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| Cabinet |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| 27 th October 2021 | |
| Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director of Place | Classification: Unrestricted |
| Delivery Report 2020/21 – Local Economic Support | |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Uz-Zaman, Cabinet Member for Work and Economic Growth |
| Originating Officer(s) | Vicky Clark, Divisional Director, Growth & Economic Development Thomas Smith, Strategy and Policy Officer, Place |
| Wards affected | All |
| Key Decision? | No - this report is for information/discussion only. |
| Reason for Key Decision | This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria. |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | 30 th July 2021 |
| Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome | 1. People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities. |

Executive Summary

This report sets out what the council has delivered to support the local economy over the course of the last 18 months since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. It provides an overview of the activities that the services have been engaged in as a response to the challenges that the pandemic has presented and highlights how these services have risen to these challenges while maintaining our core services. The report complements and adds further detail to the regular performance reports received by Cabinet.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the actions taken by officers over the course of the last 18 months in the provision of economic support, and comment as desired.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To provide a detailed overview of our key activities in the local economy over the past year and a half.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

2.1 N/A

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 While headline data conceal a very wide range of experiences and inequalities, the economic context of the last 18 months has been negative for many local residents and businesses. The enduring impact of 2020-21 will only be fully known over the next few years.

3.2 Throughout this period, local services and programmes have continued to operate to support our local growth priorities, as well as limit more immediate damage to the local economy.

3.3 This report gives an overview of our activity to support the local economy over the last 18 months. In summary, we have:

- Maintained and where appropriate expanded our core services, adapting these where necessary to comply with restrictions.
- Rolled out a rapid response, devising local projects as well as delivering central government funding and programmes
- Provided interventions to support a recovery once conditions stabilise

EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

3.4 Over the past year, we have worked with partners in the public, private and third sectors to put major interventions in place to limit the rise in unemployment. We have also ensured residents can access the most appropriate pre-employment advice, guidance and training to enable them to enter the labour market when conditions are right.

3.5 **Workpath:** Our core Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service has continued to provide a service to residents most in need. Although the ongoing disruption has limited the number of vacancies our clients can access, 326 residents were supported into work in 2020/21 and we have been able to provide training and employment support throughout.

3.6 **JobCentre Plus Co-location:** 2020 saw the physical co-location of JobCentre Plus and the Workpath and Supported Employment Programme services at Upper Bank Street. Closer working with JCP has achieved positive outcomes, for example, for young people accessing Kickstart.

3.7 **Kickstart (Gateway):** Tower Hamlets served as an intermediary (or 'Gateway') for local employers seeking to use the government's Kickstart scheme. This scheme funds 6 months of paid work experience, including training, for 16-24 year olds who are on Universal Credit. 208 local placements had started by August 2021, with funding secured for a total of 550 (one of the highest of any local authority).

- 3.8 **Kickstart (Direct Employer):** The Council itself has been taking on applicants through the Kickstart scheme, topping up the pay to the level of London Living Wage. The Employment service coordinated a number of bids from various services. Cohort 1 has provided placements to 33 resident young people.
- 3.9 **JETS Programme:** Job Entry Targeted Support, a DWP-funded programme, has provided support and training for 259 local residents who have been unemployed for over 12 weeks.
- 3.10 **CEZ Skills Programme:** As part of the Mayor of London's Creative Enterprise Zones initiative, we delivered seminars and employment support for those working in creative industries. A total of 75 residents have benefited.
- 3.11 **Digital Inclusion:** We coordinated local stakeholders to deliver over 250 digital devices and broadband connections to primary school children and their families.
- 3.12 **Expanding Careers Guidance:** We re-established the Tower Hamlets Careers Leads Network in June 2021. This will work to disseminate good practice throughout the borough. It will also promote new initiatives such as the local university summer schools being held for the first time this year.
- 3.13 **LIFT Employability Incubator:** Specifically focused on those seeking to work in the tech and digital sectors, this joint programme with three neighbouring boroughs has equipped 263 people with sector-specific skills through apprenticeships and work experience opportunities.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

- 3.14 Many local businesses have been hit hard over the last 18 months, and a range of work has been carried out to limit the impact and help enterprises to adapt their business models. This has consisted both of financial support as well as expert-led nonfinancial help.
- 3.15 **Small Business Grants:** We managed and distributed over £200m in grants and reliefs to over 5,000 local businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors – those hardest hit by lockdown. We also answered over 900 enquiries from businesses on how to access support and navigate the wide array of support schemes.
- 3.16 **Business Rate Discount:** We managed the government's 100% business rate discount for over 3,000 local businesses.
- 3.17 **Rent relief:** A three-month rent relief worth £98,210 was granted to support local community-based organisations who lease council premises.
- 3.18 **Masterclasses and webinars:** Throughout the period, we have offered free, online, expert-led advice and guidance seminars. These have been available

to all businesses and were made permanently available via the LBTH YouTube channel. In all, 598 businesses have accessed these sources of advice to date.

