Crawley Economic Recovery Taskforce Group And Town Deal Board

Wednesday, 10 June 2020

Confidential Working Draft

Meeting Notes

ITEM	ACTION
1. Welcome Chris Maidment (CM) and Peter Smith (PS) welcomed everyone to the meeting and referred to the documents that had been circulated in advance which explained the purpose of the Taskforce and the Town Deal Board. CM was elected as Chair of the Task Force and Town Deal Board. The Terms of Reference were accepted as circulated and CM invited any comments via email to **CERT.Towndeal@crawley.gov.uk** which will be responded to by council officers.	**ALL**
2. The COVID-19 Economic Crisis & The Emergency Response Clem Smith (CSm) presented a briefing paper that had been circulated in advance, highlighting the following key points: - Within the context of Crawley's fantastic economic success that has been built up over a number of years, recent reports predict that the impact of Covid-19 on Crawley's economy will be considerable, with 57% of the employment base at risk of redundancy/furloughing – the highest proportion of any urban area in the country. - Latest figures from DWP show that unemployment in Crawley doubled between March and April to nearly 5% and as many as 7,000 new claims for Universal Credit may have been made by Crawley residents since the lockdown began. - This rise has occurred predominantly due to the crisis in the aviation industry and contraction of activity at (and associated with) Gatwick Airport. - A recent survey of 160 Crawley businesses showed that 74% of those surveyed are significantly less busy since the crisis began and nearly a quarter have ceased trading completely. - 61% businesses surveyed are confident that they will recover if they can get through the public health crisis, but almost three quarters believe they need additional government support to survive. - Crawley BC has distributed £11.7m business support grants to over 800 local businesses however only 860 business ratepayers were eligible so just 19% of all VAT/PAYE registered Crawley businesses have benefited. - Crawley BC has received a top up funding allocation of £612,750 towards a Discretionary Business Grant scheme, likely to benefit a further 50-60 businesses – still a long way short of what is required.	

This is the reason why the ability to unlock further government funding for an additional 'place-based' business grants scheme is imperative to help as many Crawley businesses as possible to survive, to protect jobs and mitigate the impact of the more acute economic recession forecast for Crawley.

- Other priority areas include the need for additional resources to invest in intensive employment support and reskilling for those Crawley residents being made redundant and the action at national level, coordinated by Henry Smith, Crawley's MP to press the government to support the aviation industry to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Manor Royal - CM invited Steve Sawyer (SS) to share details of the impact of the crisis on Manor Royal.

SS stated that many of the key points highlighted by CSm are echoed in Manor Royal with around 70% of businesses being ineligible for government support and between 3,000 - 5,000 jobs being at risk as a result of the crisis. There are some companies that are trading well, particularly in the medical and manufacturing sectors, however there are a significant deal more that are at risk of being lost if they don't receive further support.

We need to ensure that any additional financial support gets to the companies who have the best chance of surviving, particularly those in events and retail who are currently ineligible for funding.

Gatwick Airport - CM invited Alison Addy (AA) to update the group on the situation at Gatwick.

AA reiterated the impact of Covid-19 on the airport has been devastating. Typically during April, the airport handles 4 million passengers but this year, it saw less than 10,000, with majority being repatriation and humanitarian aid.

North Terminal to open from Monday 15 June (6am-10pm) however volumes are expected to be low and new quarantine rules means that recovery is expected to be much slower.

Key areas of focus for the airport include quarantine rules, unlocking capacity, job protection scheme and business rates.

Town Centre - CM invited Neil Cooper (NC) as Chair of the Town Centre Partnership Board to speak about the impact on the town centre.

Monday 15 June will see the re-opening of non-essential shops across the town centre. County Mall has an expectation that by mid-June, 70% of its units will be open with the vast majority re-open by July. This includes its anchor store, Debenhams, opening on 17 June. Crawley BC is supporting the re-opening by preparing new signage to aide social distancing and queue management.

Retail requires volume and we hope the footfall will return. Security is an issue and we are working with the council to provide funding for ambassadors to support businesses in the coming weeks and months.

CM invited Henry Smith MP (HS) to comment.

