

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 16 December 2020

Staffordshire Means Back to Business



Cllr Philip White, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills said,

“The pandemic has had a huge impact on national and regional economies and as a county council it has been imperative for us to act decisively to support our communities and businesses as quickly as possible. We have done this from the beginning of the crisis, both by helping deliver national schemes and developing our own initiatives to meet local needs not fully covered by other schemes.

The Staffordshire economy has proved resilient and remains one of the best places in the UK to start or grow a business, with excellent connectivity boosted by major infrastructure projects and home to international industry leaders. Our Staffordshire Means Back to Business strategy sets out our short, medium and long-term approach to strengthening our economy through renewal and transformation with a focus on the green economy, the transformative effects of 5G, digital and online working and our commitment to supporting the renewal of our town centres.”

Report Summary:

The economic prosperity of Staffordshire is the cornerstone of the security and wellbeing of our citizens and is a key priority for the County Council. Staffordshire has a broad appeal for businesses, beautiful countryside, centrally located, diverse and vibrant settlements and a skilled workforce. It is one of our main responsibilities to respond to the challenges presented by Covid 19, to retain and enhance that appeal. We must continually strive to make sure our people have access to good jobs, career opportunities, financial security and public services that support and enrich our lives. Through protecting and growing our businesses and tax base, we will have the means to deliver those public services that enable us to protect our most vulnerable. But our approach is not just about the here and now, we need to look to the future. How we can accelerate key sectors that will provide for a much greener more sustainable future, providing more and better paid jobs for our people.

This report sets out the impact Covid-19 has had on the economy of Staffordshire and the interventions put in place locally, regionally and nationally to support businesses and residents. Each month Cabinet will now receive an update on the impact on the economy and how SCC and partners are supporting recovery, renewal, growth and transformation.

In June 2020 Cabinet signed off our strategy *Staffordshire Means Back to Business* which set out how the County Council would take a short, medium and long-term approach to supporting the economy through Covid, from response through recovery and into renewal and economic transformation. The approach we set out in June gave

us flexibility to focus on the here and now, whilst also planning for a future where our economy could thrive. This strategy has been underpinned by a delivery plan that sets out the range of interventions Staffordshire County Council has been involved with, to complement the initiatives of Government, including: support for start-ups, support for those at risk of redundancy, support for small businesses, enhanced communications, support for town centres and developing regional investment corridors.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes the impact of Covid-19 on the economy to date;
- b. Notes and continues to support the various programmes available to residents and businesses across the County; and
- c. Commits to develop further interventions for approval, that champion the recovery of the Staffordshire economy post Covid19, ensuring public sector support, both local and national, and helping the private sector to create and drive forward opportunities.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 16 December 2020

Staffordshire Means Back to Business

Recommendations of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills

I recommend that Cabinet:

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Report of the Director of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

Introduction

1. There is no doubt Covid-19 has had an impact on the global, national and local economy. In Staffordshire we have seen the number of people on Universal Credit more than double since March, an increase of just over 13,500 claimants, albeit these numbers are still below the national rate at 4.8% of the Working Age Population compared to 6.3% nationally. At its peak we had 135,700 people on Furlough in Staffordshire, this is now down to 29,300, while there were also 27,200 self-employed workers claiming the latest Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant. Overall, nearly 1 in 5 businesses/residents are receiving support from one of the three national job retention/support schemes.
2. The lockdown in November saw approximately 5,000 businesses affected, having to close or change their business model (e.g. restaurants offering take-away only). As we move into Tier 3 this is affecting around 1,700 businesses pre-dominantly in the hospitality and tourism trade. We have seen some small signs of encouragement, with UC levels stable over the last few months and even reducing ever-so-slightly. In Staffordshire our job vacancy levels are now back to pre-Covid levels, which is good news.
3. Our economic recovery, renewal & transformation strategy, *Staffordshire Means Back to Business*, was approved by Cabinet on the 17th June 2020. This sets out our vision, aims and priorities to respond to the Covid 19 crisis. The full impact of the crisis and how the local, national and global economies will recover remains

uncertain. But we do know that there will be a significant impact on businesses and their employees.

