

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 2021

A MEETING of the REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEET was held VIRTUAL MEETING THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 2021 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Majid Khan

Councillors Duncan Anderson, Iris Beech, Steve Cox and Charlie Hogarth

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Dan Swaine, Director of Economy and Environment
Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director of Development
Chris Dungworth, Head of Service Business Doncaster
Dan Fell, Chief Executive Doncaster Chamber

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eva Hughes and John Mounsey and

		<u>ACTION</u>
9	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items where the public and press were to be excluded from the meeting.	
10	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made.	
11	<u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2020</u>	
	RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2020 be agreed as a correct record.	
12	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS - [A PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING 20 MINUTES FOR STATEMENTS FROM UP TO 5 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS WITHIN THE COMMITTEES REMIT, PROPOSING</u>	

	<u>ACTION(S) WHICH MAY BE CONSIDERED OR CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMITTEES WORK PROGRAMME].</u>	
	There were no public statements made.	
13	<u>UPDATE ON BUSINESS SUPPORT, THE WORK OF DONCASTER CHAMBER, FUTURE WORKING AND ISSUES AFFECTING BUSINESS</u>	
	<p>To support the report presented to the Panel an overview of Business Support available across the Borough was provided by the Head of Service for Business Doncaster and Dan Fell, Doncaster Chamber.</p> <p>The areas highlighted by Doncaster Council included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibilities of the Local Authority and Business Doncaster; • Concentration on business support; • Recovery support for businesses that had been affect by the 2019 flooding; • Recovery support for businesses that had been affect by Covid 19 Pandemic; • Delivery of business support programmes; • Close partnership working with Doncaster Chamber including Webinar delivery for the business community during the Covid 19 pandemic; <p>The areas highlighted by Doncaster Chamber included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive officer held to account by the Chamber’s Directors; • Areas of support to businesses included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ creating better business in Doncaster and working with partners; ○ legal and financial support; ○ International trade and export advice; ○ Brexit support; ○ Support for public sector partners; ○ Opportunities for Doncaster including ensuring businesses were work ready for young people to thrive; ○ Doncaster Chamber self-funding therefore was always seeking to increase the membership base; ○ Staff reorganisation whilst retaining expertise; ○ Financial position during Covid and not having access to LEP investment in South Yorkshire. As membership fees increase then new staff could be employed; <p>Following the introductions the following areas were addressed by the Panel:</p>	

Business support by DMBC over previous 2 years – the Local Authority changed its Business Support offer to focus more on inward investment with support for larger employers but both the Flooding in 2019 and Covid – 19 pandemic required the Local Authority to again assist with support for all businesses alongside with the Chamber.

It was noted that the Business Doncaster role had changed however Doncaster's inward investment was continuing.

Government grants - The Business Doncaster Team along with Business rates had undertaken large support for the business community ensuring there was uptake on the financial support available.

Sheffield City Region recovery action plan – collectively, the Local Authority, Sheffield City Region and Doncaster Chamber had worked together over the previous 12 months to provide a more comprehensive business support offer. This included the development of this plan ensuring money was drawn down from Central Government for the region. As a result of this work and additional 4 advisors would be working with the Local Authority, which Doncaster Chamber could also utilise to support Doncaster's business community.

A new framework of support had also been developed, for example if a business required specialist support with supply chains, the Local Authority could signpost to the correct support with funding from the Sheffield City Region.

Redundancies - It was noted that as Furlough ends and businesses restart, redundancies would be mitigated.

Businesses that have received support during the Covid pandemic – it was noted that the Local Authority interacted with 70% to 80% of Doncaster's businesses and was aware of their potential and difficulties. During the previous 12 months nearly 900 companies had been supported by the Local Authority, with some cross over with Doncaster Chamber, in seeking applications for funding and grant availability. With the original allocation of funding the 40 grants available were secured immediately by local businesses.

Doncaster Chamber report that a joint comprehensive webinar was delivered at the start of the first lockdown with 2000 delegates supported during the Covid 19 period. Unfortunately, there were some gaps in support available and it was recognised that companies had not been compensated for loss of revenue.

It was stressed that there was nothing more productive than a free, open and functioning economy.

Local Support initiatives during Covid pandemic – it was noted that the driving instructors and taxi drivers support scheme was a Sheffield City Region support activity endorsed by the Business Growth Board.

Doncaster Council established a Local Discretionary scheme providing £1000 for 400 homeworkers/self employed/mobile workers who had not been assisted by the Government or Sheffield City Region grant schemes, but it could not fund anyone who received self-employed income support.

Government Additional Resource Grants – it was noted that these grants had all been available through the Government and Sheffield City Region and distributed through the Local Authority's Business Rates team, supporting loss of property and business costs not loss of income.

Generally businesses were happy with what the Government had provided in the early part of the pandemic however as time had evolved there were gaps appearing in certain sectors, for example micro businesses.

Large Manufacturers – It was noted that there had been a number of issues created by Brexit, for example bottlenecks in providing goods to the EU market and shortfall in logistics, additional to the pandemic.