- 3.19 **Pivot Project and Pivot Project 2:** A project aimed at small and micro businesses struggling in the current climate, providing the support they need to 'pivot' and survive. The package includes advice and equipment of up to £1k per applicant. Over 50 businesses were supported in the first wave. Owing to its popularity, a second, expanded wave aimed at 150 more businesses was approved for delivery in 2021.
- 3.20 **Business Adaptations Project:** Funded through the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund, this project provides funding for small and micro businesses to adapt their business operations by providing a small grant.
- 3.21 **Creative Freelance Project:** A Pivot project geared to the creative sector, it has delivered grants of up to £1k and careers/business advice to creative freelancers. So far 60 small businesses have benefited from support to adapt their business models.
- 3.22 **WICK Together:** Funded by the Mayor of London's Creative Enterprise Zone programme, this small commissions project has supported the employment of 20 local freelancers and 70 residents to develop creative skills.
- 3.23 **LIFT Programme:** This multi-borough programme has supported 55 start-up businesses from under-represented communities into the Tech sector. The programme has also secured affordable workspace, outside investment, and assisted 25 established businesses to use tech in order to 'survive and pivot' in a challenging environment.
- 3.24 **'Pay It Forward London':** We have supported businesses to sign up to this fundraising campaign for small businesses facing hardship as a result of Covid-19. A total of £342,000 has been raised for 120 Tower Hamlets businesses so far.

HIGH STREETS AND TOWN CENTRES

- 3.25 The last 18 months has seen footfall plunge, especially in those places bordering major business areas. The High Streets and Town Centres team has been working to lessen these pandemic-specific impacts, while still proceeding with planned major investments in town centre regeneration.
- 3.26 Given the spatial nature of the team's work and the nature of Covid, close coordination with Environmental Health/Trading Standards and Markets colleagues has been essential.
- 3.27 **Town Centre Regeneration Programmes:** We have continued to deliver these long-planned improvements to town centres, including:

- 3.28 At **Roman Road West**: shopfront improvements; detailed design for market square, new access route to connect to Queen Mary University; mural on flank of housing block.
- 3.29 At **Brick Lane**: we have consulted on parklets, architectural lighting, the Banglatown Arch, Pedley St link, and the renaming of Osborn St to Lower Brick Lane.
- 3.30 **Advice and materials to businesses**: Working with Environmental Health and Public Health teams, we have provided reopening advice and essential materials (PPE, QR code posters) to businesses throughout the pandemic.
- 3.31 **Covid-safe Markets systems**: the Markets team have implemented Covid-safe one-way systems at Columbia Rd, Watney market and Chrisp Street market.
- 3.32 **Outdoor Dining**: To support reopening, the High Streets and Town Centres and Markets Teams developed a number of outdoor dining areas, to facilitate trade when weather permits. Locations include Middlesex St, Brick Lane, Whitby St, Brushfield St, Boundary St, Roman Rd East.
- 3.33 **'Moving Markets Online'**: Funded through the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund, this project will create and maintain an online platform for our designated licensed trading areas.
- 3.34 **Home Delivery Pilot**: Using a local e-cargo bike delivery scheme, this pilot supported 46 high street retail businesses to develop their delivery services during lockdown.
- 3.35 **Shop-Safe/Shop-Local Campaign**: A 'Shop-Safe/Shop-Local' campaign has been initiated and promoted across the borough, benefiting around 1400 businesses borough-wide.
- 3.36 **Re-Animation Events Programme**: A series of one-off events linked to the work of the Culture team were planned to encourage visitors and residents back to the High Street and Town Centre areas.
- 3.37 **Start-Up Market Traders**: This project has supported over 25 new market traders to test potential trade at a number of different TH street markets.
- 3.38 **High Street Business Support Project**: We have organised a range of expert advice and support seminars covering all aspects of training (marketing, social media, supply chains etc). So far over 100 businesses have benefited from this support.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (as set out in the Equality Act 2010) aims to embed equality considerations into the day-to-day work of public bodies, so that they tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to making society fairer.
- 4.2 As the report is informational by nature, there are no direct implications arising from it. Any new projects or services embarked upon undergo equalities screening as a matter of course.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.
- 5.2 There are no other statutory implications identified at this stage. The council's work to date and going forward is considered to be commensurate with all its best value, environmental and safeguarding responsibilities.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report is for noting and therefore there are no direct financial implications relating to this report. The projects and services described have been funded from a range of local and national sources.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 This report refers to various activities which have been undertaken over the previous year and a half. Where reporting has been required by the council's constitution the legal impact of those activities has been considered as part of those reports. Therefore, there are no direct legal implications arising from this noting report.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Presentation: 'Delivery Report 2020/21 – Local Economic Support'

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

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