4. This report updates Cabinet on the County Councils response to Covid 19 and how our approach remains flexible to respond to changing national and local circumstances. SCC has worked with a range of partners at a national, regional and local level to support residents and businesses through this crisis, including: Districts and Boroughs, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, surrounding Local Authorities and LEPs, Midlands Engine, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus (JCP) and the National Careers Service (NCS). It is essential that we continue to develop these key relationships if we are to support our economy not only to recover from Covid, but to renew, transform and thrive.

Impact of Covid

5. The impact of Covid 19 on the national economy has been significant. Whilst Staffordshire has a strong and diverse economy it has not been immune to that impact. To illustrate the challenges faced:
 - a. Claimant Count – Doubled since March with 4.8% compared to 6.3% nationally. That is 25,600 people in Staffordshire. Although this figure has been stable over the last few months due to the national interventions put in place by Government.
 - b. Younger people disproportionately hit by economic impact due to reliance on sectors hardest hit.
 - c. Furlough – there were 29,300 furloughed job claims in Staffordshire up to the end of September, equivalent to 7% of eligible workers slightly below the national average of 8%. Approx.70% of furloughed workers nationally are from SMEs demonstrating the disproportionate impact on SMEs who make up 99% of our business base.
 - d. Self-employed - Staffordshire has seen 69% of self-employed workers claim for the second SEISS grant up to the end of October. However, the scheme misses a lot of people and we suspect the self-employed are big contributors to the increased claimant count.
 - e. 3 main job support schemes combined – we believe nearly 1 in 5 people are still on one of the 3 main Government job support schemes which is similar to the national picture – although there has been a larger impact on Cannock Chase and Tamworth Districts.
6. The hardest hit sectors are arts, entertainment and recreation, accommodation and food, wholesale and retail and manufacturing. All of which are significant in size in Staffordshire (above national average). Putting us at continued risk. Although we are starting to see some positive signs of recovery:

- a. Job vacancies in Staffordshire increased by 15% between September and October equivalent to over 2,500 more job vacancies which is above the growth seen regionally (13%) and nationally (11%). Vacancy levels are now similar to those seen pre-Covid and a year ago.
- b. UK gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have grown by a record 15.5% in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2020, as lockdown measures were eased. Though this reflects some recovery of activity following the record contraction in Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020, the level of GDP in the UK is still 9.7% below where it was at the end of 2019.

Supporting the Staffordshire Economy

7. Following the approval of *Staffordshire Means Back To Business* strategy in June 2020, which was also considered through scrutiny, we have developed and delivered an action plan that contains activities taken nationally, regionally and locally (through ourselves and our partners in the LEP and Districts/Boroughs) to support the economy. Our approach was built on an evidence base and the recently produced Local Industrial Strategy (also evidence based). The five pillars of the LIS were priorities for our strategy as the evidence at the time suggested these should remain a priority through Covid 19: Business Environment, People, Infrastructure, Place and Innovation. The five pillars were considered against the four phases of the economic impact of Covid 19: respond, recover, renew and transform. Whilst a comprehensive rollout of approved vaccines takes place, it is likely that Staffordshire will move between Tiers and National Lockdowns. As a consequence we will move between the 4 phases (respond, recover, renew and transform), as they are not linear, and we will shift between them all, with some running at the same time, to meet the needs of our economy.
8. Thinking of our strategy in these phases has helped us to consider the relevant interventions that can be put in place over the short, medium and long-term. Underpinning all of this will be the need to grow back greener, to grow back inclusively and to grow back with a stronger sense of place.
9. Our approach to delivery has been to complement the national/regional interventions and to spot the “gap in the market” where other schemes, due to the pace and complexity of the Covid 19 pandemic, don’t address all the requirements of business to get through this difficult period. This approach has seen us enhance communications so businesses are aware of the various national support schemes, support our Districts and Boroughs when it comes to distributing national grants, sit as part of the SSLEP Covid Response Task Force, and develop our own interventions (with partners) where we can see a benefit.
10. When Staffordshire County Councils response to the Covid 19 crisis was approved in June 2020, the Council was already working to support our economy with a number of interventions in place with the aim of supporting businesses and individuals. These included:
 - a. The £0.500m Staffordshire County Council emergency grants scheme to help support our micro-businesses survive the crisis;