HS reported that he has been feeding back to government departments on a number of the issues already raised and has been principally involved in establishing a cross-party Future of Aviation Working Group. CM suggested **LH**

that all comments and feedback are co-ordinated into a single briefing for HS to take back.

Questions are being posted on the meeting chat – these will be collated and responses circulated with the meeting notes. **LH/CS**

3. Crawley's Economic Recovery

CSm reported that Crawley is 1 of 101 towns selected by government to bid for up to £25m each from the Towns Fund. Each town is to establish a Town Deal Board – hence the first full meeting today of the Crawley Town Deal Board. CBC is seeking approval from the Town Deal Board / Task Force today to commission consultants to draw up first draft of a Town Investment Plan.

CM invited Cath Goodall (CG) to outline the government's view of the Towns Fund plans.

CG explained the background to the Towns Fund which invites proposals that set out a vision for the development of the town on a long-term basis. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, government expects towns to look at how their plans will address the impact felt by the crisis too.

This is a capital fund which should focus on regeneration, connectivity and skills but also cultural assets. Towns are invited to submit Investment Plans in three cohorts; the first by 31 July, second by 31 October and the final by end March 2021. No disadvantage in waiting for a later cohort.

Investment Plans will be considered by government before heads of terms are agreed and further work on project business cases.

Next steps for Towns Fund – imperative that we commission consultants to develop plan proposals; we are therefore requesting that the Town Deal Board / Task Force agree that at this meeting.

How do we decide priorities as a group? Need to consider govt criteria (ref to prospectus circulated before the meeting). Suggest we look at identifying projects over the coming weeks that meet the criteria. This will be done and the Board will be updated electronically. The Board needs to respond to both emergency priorities but also work on a medium-long term investment plan.

CM invited Catherine Scott (CSc) from DWP to talk about skills.

CSc/DWP is keen to work with local employers to identify skills gaps and deliver training. DWP have already made links with Manor Royal and Crawley College to address current issues around youth unemployment and skills needs arising as a direct result of the Covid-19 crisis. It was agreed that further discussions are needed with the Council to plan additional emergency response and potentially to access DWP funding resources.

CM referred to the ten-point letter written by Henry Smith and Peter Lamb (PL) to Government and the two responses received.

PL re-iterated the need to urgently address the substantive points raised in the original letter and expressed disappointment in the responses received from government.

PS and CS stated that the Task Force is well placed to further those

discussions with government to seek additional funding and actions in order to address the real issues facing Crawley's economy.

4. Next Steps / Date of Next Meeting

CM requested the Task Force / Town Deal Board agree:

- Draft Terms of Reference – CM invited any comments on the draft ToR to be submitted by the end of this week (12 June). CSm pointed out that there will be opportunities to make further amendments, as appropriate.

- Proposals for additional Emergency Response to the Crisis in Crawley as set out in item 2 and further dialogue with government;

- For Crawley BC to progress the commissioning of consultants to pull together the draft Towns Fund Implementation Plan and Economic Recovery Plan;

- To endorse the draft Towns Fund pump priming budget profile presented in item 3, appendix a.

The above items were agreed by the Task Force / Board.

Adam Joolia (AJ) advocated the need to bring in the voluntary sector to the plan's development process.

Alison Barratt (AB) referred to the high proportion of BAME residents in Crawley compared to other areas in West Sussex, and the need to make sure those groups are supported. CSm will discuss this with colleagues in Community Development. **CSm**

Next meeting to be convened **<u>on 22 July 2020 at 9.30am</u>**. **LH**

5. Any Other Business

NC reported a number of business transactions that have taken place during recent weeks and there is positive interest in Crawley as a place to do business. We need to support both existing and new businesses to diversify and seize opportunities that are coming forward.

CM highlighted a comment on the meeting chat about the importance of supporting mental health and wellbeing, as part of this agenda.

Marie Ovenden (MO) offered to share a formal presentation at the next meeting of two infrastructure schemes coming forward as part of the Crawley Growth Programme; Eastern Gateway and Manor Royal Highways Improvement Works.

CM thanked all attendees for their active participation today and going forward to the future.

Notes of the meeting will be circulated by 17 June.