

<b>9 February 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Backing Thurrock: A roadmap for economic recovery, resilience and an return to growth</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable	
<b>Report of:</b> Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead Economic Development		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Gerard McCleave, Assistant Director Economic Growth & Partnerships		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Andy Millard, Director of Place		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

Backing Thurrock is a roadmap for economic recovery, building resilience and a return to growth. It is an important part of the Council's response to the COVID pandemic and, alongside the Local Plan, forms the strategic framework to drive a return to growth that is infrastructure led, community driven and of high quality.

The strategy has been developed in two parts. The first part – the roadmap - was presented to Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 September. Cabinet then gave approval for formal consultation. The consultation is now complete and a final version of the roadmap has been prepared and will be presented to Cabinet for approval.

The second part of the strategy is the Action Plan which summarises the vision and goals and sets out priorities that the Council will focus on in the next 12 months. A first draft has been prepared using information gathered through the consultation and from discussions with representatives of public, private and voluntary sector organisations in Thurrock. The Action Plan will be a live document that will flex and adapt as opportunities arise, actions are implemented and new ideas and initiatives are developed.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:**

- 1.1 Note the outcome of the consultation on the Backing Thurrock Roadmap;**
- 1.2 Note and comment on the final version of the Backing Thurrock Roadmap Part 1 which will be presented to Cabinet for approval;**
- 1.3 Note and comment on the draft Backing Thurrock Action Plan which will be a live document subject to further engagement with anchor public, private and voluntary organisations to refine actions and agree delivery mechanisms;**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Thurrock has a dynamic trading economy well placed to support economic growth and generate prosperity for residents and local businesses. However the COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on the economy with some sectors being particularly badly hit, the claimant count more than doubling and many businesses and individuals relying on temporary Government support.
- 2.2 Thurrock's determination to drive growth that benefits local people and businesses is as strong as ever but the strategic framework needs to be refreshed in light of the pandemic and the impact it has had on the economy.
- 2.3 Backing Thurrock is an important part of that strategic framework – a roadmap for economic recovery, building resilience and a return to growth focussing on people, place and prosperity in Thurrock. The strategy has been developed in two parts – the roadmap and then the associated Action Plan. In September 2020 Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a draft copy of the roadmap for comment before Cabinet were asked to agree a formal consultation. That consultation has now concluded and the results have been used to inform the final version of the roadmap together with the draft Action Plan appended to this report.

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The roadmap presented to Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee included:
  - A snapshot of the local economy;
  - Some immediate actions to help the local economy during the pandemic;
  - A new approach to collaborating with our anchor public, private and voluntary groups to deliver market led growth;
  - Some themes to explore to improve resilience and support a return to growth in the medium and longer term.
- 3.2 The Committee were supportive of the approach and agreed the recommendations in the report. There was particular interest in the proposal to expand collaboration between public, private and voluntary sector anchor organisations with an interest in and commitment to Thurrock. The proposals

in the roadmap reflect an approach being increasingly used elsewhere and involves working together to facilitate growth and generate wealth within the borough that benefits Thurrock in the long term. Building on existing initiatives and developing the collaborative approach is reflected in the priorities for the next 12 months in the draft Action Plan.

3.3 Following consideration by the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee the strategy was taken to Cabinet to seek approval for consultation. Cabinet agreed and the formal consultation began in October. Given the ongoing COVID restrictions a number of different methods were used to share the strategy and gather feedback. The methods used to engage residents, businesses and key stakeholders included:

- Publication on the Council Consultation Portal and notification to subscribers: The consultation was formally launched at the beginning of November and ran until 10 January;
- Publicising the consultation online in various ways including to the more than 2,500 subscribers to the Business Buzz newsletter in Thurrock;
- Presentation of the roadmap and discussion at meetings of private, public and voluntary stakeholders including Thurrock Business Board, Economic Development and Skills Partnership, Joint Strategic Forum, Economically Vulnerable Taskforce;
- One to one discussions with representatives of key businesses, public institutions and voluntary sector partners;

Our online analytics shows that in total 248 viewed at least the first page of the consultation, of those 142 viewed more than one page included 91 who downloaded the document. There were 21 responses to the consultation via that route. In addition a further 14 responses were received via one-to-one discussions and the group discussions engaged around 49 people.

3.4 In general there was support for the approach outlined in the roadmap however a number of points were raised which resulted in some amendments. The main changes made include:

- An updated and expanded snapshot of the economy and overview of the economic impact of COVID;
- Highlighting the role of the Council in promoting and championing investment in Thurrock;
- Increased focus on factors other than COVID that will influence the return to growth in the longer term such as green growth and EU exit;
- More focus on our important key sectors such as the Ports (and related activities) recognising the potential of sectors forecast to grow significantly in the coming years like the creative industries, which continue to be one of the UK's fastest growing sectors and is worth over £115 billion to the UK economy;
- Greater focus on economically vulnerable groups and on working across Council and with partners to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from our economic success;

- Some changes and amendments to the themes to be explored to build resilience and a return to growth in the medium and longer term;
- An update to the next steps to reflect the consultation and development of the draft Action Plan;

The document forms Appendix 1 to this report.

