

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**10 September 2020**

For period 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020

**COUNCILLOR G MIDDLETON – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

#### Accelerated towns fund

As councillors are aware Kings Lynn has been allocated £750k in accelerated town fund cash. This is not part of the £25m towns fund deal but is an extra for town fund areas. The money is to be bid for to deliver shovel ready projects that can be delivered over the course of the next few months. Just under 600k has been bid for to fund a school of nursing in partnership with the college and the QEH. The further 150k has been bid for to be used in improving open space and street scene in Kings Lynns town centre. We hope for a timely response from the government into whether our bid has been successful.

#### Current grant figures

Business grants . 3288 totalling £38,115,000

Discretion grants . 97 totalling £787,500

#### West Norfolk Consumers Keen To Shop Local As Businesses Feel Impact of Covid-19

West Norfolk consumers are keen to support local businesses as shops and services in the district feel the impact of Covid-19.

That's one of the findings from the Invest West Norfolk consultation which took place earlier this summer to understand consumer and business confidence in light of Covid-19.

In the consumer survey - which was carried out on behalf of the borough council and which saw over 150 people give their views - 96 per cent of respondents stated that it is important for them to use local businesses in west Norfolk. Of those, 60 per cent said it was extremely important.

However, whilst there is an appetite for using independent businesses, online shopping is becoming increasingly important for consumers in the area. 95 per cent of those taking part in the consultation stated that they do

some form of shopping online – and overall, almost 20 per cent of people said they intend to do more online shopping in future.

The survey also revealed that around half of the participants intend to eat or drink out in the next three months, and people felt that protective measures in line with government guidelines would make it easier to return to pubs and restaurants.

The study also found that there has been a marked decrease in west Norfolk consumers shopping for pleasure with 54 per cent stating they are doing less non-essential shopping. But, over half - 55 per cent - stated that they were confident about returning to the shops as lockdown eases.

Councillor Graham Middleton, Cabinet Member for Business Development said: *“We know that the last few months have been difficult for everyone and through this consultation, we wanted to understand how consumers feel about accessing services as lockdown eases.*

*“It is really encouraging to learn that so many people are keen to use local businesses here in west Norfolk, and consumer support is so important, now more than ever. We will shortly be launching a campaign which will showcase the many great local businesses in west Norfolk so this feedback is pertinent and timely.*

*“We have already implemented a number of measures to make it easier for consumers to use businesses in west Norfolk. This feedback will help us to shape our support further so that people feel confident and safe to access the many brilliant local shops and services we have here.”*

As well as the consumer survey, the consultation also sought feedback from businesses across the district with 114 giving their views.

The Invest West Norfolk business survey revealed that there has been a clear impact from Covid-19 with 88 per cent of respondents stating that the coronavirus has impacted on their business over the last three months. Of those, 63 per cent declared that the impact has been significant.

There is a great deal of uncertainty amongst businesses in the future, including around employing staff and long-term confidence. Businesses feel that attracting and retaining customers and financial concerns are the biggest challenges they face in the next 3-6 months.

And, the areas where businesses feel they need help most is around financial support and marketing to bring in footfall and custom. In particular, a number of businesses said that they need training and assistance to adapt their services online in the next six months.

The business survey also revealed low levels of apprenticeship take-up. Businesses are being incentivised to take on apprentices – more information can be found here: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/adult-learning/apprenticeships/employers>

In spite of the difficult circumstances, 39 per cent of businesses participating said that they are confident for their prospects in the next 6-12 months.

Councillor Graham Middleton commented: *“The feedback from businesses underlines what we already knew – Covid-19 has had an impact on so many companies and organisations in west Norfolk.*

*“I have been so impressed by the efforts of local businesses who have worked hard to adapt and develop over the last few months, bringing in Covid-19 safety measures to continue to operate.*

*“We understand their concerns and we are keen to support, where we can. I am pleased to confirm that we have recently launched two new grants schemes to help tourism, leisure, cultural and hospitality businesses to extend their season.*

*“The insight from this consultation will help us as we develop our actions and investment as part of our recovery and renewal from Covid-19.”*

The consultation also asked respondents – including parish councils – to prioritise interventions that they would like to see with hand sanitiser stations in high streets/neighbourhood shopping areas and Covid safe posters and signage emerging as the top priorities. The hand sanitiser stations are set to be installed shortly.

The feedback will be used to guide the development of west Norfolk’s ‘Reopening the High Street plan’ after the borough council received European Union Funding to support the safe reopening of the high street. It will also help to inform how tourism funding is invested in the area. And, the council is working on a public realm strategy which will bring improvements to the appearance of streets and buildings.

The findings come as the borough council announces new funding for tourism, leisure, cultural and hospitality businesses in west Norfolk which will help them to trade safely and extend their normal operating season. There are two schemes available, the tourism adaptation business fund and the autumn and winter adaptation business fund. Each have a £45K funding pot and eligible businesses can apply for a maximum of £3k from each fund.

Further to this and other recent consultation, King’s Lynn town centre businesses are being invited to take part in a virtual business workshop from 5.30pm – 7pm on Wednesday, 9 September. Businesses will be asked to share their ideas on topics such as making use of empty units, and enhancing the town centre offer.

The feedback will help to shape the Town Investment Plan and any King’s Lynn town centre businesses wanting to join the workshop can register their interest via [michelle@engaging-people.co.uk](mailto:michelle@engaging-people.co.uk)

<b>Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled</b>
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BID R&D Panel Portfolio session with exec Director Cabinet Portfolio session with various officers
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