

16 September 2020		ITEM: 15
Cabinet		
Backing Thurrock: A Five Year Strategy for Economic Recovery, Resilience and a Return to Growth		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not applicable	
Report of: Councillor Mark Coxshall, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning		
Accountable Assistant Director: Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead – Economic Development		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

Backing Thurrock is a five year strategy for economic recovery, resilience and a return to growth. The strategy aims to support economic recovery and, alongside a new Local Plan, drive the Council’s ambition that growth should be infrastructure led, community driven and of high quality. The strategy is being developed in two parts.

This first part of the strategy recognises the underlying strengths in the Thurrock economy and the devastating economic impact that the COVID pandemic is now having in Thurrock and elsewhere. The strategy suggests a pro-active approach where the Council uses the levers it has to support a market led recovery. It proposes a number of immediate actions that are being delivered or can be implemented in the next six months to support the response.

In the medium and longer term the strategy needs to continue to support the recovery but also to take advantage of the huge opportunities arising from underlying changes in the economy. It outlines the foundations of any work to support economic growth and some of the themes that need to be explored to develop a more resilient, growing economy.

Stakeholders in Thurrock have a proud tradition of working together and the strategy proposes a framework within which businesses and other stakeholders will be invited to work with the Council to develop an Implementation Plan for the medium and longer term. The Implementation Plan will capture the work that each partner is taking to support the Thurrock economy and will be written by January 2021.

1. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to:

- 1.1 To approve the draft Backing Thurrock strategy for consultation**
- 1.2 To agree to co-design the related Implementation Plan with anchor institutions, key businesses, the voluntary and community sector and other stakeholders and to return to Cabinet with a further report seeking approval of the final Strategy and Implementation Plan.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock's level of ambition and determination to drive growth that benefits local people remains as strong as ever, despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. The Council intends to build on strong foundations already established through the existing growth programme and develop a revised strategic approach that will bring further, considerable benefits to people and communities within Thurrock and the wider region.
- 2.2 The Council is determined that growth will be infrastructure led, community driven and of high quality. To deliver on that ambition the Council needs to work with residents, the business community and with stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector to put the right strategic framework in place. A new Local Plan and a revised approach to Economic Development will form the focus of that approach.
- 2.3 While the Local Plan has to be developed in line with a legal framework and will take time to complete, the development of a new strategy for economic development (the Backing Thurrock Strategy) and associated Implementation Plan can be delivered at pace, securing benefits for the local economy, residents and the business community.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Work on a revised approach to economic development began with an assessment of the local economy – its characteristics, strengths, issues and opportunities.
- 3.2 The strategy sets out some key findings from the assessment of the economy and concludes that in recent years the economy has performed relatively well. The local economy has grown, jobs and new businesses have been created and wage levels have improved. Confidence in the economic potential of Thurrock can be seen in the large private sector led investments, particularly in relation to development and expansion of the Ports.
- 3.3 The assessment identified some underlying issues to be addressed including challenges around productivity and a rise in the claimant count (albeit still at a relatively low level). The economy also faces major changes as a result of

technological change and automation, the increasing importance of sustainable green growth and changing patterns of world trade. These changes present challenges and also huge opportunities reflected in the strategy.

- 3.4 The COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on the economy. It is still too early to understand the full impact however it is clear that there has been a severe contraction in the economy, that the numbers of people looking for work have increased significantly and that certain more vulnerable groups – like care leavers – are at higher risk, that some businesses – particularly those in the hardest hit sectors – are closing or struggling to survive. The pandemic has also had an impact on commuting patterns and on consumer spending habits that could last beyond the pandemic recovery itself.

Immediate actions

- 3.5 In the short term the strategy outlines immediate actions that the Council has already taken to help shore up the local economy. These actions have included timely distribution of funding from the Government support schemes, grant funding for resilience within the voluntary sector, engagement and sharing information with local businesses and supporting the reopening of the economy.
- 3.6 Building on the strength of partnerships in Thurrock. The strategy proposes some new initiatives that the Council can work with partners to deliver – helping local people find work (including particularly vulnerable groups such as care leavers), supporting the local economy by working with Thurrock's major partners across both the public, private sector and Thurrock residents to develop a Back Thurrock Economic Partnership that aims to procure significantly more goods and services from local businesses, recruit locally and work together to ensure that the Thurrock economy is resilient. The strategy will ensure the Council is planning for and managing new local outbreaks of COVID so they are contained and controlled quickly and efficiently to minimise impact on Thurrock businesses and residents.

