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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	CABINET
<b>DATE:</b>	31 March 2021
<b>SERVICE AREAS:</b>	Culture, Tourism & Sport Destination Marketing Place-Shaping & Economic Growth
<b>REPORTING OFFICER:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY &amp; CULTURE</b> <i>(Trevor Watson)</i>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK &amp; ACTION PLAN – Update &amp; Priorities for 2021/22</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	ALL DISTRICT
<b>FORWARD PLAN REF:</b>	N/A

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## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is twofold:

- (1) to provide a general update on ongoing and planned future work to support businesses and the local economy via the Council's Covid-19 Economic Recovery Framework & Action Plan; and
- (2) to recommend a number of specific priorities for events and use of outdoor space to proactively support the local economy as it opens up from lockdown over the months ahead

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1) note the two updates made to the Economic Recovery Framework (as set out in section 5.1 and at Appendix A) and the specific activity undertaken and planned to support businesses and the safe re-opening of the high street (as set out in section 5.2-5.3)
- 2) endorse the priorities identified in sections 5.4-5.6 of the report in relation to proactive events and use of outdoor space to support the local economy

- 3) approve the provision of £75,000 funding from the Council's Major Events Reserve to support the delivery of additional event activity during the latter half of 2021

### **3.0 RECOMMENDED REASON/S FOR DECISION/S**

The Council's Economic Recovery Framework & Action Plan are 'live' documents which recognise the need to adapt and work in new ways to support the local economy/businesses throughout and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important that the Council continue to play a proactive role in supporting the local economy in the coming months as lockdown is eased and the district starts to re-open for business. Supporting businesses, maximising the safe use of public space and a proactive approach to Covid-safe events are all key parts of this.

### **4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTION/S CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION**

Not to endorse/support the priorities for economic recovery set out in the report. This option is recommended for rejection because the Council has a critical role to play in economic recovery activity over the coming months and the local economy/businesses would be adversely affected if the Council failed to adopt a proactive approach.

Not to agree the funding to support delivery of the proactive events outlined in the report. This option is recommended for rejection because a proactive and safe approach to events will help support the local economy at a time when it is needed

### **5.0 THE REPORT**

#### **5.1 Context**

In July 2020 the Council adopted a Covid-19 Economic Recovery Framework and Action Plan, recognising that this recovery would be an ongoing process (survive > recover > thrive) requiring different responses and actions over a period of time. The Framework/Action Plan is based around four themes which represent key strands of economic recovery, namely:

- (1) Business & Innovation
- (2) Place & infrastructure
- (3) People & community
- (4) Environment & land use

The Framework ('plan on a page') is attached as **Appendix A**. This includes two minor updates to the document, namely:

- (1) Delivery timescales in the document have been updated to reflect that the national and local economy still remains in the 'survive' phase, as a result of extended national lockdowns throughout 2020.

(2) An additional action area has been added under the 'Place and Infrastructure' theme to highlight the importance of events in supporting the local economy over the coming months and in the longer term.

In terms of progress to date against the Framework/Action Plan, **Appendix B** provides a visual summary of outcomes up to the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2020). The year-end outcome report for 2020/21 (to 31 March 2021) will be published in May 2021.

Key headlines up to end of Quarter 3 included:-

- Over 4,700 downloads of our Business Toolkit helping shops and businesses re-open safely
- Over 900 business enquiries responded to by our Economy and Transport team
- 80 businesses supported via our one to one 'Reopening the High Street Safely' business support scheme
- 1100 Proactive Covid-19 Compliance advice checks responded to by our Environmental Health team
- Business support features in Residents and Business e-newsletters with a reach of 45,000 and social media reaching 40,858 on Facebook, and 14,246 Twitter Impressions

With a clear Government plan now in place to gradually ease lockdown restrictions (alongside a proactive vaccination programme), it is hoped that we can start to move towards the all-important 'recovery' phase of the Framework/Action Plan over the Summer 2021 period.

In preparation for this, the Economic Recovery Project Team have identified a number of specific work areas for prioritisation in the coming months - particularly in relation to the 'Business & Innovation and 'Place and Infrastructure' themes of the economic recovery framework. These priorities are:

- Support for businesses
- Reopening the High Street Safely
- Maximising the economic use of outdoor spaces
- A proactive approach to (Covid-19 safe) events

The detail of these priorities is set out in the sections below:

## **5.2 Support for Businesses**

Since the initial lockdown in March 2020, support for businesses has been a top priority for the Council – as set out in the 'Business & Innovation' section of the action plan and in previous recovery updates to Cabinet.

Since March 2020 the Council has paid out

£76.7m worth of Covid business support grants across 10 grant schemes to 9862 recipients (as of 23 March 2021). These numbers will rise as there are still grants being assessed.