Brexit – Doncaster Chamber reported that the businesses were divided with regards to the issue, however, the opportunities Brexit offered has united the business community. The short period of time to prepare following the Brexit deal in December, was acknowledged.

The operational challenges included the complexity of paperwork and customer declarations to ensure businesses could trade within the EU. It was noted that hauliers were now picking and choosing which work they wished to undertake with some SME manufacturers having their work refused, therefore creating difficulties in providing their goods. It was noted that Doncaster currently worked with 150 international traders and 100% of them had come up against a different level of problem following the Brexit deal but easements were now in place.

It was noted that Doncaster Chamber was improving with it's response to any problems presented by businesses.

Business Doncaster reported that it had worked with the Department of International Trade and indicated that there had been a small spike in businesses looking to move to the UK from the EU, with a 25% increase in investment, with the Local Authority hopefully in a position to take advantage of this position within the next couple of years. It was noted that a Dutch rail company had already established itself on a site at the Airport.

Local Manufacturing – It was noted that the Business Doncaster Team held a local performance indicator for this specific issue. The Team was due to address contracting opportunities for local companies working with each other, and reported that this year an £18m local investment had been achieved.

Redundancies due to Covid – 19 pandemic – The Panel noted that a number of resident support programmes were in place, including “Advance”, and highlighted that unemployment had increased but not as much as had been envisaged. One company in the borough had closed however they had worked with Job Centre Plus achieving 80% of staff finding new employment.

Caution was expressed as the Furlough scheme had kept people in employment and would only continue to September, at this point. It was noted there had been many acts of empathy and sacrifices made by local businesses to support staff.

The Panel noted that redundancy figures could not be supplied however claimant figures included:

- Job Seekers allowance
 - 1163 in January 2021 claimants
 - 66 increase since December 2020
 - 53 reduction in previous six months.
 - 577 increased in previous 12 months
- Universal Credit
 - 577 increase between January 2020 and January 2021
 - Reduced by 64 between December 2020 and January 2021
 - Reduced by 368 over the last 6 months

The total change for the two elements of support had increased by 6785 over the last 12 months.

Support available to those seeking self-employment – the Panel noted that support was provided by the Chamber with guidance and expertise rather than through providing financial assistance.

Misuse of Furlough scheme – it was acknowledged that this was not a local authority issue but would be addressed by the HMRC. Assistance to make claims was provided to businesses by Doncaster Chamber.

Repurposing the Town Centre – it was acknowledged that peoples habits had changed over the last 12 months and it would be a

challenge for the whole Country to return to what was classed as “normal life”.

It was explained that an economic recovery plan was being developed including repurposing of businesses and buildings, including test trading for start-up businesses and marketing the town centre. Assistance had been provided through the Business Support Team to assist with Click and Collect whilst businesses could not fully reopen. A Town Centre Task Force was also being assessed, led by the private sector, to address how businesses could trade differently and successfully.

In response to a query relating to the use of grant funding to support new businesses, it was outlined that regeneration funding was ring-fenced with it's use set out by Central Government. Capital schemes were available to local authorities to reinvent highstreets, moving away from retail and introducing more residential and leisure facilities. It was noted that with regard to employment grant funding, Sheffield City Region was lobbying Central Government.

It was stressed that at the heart of all Government Funding streams regeneration was a central focus to provide a sustainable environment and sometimes a portion could be for increased employment.

Freeport bid – it was reported that the Government called for applications in November, 2020 with Sheffield City Region submitting their application by 5th February 2021. The requirement for the size and number of customs and tax sites and flexibilities and restrictions for businesses on the site, was outlined to the Panel. It was explained that the Government stipulates that if business rates above a certain level were attained then it must be reinvested back within the Freeport area. With regard to Doncaster Chamber, the bid was well supported by the private sector with exciting opportunities for the area.

New Business Landscape – in response to a question it was explained that a number of investors had moved to Doncaster over the last three months with new enquiries continuing, including online retailers, small manufacturers and the medical health care sector, identifying that the landscape was changing. It was also outlined that the number of buildings across the Borough was low, therefore work was currently being undertaken with the development sector to provide new infrastructure.

Home working – Members noted that due to the type of businesses based in Doncaster eg. warehousing and manufacturing there had been less home working than other areas of the country.

Business “Start Ups” - With regard to business “start ups” the borough had continued to benefit from self-employment, particularly through the “Launch Pad” initiative promoted by the Local Authority and Doncaster

	<p>Chamber which had increased levels with 35 since the beginning of the year.</p> <p><u>Business failures</u> - it was noted that there had not been many business failures across the borough but if a company was in a difficult position then Doncaster Chamber would offer support to mitigate against closure. Due to the current pandemic, it was noted that the unforeseen issues, for example, for cafes and leisure facilities was unknown.</p> <p><u>Business mix</u> – it was acknowledged that the business stock in Doncaster required increasing with the need to increase that already established at the lport and Airport.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the discussion, be noted.</p>	
14	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny work plan and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions. She reminded the Panel that it's work for the 2020/21 year was nearly complete and asked Members to give consideration to areas they may wish to address moving forward.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report, be noted.</p>	