

<b>Title of Report:</b>  <b>Covid Recovery &amp; Revitalisation Plan</b>	<b>Officer Presenting: Head of Business</b>  <b>Author: Head of Business</b>
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## **1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations**

1.1 To provide members with an update on the extensive range of interventions Council has been delivering across Strabane Town, Derry City Centre and the rural areas to support business and economic wellbeing.

## **2 Background**

2.1 A cross directorate internal working group was set up in May 2020 led by senior Officers from Business & Culture, Environment & Regeneration, Health and Communities tasked with providing an integrated approach to supporting our City and Town Centre's and Rural businesses as the current pandemic has progressed. The internal group focused on four areas:

- Business Support
- Physical Infrastructure Improvements
- Animation
- Marketing
- Environmental Health Guidance

2.2 The COVID Business Recovery group convened a series of meetings with officials from Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities and Invest NI along with representatives from the following local business stakeholder groups: L'Derry Chamber of Commerce, Strabane BID, CCI, Inner City Trust, Visit Derry, DCSDC Food Network, Retailers (including the main Shopping Centre managers) and Hotelier group reps.

- 2.3 In addition to meeting with the stakeholders, Council carried out extensive online surveys, one-to-one meetings and virtual business engagement events with businesses (Sole Traders, Micro and SME's) to assess the current issues, needs and impacts of the pandemic from an economic point of view.
- 2.4 Officers from across Councils' three directorates co-ordinated physical walkabout meetings during June/July in both Derry City and Strabane Town Centre's alongside officials from DFI and DFC and local business representatives with the aim of identifying potential revitalization opportunities to facilitate outdoor trading, making accessibility improvements to streetscapes and building footfall within both locations.
- 2.5 Since the beginning of the pandemic, Council's Business & Culture team has provided a dedicated Covid Business Recovery and Referral service. The team has fielded in excess of 500 individual queries; supported DfE in providing a validation service for the administration of its Hospitality Grant scheme; delivered the Go For It Business Start scheme; Launched the Business Innovation and Growth (BIG) – mentoring programme.

### 3 Key Issues

- 3.1.1 Following extensive consultation outlined above, Council submitted a Recovery Revitalisation Action Plan to DFC and DAERA in August 2020. Council was successful in leveraging total funding of £1.43m made up as follows:
- DfC - £910,000
  - DfI- £373,000
  - DAERA - £148,000
- 3.2 The programme themes with the associated budgets are:
- **£350K – Business Grants (Urban)** - grants up to £3k to support businesses to adapt to the changing trading environment associated with Covid & cluster grants up to £25k for combined projects among businesses
  - **£148k - Business Grants (Rural)** - grants up to £3k as above

- **£380k - Physical & Environmental Improvements** - A series of interventions designed to enhance streetscapes through upgrading public realm ie - street furniture - seating/planting; decorative lighting; meanwhile public realm; clearance of derelict sites; new market stalls; pedestrian counters for Derry City & Strabane Town Centres
- **£373k - Highway Interventions (DfI Grant)** - Funding to support interventions to promote greater and safer opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists ie. Temporary road closures & pavement extensions to promote greater social distancing; other greenway and pavement improvements/upgrades
- **£105k - Specialist Town & City Centre Cleaning** - Purchase of 2 no. specialist mechanical cleansing machines to assist with enhanced cleaning schedules of both locations
- **£75k - Marketing** - Design and delivery of a bespoke marketing campaign promoting Derry City & Strabane Town Centres consisting of advertising (outdoor, digital, press); branded merchandising & materials
- **£76k - Animation** - Direct investment **by DCSDC** towards the delivery of an animation programme to compliment the above grant funded activities.

3.3 There have been over 150 applications received District Wide for the Business Recovery grants. This can be broken down as follows:

- **Urban Grants - LoO's issued already to the value of £82,227.16**, with a further committed spend of £239,669.90 – Scheme currently closed but may reopen if applications do not translate into LoO's.
- Rural grants - **LoO's issued already to the value of £32,562.44**, with a further committed sum of £18,262.03 for businesses who have submitted and where additional information has been requested. The remaining balance is £97,175.53 – Scheme currently open and accepting applications.
- Cluster Applications – Officers have been engaging extensively with CCI, Strabane BID, Retailers, Businesses and Sole Traders to develop a series of Cluster Applications (£25k). To date applications are in development for the following locations:
  - Pavillion Retail Park – Strabane
  - Main Street – Strabane
  - Castle Street – Strabane
  - Abercorn Square – Strabane
  - Waterloo Street – Derry
  - Craft Village – Derry
  - Ebrington – Derry
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3.4 **Pavement Café Licenses** – Council has issued 12 Pavement Café licenses to date.

3.5 **Animation** – Council's festival and events team has been delivering pop-up animation across Strabane Town and Derry City Centre focusing on adding vibrancy to support local businesses. This was done in line with the guidance during August and September. Clearly, the most recent public health guidance and restrictions has resulted to a scaling back in activity.

3.6 **Marketing** – Council’s Marketing Team have developed a bespoke campaign focusing on three areas:

- Business Grants campaign/Business Engagement Event, which was a digital campaign. Activity included:
- Social Media schedule developed and delivered
- Targeted social media ads
- Animation videos advertised via social channels and e-zines
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdmNoVfDi3w&t=2s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBp4oAto3Pc>
- E-Zine sent to business audiences and forwarded through networks including CCI, BID and Chamber of Commerce.
- Multiple press releases.
- Your small spend makes a GIANT difference (Support Local)
- Phase 1 of the Support Local campaign was delivered in September and the next phase will launch on the 19<sup>th</sup> October, developing the message further, using more businesses as the faces of the campaign. Activity/Promotional Tools for this aspect of the campaign have included:
- Outdoor Media campaign including
  - 48 sheet billboards
  - Digital billboards,
  - 6 sheet ad sites on bus shelters and in Railway Station.
  - Bus sides and Rears

- Inside Out Programme – Supported this programme under the umbrella of the Recovery campaign. This was not profiled pre-weekend because we did not want to encourage crowds to gather, but businesses were informed in the days leading up to the activity that it would take place.
- Letter distributed to businesses in Strabane to inform them of the activity and how it aimed to support the businesses
- E-Zine to business audiences
- Branded flags placed in locations across the city where the activity would take place
- Social media activity throughout the weekend covering the activity and profiling the energy out and about in both Derry and Strabane
- Photography coverage in both Derry and Strabane which was issued to local press post-events

#### **4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications**

**4.1** Council is in receipt of funding from DAERA and DFC totaling £1.43m. Council is supporting business recovery within existing budgets on a cross directorate basis.

#### **5 Recommendations**

**5.1** Members note the contents of the report.

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#### **Background Papers**

Appendices including artwork and editorial for marketing campaigns.