## Action Plan

- 3.5 The second part of the strategy is the Action Plan. The Action Plan is a live document that will flex and adapt as issues and opportunities arise, actions are implemented and new ideas and initiatives are developed. Our focus will be on delivering actions at pace and in partnership with Thurrock anchor organisations in order to maximise resources available and achieve the greatest impact.
- 3.6 A draft Action Plan forms Appendix 2 to this report and summarises our vision for growth in Thurrock: for Thurrock to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic and return to good growth that benefits our residents, businesses and the borough as a whole. We will work collaboratively with our anchor organisations and groups to consider new thinking, new ideas and new approaches to strengthen and grow our economy so that it is sustainable and inclusive, making Thurrock a more resilient place and positively contribute to securing the well-being of everyone in our community.
- 3.7 The draft Action Plan then sets out the three goals from the strategy, together with a number of priorities for the next twelve months:
- Enabling Economic Recovery focuses on understanding the pandemic and supporting businesses and residents to adapt and enable economic recovery to begin. Priorities include provision of advice, guidance and financial support to eligible businesses, helping people upskill and reskill and find work and supporting the reopening of the economy as restrictions ease;
  - Building resilience focuses on building a stronger economy where residents and businesses are helped to focus on their strengths and adapt to take advantage of new opportunities as growth resumes. Priorities include implementation of specific projects focussed on green growth and broadband, supporting the proposal to create a Thames Estuary Freeport and working to help the most vulnerable in the community tackle issues, develop their skills and find work;
  - Return to Growth which focuses on building new ways of working with our key businesses, stakeholders and anchor organisations to grow an economy that benefits everyone in the long term. Priorities include finding new ways of working with our anchor organisations to collaborate and generate wealth that stays in Thurrock, working with priority and

growth sectors and with major developers to secure growth that benefits local businesses and creates jobs.

- 3.8 Greater collaborative working in the implementation of the actions will be important to maximise the positive impact of the plan. The draft Action Plan is subject to further engagement with anchor organisations, key stakeholders and within the Council to agree the lead partner for the implementation of each action, how actions will be delivered, who will need to be involved and the timeframe within which delivery will take place. Conversations with Thurrock Business Board and other partners have already begun. The Council has a vital role at the centre of a 'whole system approach', acting as an agent of change to lead or support delivery of the priorities, coordinating activity among partners and ensuring the integration of actions and alignment of priorities to improve Thurrock's overall economic performance.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The strategic approach to drive growth in Thurrock needs to be refreshed in light of the COVID pandemic and the Council's determination to drive growth that is infrastructure led, community driven and of high quality.
- 4.2 The Backing Thurrock strategy has been prepared to refresh the approach to economic development. It includes some immediate actions that are already underway to support people and businesses in the short term and sets out a collaborative approach to building resilience and support a return to growth in the medium and longer term.

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

- 5.1 Initial discussions took place with Thurrock Business Board and with other key stakeholders to inform development of the draft Backing Thurrock. The draft strategy was presented to Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment prior to a Cabinet decision to approve a formal consultation.
- 5.2 The consultation is now complete. It involved posting the strategy on the Council Consultation Portal and promoting the consultation via email, on the Council website and to more than 2500 contacts on the Council's business newsletter database. Thurrock Business Board, Economic Development and Skills Partnership and representatives from anchor public, private and voluntary sector organisations and from other parts of the Council were also consulted.
- 5.3 Using the information gathered through the consultation process the roadmap has been amended and is now presented to the Committee as a final document. The consultation process has also informed the objectives identified in the draft Action Plan. The Action Plan is subject to further engagement with Thurrock Business Board, anchor institutions and within the

Council. It will be a live document that will flex and adapt as opportunities arise.

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

6.1 The Backing Thurrock roadmap will support the Council's vision and priorities with a particular focus on 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 and appropriate links have been or are being made to other areas of work.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

It is anticipated that the roadmap and draft Action Plan will be managed within existing budgets and using external funding. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Deputy Head of Legal 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 roadmap and draft Action Plan clearly set out an intention to support the whole community including the most vulnerable and hardest to reach. The focus on a collaborative approach to market led growth is to be welcomed as a way to generating and retaining wealth in Thurrock and ensuring that all views are considered to ensure that challenges facing individuals and communities are overcome.

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

The Backing Thurrock Strategy should have a positive effect on other priorities including addressing health and wellbeing, education and skills, community development and civic pride.

**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](http://www.gov.uk)
- [www.obr.uk](http://www.obr.uk)
- [www.bankofengland.co.uk/](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/)

**9. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Backing Thurrock: A roadmap for economic recovery, resilience and a return to growth
- Appendix 2: Draft Backing Thurrock: Action Plan

**Report Author:**

Stephen Taylor

Strategic Lead

Economic Development