

Committee: Scrutiny Committee
Title: Economic Recovery Plan Delivery Plan
Report Author: Linda Howells, Economic Development Officer
lhowells@uttlesford.gov.uk
Date: Thursday, 18 November 2021

Summary

1. The Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) Delivery Plan was approved by Cabinet on 1 July 2021, following a review by the Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2021.
2. The Scrutiny Committee requested that a performance report be brought back the Committee for their November meeting.
3. The original ERP Delivery Plan acknowledged that it would be an evolving document, needing to respond to changes in circumstances nationally and locally. There are number of factors that have impacted on the performance of the ERP Delivery Plan which are detailed in the body of this report.
4. Since March 2020 UDC has paid out £15.1 million of COVID-19 business support grants to local businesses, the majority of these were administered by the Revenues Team.
5. The Economic Development Team are now administering the last two discretionary COVID-19 business support grants. Essex Business Adaption Fund and the Additional Restrictions Grant.
6. Appendix A provides the performance report as at the end of October 2021.

Recommendations

7. That Scrutiny Committee note progress of the ERP Delivery Plan.

Financial Implications

8. None, the delivery plan is consistent with the funds allocated.

Background Papers

9. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Impact

- 10.

Communication/Consultation	JET
Community Safety	N/A

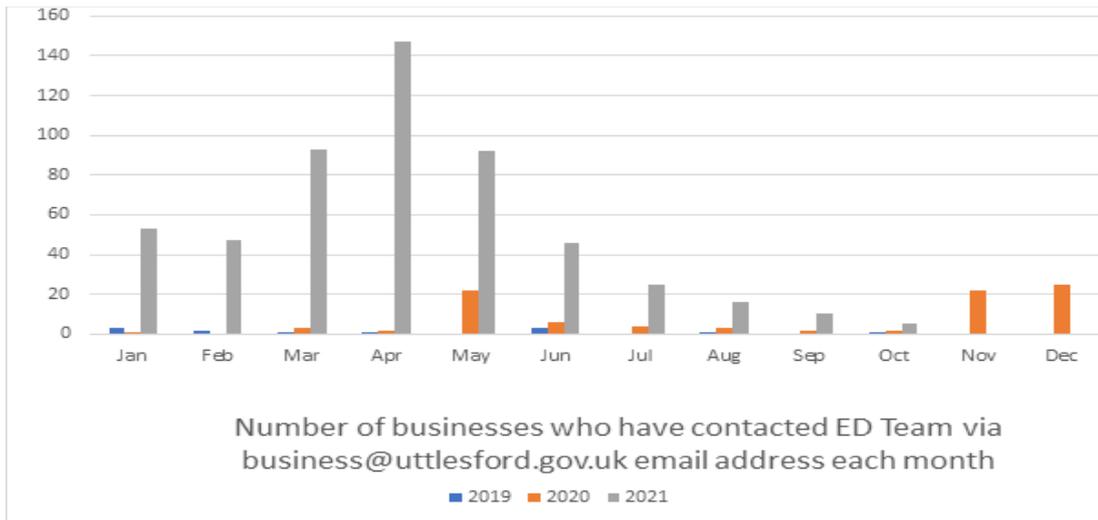
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

11. The ERP delivery plan is made up of a number of objectives with associated actions which are set out in detail in Appendix A, the areas to note are set out in the following paragraphs.
12. The local economy is still in the recovery phase and some business sectors remain severely impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to need financial support. These include:
 - travel, particularly international travel
 - aviation, tourism
 - international and coach travel
 - leisure
 - retail
 - personal care
 - hospitality and their supply chains
 - some elements of the supply chain to hospitality and event management.
13. The majority of businesses are now fully open and trading although some remain severely impacted by the effects of the pandemic. The town centres have few vacant premises although a few national chain stores have left Saffron Walden leaving behind larger commercial units which do not appeal to independents.
14. Business rates collection is slightly below 2019/20 rates suggesting that some businesses remain under pressure. Unemployment data has fallen in the last few months from 2,245 Universal credit claimants in May 2020 to 1,490 in September 2021 but remains higher than in February 2020.
15. We are still learning what the new 'normal' for the local economy will look like, we continue to provide support, advice and signposting to partner agencies as appropriate. The recovery of the local economy is being constantly reviewed and monitored.
16. Business support grants remain important, and their administration and delivery remain a priority. The Essex Business Adaptation Fund (EBAF) was launched in December 2020 for Round 1 which expired at the end of February 2021. In the summer of 2021 Essex County Council launched a second window which expired at the end of July 2021 and then a third window in September 2021. This has been a

very popular grant and has proved helpful to many Uttlesford businesses, but the administration has taken resources away from other actions.

17. Uttlesford received the first EBAF grant from ECC and were one of the only Local Authorities to distribute 100% of the grant, which has enabled us to apply for further funding and we have allocated over £1.1 million and have just received an additional £400,000 to provide further support to our local businesses by the end of December, giving total funding support of £1.5 million in addition to other Government grants. The direct focus by the team on delivering this grant has meant that we have been able to secure high levels of funding and support for our businesses compared to other areas in the County.
18. The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) is now the only Government funded business support grant available. Unfortunately, the officer leading on this grant terminated her secondment and returned to her substantive post. A new planned member of staff started in post in the middle of September and is now leading on the delivery, but this has resulted in a lack of resources for other activities, particularly the delivery of markets, pop-ups shops, the Climate Change agenda or building new business networks.
19. The Revenues and Economic Development teams to date has awarded over £2.8 million in ARG since November 2020 and has a further £650,000 funding to allocate by the end of March 2021.
20. Some activities in the ERP Delivery Plan were originally being led by other agencies and that agency no longer plans to deliver these projects. These may be projects that would benefit local business start-ups or existing businesses, but reduced resources limit the ability to deliver in 2021/22. These projects will be considered for inclusion in the delivery plan for year 2.
21. Some activities have been added to the Delivery Plan – these are highlighted in cream in Appendix A. These include Visit Essex membership, business start-up support and the Essex County Council High Street Summit on 24 November 2021.
22. Projected spend is included in the Performance Report but this may change as circumstances change in Quarters 3 and 4 2021/22.
23. The original version of the ERP Delivery Plan Objective 1.2 included an action to “Support the delivery of the business support grants”. This has now been amended and there are now two actions which are:
 - Administer the Additional Restrictions Grant
 - Administer the Essex Business Adaptations Fund
24. The following graph shows the number of businesses contacting the Economic Development Team via the business@uttlesford.gov.uk email address, excluding grant enquiries. This shows the performance identified in Objective 1.1.



Risk Analysis

25.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The work programmes are not delivered	1 – low risk	2 - businesses may not get the support they need	The delivery programme is constantly being monitored

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.