In addition, in the March 2021 Budget the Chancellor announced additional grants of up to £18,000 for pubs, restaurants, shops, hotels, gyms and hairdressers and an additional discretionary element of grant funding. Detailed guidance about this funding was received by the Council on 22 March 2021. As with previous rounds of grant funding there are conditions that need to be adhered to and in the case of the discretionary element (Additional Restriction Grant) it will only be available to councils once all previous Additional Restriction Grant money has been paid out. The Council will continue to place high priority on ensuring that grant funding is paid out to eligible businesses as quickly as possible.

In addition to the grants, the Council has also funded a business support initiative which gives Harrogate district businesses 'free' access to the 'Maybe Tech' platform ([www.maybetech.com](http://www.maybetech.com)) for 12 months (worth upwards of £35 per month). This enables them to access a comprehensive programme of training and support and use of proactive social media tools to engage customers, reach new audiences and empower teams to make more sales. Local case studies for the initiative will be developed and promoted in the coming weeks to encourage more businesses to get involved.

### **5.3 Re-opening the High Street Safely**

Since the initial easing of the first lockdown in Summer 2020, re-opening the high street safely has been a key priority for the Council – as set out in the 'Place & Infrastructure' section of the recovery action plan and previous recovery updates to Cabinet.

The Government awarded Harrogate Borough Council c. £141k of Reopening the High Street Safely (RHSS) funding in June 2020. Since that time we have carried out a number of initiatives using the fund to support the safe reopening of the high street / town centre at the appropriate times. This proactive work will continue in the coming weeks/months as our high streets/town centres once again gear up to re-open over the coming weeks/months, including:

- A further proactive phase of our #shopsafeshoplocal campaign to encourage people to shop local and in a safe covid compliant way, this includes; bollard covers, lamp post flags, radio adverts, newspaper adverts, social media campaigns, posters and parking restriction planter wraps.
- Extension of our high street / town centre business support service that is helping businesses become more resilient and adapt to the Covid restrictions. To date over 80 businesses have received support and advice.
- Launch of a digital "London Tube style" Harrogate and Knaresborough cycle map; 'Buy Local, By Bike', that encourages people to cycle to do their shopping locally

- Enhanced cleaning services at the Council-owned Public Conveniences in main visitor locations and across all the district's towns during key holiday periods (2nd April – 5th April, 1st May – 3rd May, 29th May – 31st May and 27th July – 6th September 2021). This will be delivered through the employment of short-term agency cleaners by way of proactively dealing with an anticipated increase in 'staycation' visitor numbers/increased use of the facilities within the district across the Spring/Summer period.

#### Welcome Back Fund (April 2021-March 2022)

On 22 March 2021 the Government also confirmed their intention to allocate a further tranche of funding to all Local Authorities, as part of a national 'Welcome Back Fund'. This is essentially a 100% 'top-up' to the original RHSS funding, thereby allocating a further c. £141k to Harrogate Borough Council. As with the original RHSS grant, the new money is also funded via the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and will therefore come with strict criteria and specific requirements for how funding can be spent. The funding will run until 31 March 2022 and includes two additional criteria in addition to the four listed in the original RHSS scheme, namely

- Support and promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy; and

- Allow local areas to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of CV-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.

Detailed guidance on the scheme is expected in the coming weeks.

## **5.4 Maximising the economic use of outdoor spaces**

### **Use of Outdoor Space:**

An 'Outdoor Spaces Group' was created last year to coordinate recovery action planning and support the re-opening of town and city centres across the Harrogate district following lockdown. This group has now reconvened to play the same proactive role as we move out of the latest lockdown via the Governments 'Road Map'.

This will be of particular importance from 12 April 2021 when it is expected that the hospitality industry will be able to serve food and drink ONLY in the outdoors until the next stage is reached.

The Business Planning Act was passed in 2020 granting powers to HBC to issue pavement licences via a streamlined process allowing businesses to occupy outdoor spaces creating additional trading capacity. The Government have asked local authorities to be proactive and supportive in their granting of permission to use these spaces and to enable outdoor areas to be utilised in this way.

Early indications are that the Business Planning legislation will be extended beyond 2021 and the Council is being asked to continue its flexible approach to the use of outdoor spaces throughout 2021.

Recognising the special status of the Stray and it being a key outdoor space which must be managed in accordance with the provisions of the Stray Act 1985, consideration is being given as to whether it is possible to use limited parts of the Stray in the summer months where, due to the location, pavement licences or alternative locations are not logistically possible. Any consideration would be predicated on obligations being in place to protect the Stray.

To support any decision being taken on this matter, the intention is to conduct a consultation exercise to ascertain the extent of interest in using the Stray for this purpose and any potential views on this locally. The consultation will include seeking the views of key stakeholders, along with local businesses. We are currently awaiting feedback from the Duchy on the proposed approach, prior to starting the consultation.

We are asking Cabinet to endorse the following actions

- To support the use of open space in the reopening of the hospitality sector, via the issuing of pavement licences
- To support the proposed consultation on limited use of the Stray Land as part of our Town Centre recovery work, subject to feedback from the Duchy
- To help businesses take full advantage of the flexibilities of their alcohol licences and any relaxations created to assist recovery.
- To continue working with NYCC in implementing road closures to create additional hospitality space or safe pedestrianised zones in order to maintain social distancing and a safe retail environment.
- To issue proactive planning advice to help support businesses who wish to open or improve an outdoor seating area, re-use an existing area or vary their opening hours.
- To continue to facilitate the suspension of parking spaces in key areas creating additional space for pedestrians to maintain social distancing.