The Vision and Approach

- 3.7 The strategy recognises the huge opportunities that there are in Thurrock to deliver resilient growth over the next five years. It sets out a vision based on the underlying strengths of Thurrock as a dynamic, entrepreneurial trading economy. Setting out the opportunities that arise from longer term changes to Thurrock's economic activity - including green growth, changing trade patterns and technological change. There are two further themes to the strategy that sit alongside recovery from the pandemic as the basis for the medium and longer term actions – building resilience and a return to growth.
- 3.8 The strategy recognises the proud tradition of working together to design and deliver shared approaches in Thurrock and proposes a collaborative approach to delivering market led growth. The approach focuses on working with other

anchor institutions – who have invested in Thurrock, are committed for the long term and have a real interest in growing a successful and vibrant economy. Working with the other anchor institutions the Council can facilitate a discussion around the five different areas of potential collaboration set out in the strategy that we want to explore.

- 3.9 In parallel the Council will work with other stakeholders including Thurrock Business Board, business representatives, the voluntary and community sectors and public institutions to develop actions based around the foundations of economic growth set out in the report.

The Implementation Plan

- 3.10 The second part of the strategy – the Implementation Plan – will be developed through the autumn. It will include the short term actions already underway and the medium and longer term priorities identified through the co-design process.
- 3.11 The Implementation Plan will be prepared by January 2021 and delivery will begin straight away. It will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as opportunities arise.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The strategic framework to drive Thurrock's growth ambitions needs refreshing in light of the significant changes in recent years. While the development of a new Local Plan takes time, a fresh approach to Economic Development can be delivered and implemented at pace.
- 4.2 The impact the COVID pandemic means that there is a need to deliver urgent short term actions that will help counter the impact and will help businesses recover. The strategy sets out a number of short term actions that can be delivered straight away to support economic recovery.
- 4.3 There are also opportunities for Thurrock in the medium and long term; to develop a more resilient economy able to overcome the impact of COVID; to address any underlying issues; to take advantage of the huge opportunities to come. The report sets out a framework within which the Council can collaborate with other stakeholders to develop a clear shared Implementation Plan which will form the second part of the Strategy and will be produced by January 2021.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Initial discussions have taken place with Thurrock Business Board and with other key stakeholders including potential anchor institutions. The draft strategy reflects those discussions and sets out a framework for consultation and collaboration to ensure that the final strategy and Implementation Plan

are community driven.

- 5.2 This report and the draft strategy was presented to Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th September for comment. A verbal update on comments made by the Committee will be presented to Cabinet.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Backing Thurrock Strategy will support the Council's vision and priorities. Notably the priority relating to prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.
- 6.2 There will be an impact on other policies and priorities across the Council. Appropriate links will be made through the consultation on the first part of the strategy and the collaborative approach to developing the Implementation Plan.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Regeneration, and
Deputy Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and
Equalities

The strategy and supporting implementation plan will be informed by a Community Equality Impact Assessment that will seek to remove barriers to participation impacting individuals and communities with protected characteristics, as well as those affected by health and/or socio-economic conditions.

This report sets out an intention to support the whole community - including those hardest to reach – to help improve skills and access to good jobs. The implementation plan will need to consider how best to work with stakeholders to ensure that actions address deprivation and help residents benefit from work.

The focus on a collaborative approach to market led growth – working with the anchor institutions and wider voluntary and community sector- is to be welcomed as a way of generating and retaining wealth within Thurrock. Through the co-design of the implementation plan all views will be considered to ensure that challenges facing individuals and communities are overcome or minimised, before moving to the medium and long term delivery phase.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

The Backing Thurrock strategy should have positive implications for many other priorities - health and wellbeing, education and skills, community development and civic pride. The approach to the design of the Implementation Plan set out in this report will help ensure appropriate links between different priorities are made.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>
- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>
- www.gov.uk
- www.obr.uk
- www.bankofengland.co.uk/

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Backing Thurrock: A Five Year Strategy for Economic Recovery, Resilience and a Return to Growth

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