- b. A new £0.360m Staffordshire County Council Start-up support scheme;
 - c. Delayed rent payments at our Enterprise Centres, and;
 - d. The planned progression of extensions to our Enterprise Centres at Cannock Chase and Silverdale.
11. As the Country moved out of national lockdown and businesses were able to open back up the County Council funded a PPE Start-back Pack initiative, whereby the Council sent out nearly 1,800 Start -back packs to support small businesses who had no choice but to have face-to-face contact with their customers. The key to this initiative though was the provision of a list of trusted PPE suppliers that was available to all businesses, with nearly 6,500 businesses visiting out PPE webpages.
12. Throughout our response communications have been key.
13. To achieve enhanced communications, we set up Recovery and Renewal Strategy webpages together with relevant information. This has generated over 2,000 hits. Our initial response to Covid 19 then moved quickly to put in place a comprehensive communications campaign to illustrate the range of support and information available to residents and businesses. These campaigns have generated significant interest which has included:
- a. Total business visitors driven to find out more information from local sources, just over 5,000 by July, but by November this had increased to over 10,000.
 - b. Total business visitors driven to find out more information from government sources, e.g. Job Retention Scheme, Kickstart, over 4,000
 - c. SCC newsletter that goes out every week and contains links to business support, 3,700 followers in July, this has now grown to over 5,300. These also provide support on the day to day Covid controls and how to run businesses safely. Our stakeholder edition goes out once a month as standard.
 - d. Our LinkedIn pages are reaching over 31,000 people a month, and continues to attract new visitors - 662 new visitors over the last 30 days
 - e. Our Twitter account is used to tweet posts for business and business start-ups.
 - f. SCC media releases are provided regularly and associated social media on any SCC business support (start-up support, micro business grants scheme, economic recovery plan updates, PPE provision etc). These are shared through LEP and partner channels (chambers/growth hub). Our webpages are regularly updated with all the relevant information.
 - g. As part of the Countywide Redundancy Task Group, a local communications campaign is also being implemented to promote the national Kickstart programme and to date the local website has seen over 1,900 visitors seeking information. We have also been working to promote the government's Skills

Toolkit through a local promotion campaign. This has resulted in over 900 individuals accessing the government's Skills Toolkit to explore free government courses.

14. We are reinforcing our communication campaigns through bespoke place branding. The County Council has invested significant funds on place branding (£0.5M) with the objective of this activity providing a unified approach to Staffordshire as a place. It provides us with a tool to help us promote Staffordshire and attract business, talent, visitors and students. It is the story of our county, past, present and importantly future – and the places and the people that make it special.
15. We will use our new place brand to build local pride and confidence in our county, and to help us promote Staffordshire as we reignite our economy post coronavirus. But we recognise the importance of partnership and are working with business leaders, our universities and other public sector partners to deliver our brand, with the objective of growing Staffordshire's economy and create more, better paid jobs for our people.
16. We continue to listen and are engaging directly with leaders from our BAME communities. To ensure our communication platforms and branding reaches all sections of Staffordshire's population and that we all have access to the opportunities presented to us, in the most positive and fair means possible.
17. In addition to Communications and Place Branding, the County Council has continued to develop its business support offer with £625,000 committed over three years. This now consists of three distinctive, yet interwoven elements detailed below:
 - a. **Start Up Scheme** (£360,000 over 3 years) to complement existing programmes which will help those at risk of redundancy or unemployment. In the first year of the programme the aim is to support 300 people and see 200 businesses started. It is being provided by the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce who have a track record of providing successful start-up services and have achieved a 76% three-year survivability rate in those that began trading.
 - b. **Start Up Loans Scheme** (£100,000), providing loans of between £3,000 and £5,000 to people who have successfully completed the Staffordshire Start Up course at an interest free rate with no arrangement fee to be repaid 12 months after issue. This pilot project will allow us to determine whether there is a gap in the market for low risk loans to new start-ups with the ambition that this can be scaled up in the future if successful.
 - c. **Bespoke student start-up programme** (£165,000 over 3 years), for young entrepreneurs called Ignite. Delivered in an engaging and interactive way through an online platform, dedicated resources and with ongoing professional support. A county-wide initiative designed to encourage young people to understand the basics of entrepreneurialism and enterprise. The programme aims to engage 4,000 students through a dedicated lesson leading to 300 engaged online with 100 taking the intensive 5-day programme with a target of 20 business starts in year one.