## **5.5 Events as a vehicle for economic recovery**

The positive economic impact of major events is well documented and the loss of event activity over the past 12 months has demonstrated the depth and breadth of the impact.

If the roadmap out of lockdown progresses as planned, Harrogate District will see events returning from mid-May onwards.

A number of key Harrogate District events have confirmed that they will take place over the summer, including the Great Yorkshire Show, Theakstons Crime Writing Festival and a number of trade events at Harrogate

Convention Centre. In addition there is a full calendar of events taking place on the Stray, Valley Gardens and other council land.

Although a busy summer is anticipated immediately following the main lifting of COVID restrictions planned for 21 June, additional event activity will support in attracting a larger share of the staycation audience and further benefit those businesses in the visitor economy that have been hardest hit by the lockdowns. This will be particularly important in the shoulder season once the school summer holidays are over.

In addition to the existing calendar of local events, HBC will support the following:

- **Harrogate Carnival 2021 - 4/5 September 2021 (TBC)**

This event will be organised, managed and produced by Harrogate International Festivals (HIF).

Harrogate Borough Council will provide direct grant of £50,000 from the Major Events budget to HIF, plus potential support activity in kind (e.g. litter picking).

There will be a one day lively and innovative celebration event building on the success of the 2019 delivery as part of the UCI cultural celebrations. The event will feature spectacle, street theatre, music and arts stages, workshops and food zones ensuring a creative and enticing event to drive footfall within the town, both from the local community and to create an enhanced tourism offer for visitors.

Currently this event is not anticipated to include a Parade in the same way it did in 2019. This is due to current advice and guidance from large scale city projects including Birmingham 2022 and Festival UK 22, which is the avoidance of parades as crowds are more challenging to manage at the roadside. Although this guidance is being regularly updated, HIF will need to consider the safety element, and both reality and perception and the costs of producing the parade vs a full day of delivery across multiple zones.

Elements of a 'Parade' could potentially be included within static areas avoiding the need for costly road closures and managing moving multiple sites, however this needs to be explored further.

- **Fire Garden 2021 – October/November 2021 (or February 2022)**

This event will be organised, managed and produced by HIF.

Harrogate Borough Council will provide direct grant of £25,000 from the Major Events budget to HIF, plus potential support activity in kind.

A 2-3 day evening Fire Garden event based on the success and outputs of the 2016 Cie Carabosse event in the Valley Gardens which was designed to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of HIF, attracting 25,000 people to the Harrogate across three evenings.

The programme will consist of fire shows, sculptures and installations on a grand scale using flickering art works. The fire gardens need twilight/darkness to create the most stunning effects and the early sunset at this time of year will allow families to attend the event.

It is proposed that the event will take place in October/November 2021 or February 2022 subject to government restrictions and guidance

In addition to the specific grant funding referenced above, other event related activity to note will include:

- Marketing support for the **Harrogate BID's planned series of weekend events** through Visit Harrogate's website and social media channels.
- **A review of Christmas in Harrogate District:** To support in the attraction of visitors outside of the peak summer months, a review of the District's Christmas offering will be conducted in order to maximise visitor expenditure and economic impact.

## 5.6 Event management resource

It is proposed that a new Events Bureau Manager post be created within the new Destination Management Organisation (DMO) subject to necessary budget approval.

This post will be critical in the delivery of the event related actions detailed within the Economic Recovery programme, and in the long term will form an integral part of the DMO's ambitions for positioning Harrogate District as an exceptional events destination. The role will lead on the attraction of new business and leisure events to the Harrogate District, and oversee the delivery of Harrogate Borough Council's Event Strategy.

## 6.0 REQUIRED ASSESSMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The following were considered: Financial Implications; Human Resources Implications; Legal Implications; ICT Implications; Strategic Property/Asset Management Considerations; Risk Assessment; Equality and Diversity (the Public Sector Equality Duty and impact upon people with protected characteristics). If applicable, the outcomes of any consultations, assessments, considerations and implications considered necessary during preparation of this report are detailed below.

6.2 Financial implications – there is £75k available within the Major Events Reserve to fund the events detailed at paragraph 5.5.

6.3 Legal Services have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated in to the report.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The Council's Economic Recovery Framework & Action Plan are 'live' documents which recognise the need to adapt and work in new ways to support



the local economy/businesses throughout and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important that the Council continue to play a proactive role in supporting the local economy in the coming months as lockdown is eased and the district starts to re-open for business. Supporting businesses, maximising the safe use of public space and a proactive approach to Covid-safe events are all key parts of this, and Cabinet are therefore recommended to endorse the priorities identified in this report.

**Background Papers** – Various Covid-19 update reports at Cabinet meetings throughout 2020

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