owners of the former Tesco Metro and Beales stores on the High Street on how developments can best support the objectives of the town centre masterplan. We will continue to work these landlords/ developers to support the delivery of the masterplan objectives, this includes a greater focus on uses other than retail i.e. leisure, residential, cultural, business and community to maintain the relevance of the high street and increase footfall.

In the Heritage Action Zones (HAZ), where no business rates are payable due to size of units, we are seeing an increase in small retail/ food & beverage start-ups, as during the pandemic people have looked to set up new business in town centre areas where risks can be minimised due to the low costs involved.

More generally the High Streets Task Force has recognised the common challenge for place managers can be tracking down property owners or getting responses from them on specific issues. A need has been identified for a national Landlords' Register and Government is exploring a pilot for such a register. ESC covers 12 towns, and this would be a significant piece of work to undertake across the district that would require additional service provision to achieve. ESC open data portal indicates from the latest survey (Sept-October 2020) there is a total of 271 vacant premises across East Suffolk.

Q6: Would it be possible to have a table of current store/shop vacancy rates covering the main shopping centres of the district (Lowestoft, Felixstowe and the market towns)?

A6:

	2019	2020
Lowestoft	21.4	21.0

Beccles	5.5	8.4
Bungay	17.0	17.0
Halesworth	9.1	12.0
Southwold	7.0	8.0
Aldeburgh	3.3	8.0
Felixstowe	8.4	6.3
Framlingham	10.6	9.6
Leiston	11.4	11.4
Saxmundham	9.6	10.3
Woodbridge	10.9	11.0

Source: ESC Annual Monitoring Report

Survey dates: 2019 – August to October/ 2020 – September to October

For comparison the latest national (GB) vacancy rate is 12.5%

Q7: How many new start-up businesses have been referred to the council or have self-referred to the council in this financial year? What is their nature of business?

A7:

ESC works closely with the Growth Hub and the local Enterprise hubs to provide support to start-up businesses. Current start-up support programmes are funded through the European Regional Development Fund and are delivered through the two local enterprise agencies NWES and Menta who cover East Suffolk. ESC signposts all start-up support directly to our partners so entrepreneurs can access support, advice and training. As a result of the Covid downturn the enterprise agencies, have reported a 50% increase in enquiries for start-up

support since March 2020. It is worth noting that start-up businesses vary widely from lifestyle to potential high growth. An example of the increasing trend in start-up activity is demonstrated by NWES who provided start-up support for 68 clients in 2019 and 116 in 2020. The increase in start-up activity is also a national trend across the UK according to Enterprise UK. Furthermore, this trend is commonly experienced during significant economic downturn.

East Suffolk Council actively promotes our partners who deliver the service required to support start-up. It has been identified that there is a need for start-up grants to support the formation of new enterprises to assist the economy to recover from Covid and this is currently being developed as part of a wider business recovery programme.

Q8: In terms of follow-up communication with businesses who have either been in receipt of grants and/or advice, what have they said has been the most useful support we can give as a Council?

A8: The grant recipients for the ESC administered schemes are self-employed, micro and small businesses. By far their biggest challenge has been maintaining positive cash flow when trading has been forced to stop or been severely curtailed their whilst fixed costs remain. The speed and amount of grant funding businesses have received has been cited as the most useful support during the period for the pandemic.

As an ED team we are aware that whilst grant funding i.e. getting cash directly to businesses as quickly as possible is currently paramount, in the medium and longer term support focussed on recovery will become more important. This is why, alongside our existing economic and regeneration growth programmes (which include our core business support offers) we are developing a recovery business support programme as highlighted in the response to Q4.