18. To draw all this activity together, an electronic Start Up Prospectus is being designed to let the UK know what a great place Staffordshire is to start a business.
19. The County Council will also shortly be launching a partnership programme with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) which has been supported by all the County's Districts and Boroughs, to give micro businesses, through application, access to the full range of business support services they might require e.g. legal, finance, health and safety etc. for a year.
20. In partnership with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the County Council and partners continue to work with the NCS to deliver the Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service which went live in April 2020. This service supports businesses and employees facing redundancies and is delivered by the National Careers Service West Midlands. The service will match those recently made redundant with new work in those sectors currently experiencing growth. This service is funded via the main NCS contract awarded by the ESFA. Comprehensive marketing and communications activity for the Triage service has seen 7,914 visitors so far to the Council and LEP websites (5,194 from business and 2,720 from individuals).
21. Furthermore, the government has provided an additional £32 million of national funding over the next 2 years for the NCS; and locally NCS is recruiting for 26 additional advisers overall across the West Midlands, of which 6 will be allocated to the Staffordshire area.
22. The County Council established the Countywide Redundancy Task Group in June 2020 that continues to meet weekly with good attendance from 24 partner organisations. It brings together the County Council, City Council, District/Borough Councils, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Jobcentre Plus, BEIS, Chambers, FSB and other national agencies and local partners. The main focus is to support the co-ordination of the services to help to redeploy, retrain, reskill, upskill and signpost people to new employment opportunities ensuring support is available to the individuals affected and their families. To also ensure a menu of support will be made available to the employer and its employees through existing programmes such as DWP Rapid Response Service, National Careers Service and the European Social Fund funded Skills Support for Redundancy contract. To date we have logged 62 businesses making potential redundancies, with 45 of these businesses submitting an HR1 form via the Insolvency Service, of which 40 have taken up the local offer of support. The next key activity that the Group is implementing is a series of virtual jobs/careers fairs with the first social media coverage commencing in early December. This will focus on promoting opportunities in the construction sector and will be closely followed by the health and social care sector. We are also developing a local offer to reskill workers in the retail sector with digital skills to help them trade online.
23. We have worked with partners through the Redundancy group to support the Government Plan for Jobs and in particular the Kickstart Scheme aimed at preventing young people aged 16-24 becoming long term unemployed, with a 6-month work placement. We have formed a task group locally to ensure we have a quality offer for business and young people, with the aim of getting the best

outcomes from the programme for the local area and the government achieves its ambitions from the scheme and its investment. As part of this work we supported the creation of a Kickstart charter that set out the principles and priorities for Staffordshire from the scheme that we have shared with all partners and gained their approval. We have also written to the Minister for Employment offering our assistance for the scheme and to help coordinate it locally. We have worked with the Chambers of Commerce in helping them offer the support as an intermediary to businesses, as a gateway organization. They have been able to secure, potentially, over 750 placements with over 250 businesses in the local area. This has been achieved through a significant campaign to promote the Kickstart scheme to generate placement opportunities with businesses. We have had 1,500 hits through social media, 2,000 web page hits and over 40 click throughs from businesses looking to secure 30 placements or more.

24. We have adapted our adult community learning offer to move from solely classroom-based provision to an online remote learning offer during the first lockdown. We developed over 100 courses to help improve the ICT and employability skills of almost 800 learners through the summer term. We have continued to increase our blended learning offer this term. We have supported this with a campaign to promote adult learning. In November, we were an area with the largest number of hits on the Council's website with over 13,500 unique visits.
25. We have worked with the Further Education and Higher Education sectors throughout the pandemic to ensure they could continue to operate an offer with the right level of support and provide the appropriate links into the local outbreak control. This included briefings, advice and resources to support reopening and continued operation, as well as practical support such as supplying 1,000's of face covering's, PPE and advice in sourcing. We have also established an FE working group to help support the county's economic recovery strategy and the role the FE sector can play. This has already seen the Ignite start-up programme come to fruition and there are plans to do more work around apprenticeships, careers and re skilling as part of that working group.
26. We continue to work with Keele, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton Universities, to ensure we support their objectives of growth and help drive forward the Staffordshire economy. This is in addition to the work they are doing as part of their respective "Deals". We have established a regular dialogue and single point of contact for each university to enable better joint working and have engaged them through the Redundancy Group to play in the HE offer of support.
27. We strive to ensure young people can continue to participate in education and training. Our work with Entrust supports this significantly as we track and report on the participation of some 22,000 young people every month. Throughout the pandemic we have adapted the approach and ceased face-to-face support but offered remote and online support. Our Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) & Not known's performance remains strong and we are in the top quintile for performance nationally, comparing very well with our statistical neighbours.
28. Apprenticeships remain a key priority for the Council, both our own programme and the work with partners in supporting apprentices. We continue to operate our own

apprenticeship programme throughout the pandemic with 118 apprentices currently on programme. However, recruitment patterns have been affected with some starts being put back until January. A toolkit for Schools has been sent to all schools to support them and help them to understand the number of different apprenticeships available to them.