As stated in the response to Q4 ESC was part of Suffolk wide survey of Covid business grant recipients and in addition to current support being offered the following support was suggested:

- Support for paying for waste disposal
- Promote tourism
- Additional grants on a local basis
- Support to pay for: utilities, PPE and rent
- Review what grants are required in 3 months time

- Domestic rates relief for the hospitality industry
- Investment in town centres
- Help educate locals of the tourism offer in Suffolk
- Promotion of small businesses
- Financial support to restock pubs and restaurants

More recently the wider business community were invited to participate in ESC budget Consultation Survey which was conducted in January and asked the following question: The Council has some additional Government funding available to support businesses in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Do you have any suggestions as to how this funding might be used most efficiently?

Respondents to this question overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of supporting small, independent, local businesses through the continued provision of grant funding, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Support requested directly to ESC includes, financial support, general business advice and guidance, business adaptations support, marketing and promotion of East Suffolk, digital training, health and safety advice, recovery support/grants, Town Centre marketing and support and development of the visitor economy.

The report to Scrutiny highlights that the Council is responding to a number these support requests through existing and planned economic growth and recovery programmes.

Cllr Deacon

- Q9:** (a) What circumstances have led us to perform better than at regional and national levels? (paragraph 2.2)
(b) When possible, what specific plans are in place to kick start the visitor economy?

A9:

- (a) Although unemployment has almost doubled in East Suffolk during the pandemic this represents a better performance than regionally and nationally where jobless numbers have increased by 120%. Whilst it is not always easy to specifically identify the reason for differences in economic performance, the make up of the East Suffolk economy is likely to be the main factor. East Suffolk has a strong and diverse economy with particular strengths in key sectors such as ports & logistics, energy, ICT, tourism and

agriculture. This diversity means that the District is not overly reliant on one sector such as tourism. If this was the case the District's economic performance over the last 12 months would have been significantly worse than regional and national comparators. The District has continued to see growth in the energy, ports and logistics and ICT sectors whereas there has been significant decline in the retail and hospitality sectors.

A further factor in the district avoiding the most severe impacts of the downturn has been the level of actual and planned investment. Major infrastructure and construction projects such as the Gull Wing bridge, CEFAS development, Brightwell Lakes, flood defence scheme, Scottish Power's operations and maintenance base, massive planned investment in offshore and nuclear energy provide a strong degree of business confidence within the district. This feeds through into the wider supply chain and therefore mitigates the scale of business closures and job losses.

ESC's ambitious growth and regeneration programmes provide a strong strategic framework for these investments (in a number of cases have been directly responsible for securing this) and provide further confidence through the knowledge that the council and other public sector partners are fully supportive and enabling this growth. Ambitious direct investment by the Council in schemes such as the former Deben High School development in Felixstowe, the former post office building in Lowestoft and a range of visitor economy capital assets further reinforces the confidence of the private sector to invest.

- (b) The Suffolk Coast DMO and Visit Suffolk are maintaining and updating key information via websites and social media – it is anticipated that international travel will remain embargoed or restricted during 2021, and therefore assuming domestic restrictions in the Spring/early summer our coasts and resorts will be heavily patronised this year as they were in the summer/autumn of 2020. In addition there are combined campaigns to attract visitors already underway and ready to ramp up once COVID guidelines allow;-

Unexplored England (£500k budget through Suffolk and Norfolk Councils and directly from the Cabinet Office)

- . The Unexplored England video now has links to the DMOs, as requested [Discover Unexplored England for your 2021 holiday - YouTube](#)
- . Campaign messaging has been amended to 'Don't travel now – but plan for later'.
- . Overwhelmingly positive response on Facebook already.

Escape the Everyday

- . Allocated £7.5k for photography and replicate the previous exercise, but for when the weather improves.
- . Video collateral will wait until later when we see what experiences we have.

Celebrating Culture 2021

- . Likely to be Autumn 2021 through to Spring 2022 and will be featured on the Visit East of England (VEE) website. £5000 of the Visit Suffolk budget has been allocated to this project, which allowed them to leverage LEP funds for their £250,000 pot.

In addition, and as highlighted in the Scrutiny paper ESC is also making direct and substantial capital investments in new and existing visitor economy infrastructure in our key resorts. These developments are taking place during lockdown and in most cases will be available for visitors during the summer season.