29. On a wider note through the Redundancy Group we have put in place support for businesses and apprentices at risk through the Ladder for Staffordshire where they can get advice and support. We are also working with the National Apprenticeship Redundancy Service to help apprentices in receiving support to complete their apprenticeship and find other opportunities. We continue to offer support for businesses to access funding for apprenticeship training through our Levy Transfer scheme. So far, we have committed £250,000 to local businesses from the County Council levy to support them with apprentices. In addition, through the West Midlands Levy fund we have been able to secure an additional £175,000 levy to transfer to Staffordshire businesses.
30. The government also launched the Getting Building Fund which we have been successful in securing through SSLEP. The County's Officers are working to crystallise those allocations whether that be leading, supporting or simply advocating. These include:
 - a. **i54 Western Extension (£3m)** grant was secured which will support development of nationally significant 60-acre site and expected to generate around 1,700 jobs. Plot development is due to be complete in summer 2021.
 - b. **Local Sustainable Transport Package (£0.65m)** grant to support a package of sustainable transport schemes in Tamworth, Biddulph, Burton-upon-Trent, Uttoxeter, Eccleshall and Burntwood delivering walking and cycling provision to facilitate a green recovery.
 - c. **Skills Equipment Fund (£0.92m)** – grant to support skills projects which are focused towards improving in the creative, digital and construction sectors.
 - d. **Drakelow Park (£5.05m)** - A strategic development in South Derbyshire that will accommodate 2,000 houses and 30 hectares of employment land. The scheme has transport implications for East Staffordshire and the project is a new road bridge that will facilitate the development. This scheme is also being supporting by the D2N2 LEP.
 - e. **Shire Hall (£1.6M)**- This will supply Stafford with Class A office space in the future, and a new Enterprise Quarter.
31. These projects represent a significant commitment to drive forward their delivery so that Staffordshire residents and businesses can benefit from their outputs. One of the most challenging elements relating to their ongoing delivery is tiers of restricted movement. This underlines the ability we have, together with our partners, to continue to implement schemes of a strategic nature and yet rigorously adhere to relevant Covid restrictions and safe working practices.

32. We must also consider how we support further the groups and sectors disproportionality impacted by the pandemic. The Destination Management Partnership (DMP), which represents the tourism and hospitality sector across Staffordshire, has broadly existed in its current form since 2006. We are commencing a review of the DMP, working closely with our colleagues who are part of the partnership, to celebrate its success, but with the clearly defined objective of delivering a DMP that is fully effective, post pandemic, in supporting the Staffordshire tourism sector including leisure and hospitality.
33. A revitalised DMP will act as a firm advocate for Staffordshire's tourism sector, and lobby government to continue to ensure the right policy and support packages are in place to safeguard the survival and renewal of the sector in the most positive way possible. The DMP will work to continue and develop its role as a key vehicle for sharing the narrative and branding, described earlier, and will be in a crucial position to socialise the Place Brand. Future work will include establishing how the existing Enjoy and Visit brands should develop to bring the narrative, collateral and spirit of the Place Branding into the marketing activity of the DMP. Staffordshire County Council recognises the importance of tourism to the Staffordshire economy and are committed to working in partnership with public/private partners to transform the DMP.
34. As an authority which attaches significant importance to the economy of Staffordshire, understanding the importance to an individual of having access to good quality employment, and for business having access to skilled staff, we continue to develop and flex our approach to the Covid 19 crisis. Towards the end of November, we launched the Make It Your Space office campaign, posting on social media, sending a mailer to over 700 subscribers comprising of office agents, including commencing a paid-for campaign on LinkedIn targeting MDs, finance directors, operations directors etc. The objective was to raise the profile of Staffordshire should firms be reconsidering their office requirements in light of Covid 19.
35. We have more planned with further mailers, ongoing social media activity (including a couple of short films that we have produced) and a webinar on the Future of the Workplace which was delivered on the 5 November:

[catch up on our YouTube channel here](#)
36. Through smart and home working we are already seeing companies move out of large city centres, locating to smaller more convenient locations. We aim to capitalise on this through our Make It Your Space campaign and developing our own regeneration scheme (Eastgate) that will consider the extensive use of live workspace, which in turn will aim to support the High Street. In all, whilst times are difficult for many companies and our communities impacted by potential redundancy, there is plenty of opportunity and optimism in the Staffordshire economy.
37. We worked closely with our Growth Hub, Districts and Boroughs to support the re-opening of High Streets and Town Centres in the summer and we are working

across the County to support a comprehensive town centre development programme.

38. We recognise there is much to do to return our town centres to locations of great vibrancy. Staffordshire has been successful in being awarded places on the Town Deal and Future High Street Programmes, each advocating a potential £25M investment in a locality. Kidsgrove, Newcastle and Burton Upon Trent have been successful in securing places on the Town Deal Programme. Whilst Stafford, Newcastle town centre and Tamworth on the Future High Streets Programme. We have supported our District and Borough Council partners to make comprehensive and quality submissions to ensure we are well placed to be awarded funds.
39. All of our towns and service centres are important to our communities, and therefore alongside the above schemes we are working to deliver a comprehensive proposition to support the regeneration, renewal and prosperity of all our town and service centres which are so important to us all. This will be shaped under the place brand, to deliver all the components of successful areas including opportunities for employment, homes, education, and open space. All this must of course be supported by the necessary infrastructure.
40. Staffordshire County Council has also taken a lead role, alongside the Midlands Engine, in bringing together partners across the East and West Midlands to develop a corridor investment programme along the A50/A500. This initiative is at early stages but presents a huge opportunity for UK Plc to invest along the A50 corridor from Leicestershire to Cheshire East, to unlock serious growth, increase productivity and improve east – west connectivity by road, rail and digital. We are also working on allied initiatives to improve our road and rail connectivity across the County
41. In all we are relentlessly working to support our business community in a constantly changing and dynamic environment. We are responding rapidly to new announcements (Additional Restrictions Grant) and continuing to consider how we can better our approach. Our relationships with key business groups, FSB and Chambers, goes from strength to strength.
42. Throughout our Strategy and interventions there is an eye to the future. To identify and work towards delivering the growth of a clean and green economy in Staffordshire. Amongst all the economic challenges businesses and communities will face through recovery, accelerating our plans to transform to a clean economy with a strong green sector will support our climate change ambitions as a County. This is clearly demonstrated by our ambitious plans to work with partners to develop and deliver the bold A50/A500 East West Corridor, improving productivity, employment opportunities and a step change in manufacturing, all orientated around the green economy.
43. The labour market is transforming at a pace and the fourth industrial revolution is shaping the economy and labour force of now and the future. Digital skills are increasingly demanded and we will work to ensure we can provide those skills to help people retrain and upskill, to take advantage of new opportunities. The government Plan for Jobs will play an important part in the recovery and we will

drive to support the local implementation of the Restart programme for the long-term unemployed as we have done with the Kickstart scheme. We will also ensure people can access up to date and localised information on careers, training, apprenticeships and jobs to support job finding and career progression. The downturn in apprenticeships will require additional support for business to create apprenticeship opportunities and how we incentivise employers to do so. We will be clear about our local skills priorities and access the support offered through new government programmes as the ESF programme ends.

44. All of our activity has enshrined within it, digital connectivity, not only working to ensure all those without broadband have access to it, but also seizing the opportunity presented by Gigabit broadband and 5G.
45. We still have much to do. We will bring forward further reports in 2021/22, covering key topics including our small towns and high street activity and how, post Covid 19, our future economy has changed and how we will work to ensure it is befitting of our County and the skills of our citizens.

Legal Implications

46. The County Council's' Legal Team have been engaged with providing the necessary advice regarding the component parts of our Strategy.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

47. There are no resource or value for money implications as a result of this report.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Cabinet Decision on Staffordshire Means Back to Business Strategy 17th June 2020
Cabinet Decision Support Provided to Business Start Ups in Staffordshire 18th
November 2020

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