

<b>Item No.</b> 19.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 14 September 2021	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Response to the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission: Local Economy: Revitalising Southwark's High Streets and Town Centres	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Jason Ochere, Jobs, Business and Town Centres	

## **FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR JASON OCHERE, CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, BUSINESS AND TOWN CENTRES**

I would like to thank the education and local economy scrutiny commission for their hard work during the last municipal year, in ensuring our efforts to revitalise Southwark's high streets and town centres are rooted in good evidence.

As we know, our high streets and town centres have been hugely impacted by the pandemic, with less footfall resulting in lower sales and activity. Our response to boost our local economy requires an innovative approach, which also acknowledges the differences between the high streets and town centres within our borough.

The commission highlights a number of key recommendations to assist Southwark's high streets and town centres. I am committed to building on these key initiatives that have been highlighted within the report including: exploring community ownership structures; finding creative new uses for the high street; and supporting young people into high quality apprenticeships to strengthen our local economy.

All of the recommendations in this report will aid our response to economic renewal and I look forward to working with the commission to deliver these priorities for the people and businesses in Southwark.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the following response to recommendations set out in the Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission (June 2021) is considered by Cabinet.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. This report responds to the Commission's investigation into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses and the future of our high streets and town centres.
3. The report by the Scrutiny Commission identified a set of recommendations to assist in the delivery of the Council's aim of revitalising high streets and town centres as part of the council's Economic Renewal Plan. These recommendations are welcomed and this report provides a response to each of these.
4. High streets and town centres have seen significant reduction in footfall for a number of years with an increased trend towards online shopping, which has accelerated due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.
5. The Covid-19 crisis has threatened to exacerbate these challenges and the council has therefore made their protection a priority. It is vital that we ensure our town centres and high streets remain vibrant, thriving, accessible spaces, safe for all, which contribute to the prosperity and cohesion of our local communities.
6. Town Centres and High Streets are one of the four central themes of Southwark's Economic Renewal Plan, through which we have outlined the actions we are taking in response to the economic challenges brought by the pandemic.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

7. **Recommendation 1: The Commission recommends the Council maps Southwark's various local economies as part of the implementation of its economic renewal plan.**
8. A framework is now in place to guide our cross-council approach to the revitalisation our high streets and town centres, including a set of overarching themes, which encapsulate the council's vision for its town centres together with objectives, policies and proposals to guide future delivery, development and change. It will help to ensure a more comprehensive and consistent approach across the borough, whilst also acknowledging that each town centre has a unique identity and may require a more targeted neighbourhood level approach in particular areas.
9. Aligned to our "Southwark Stands Together" programme, this approach will highlight the diversity of each town centre and the local communities within them, and ensure that we celebrate and enhance the distinctive identity of each locality within our borough.
10. Through this strategic approach the council will deliver its Borough Plan commitment to *"Help Southwark's high streets to be thriving and vibrant, seeking to achieve full occupancy and encourage residents to shop local"*.

11. This approach will enable us to reimagine these spaces so that they are fit for the future, balancing retail, business, development and inclusive economic growth, with health and wellbeing, sustainable transport, culture and leisure. The approach will be structured around five key themes and will align with all other council plans and strategies with relevance to town centres, high streets and neighbourhoods, and ensure that vital lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic help to shape future approaches.
12. The five themes guiding our approach to Town Centres and High Streets are:
  - Sustainable, accessible places – A 15-minute borough
  - An inclusive, greener local economy
  - Vibrant, resilient and connected high streets
  - The heart of our communities
  - Healthy and safe high streets.
13. To ensure we have a consistent, cross council approach to our town centres and high streets, we have worked with officers across the council including those from Public Health, Planning, Regeneration, Communities, and Culture. In addition, governance arrangements have been put in place reporting to the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Business and Town Centres.
14. Chaired by the Director for Response & Renewal, a cross council Senior Officer Group meets on a monthly basis to oversee the development and implementation of an activity log and set of action plans for the four priority town centres and high streets, identified as Camberwell, East Dulwich, Peckham and Walworth Road.
15. In addition, we are working with nominated town centre lead officers to develop action plans for each of the priority town centre areas. These will include current challenges, opportunities and resourcing, while activity logs track all current activity. It is intended that these action plans will be developed in partnership with ward members and key local stakeholders through established Task Forces.
16. In order to successfully establish task forces in the four priority areas, we have been developing a template engagement plan. This will ensure consistency in our approach to the work in each town centre, set out clear steps for establishing taskforces with the aim of delivering task and finish groups, and ensure successful engagement with key stakeholders internally and externally.
17. Officers in the Regeneration team have developed baselines to capture current activity and investment in each of the priority areas in order to gain a clear picture of the current state of the area. This will help to illustrate the starting point when developing the action plans for each of the areas.

18. In addition, the council has signed up to the GLA's High Street Data Service and Partnership. A hub that brings together important information about the economic and social health of High Streets and Town Centres. We will have access to new, regularly updated data showing footfall and spend, which will inform the development of the town centre action plans.
19. As the overarching framework for this work, the Economic Renewal Plan (ERP) is updated and monitored each quarter, with input sought from officers across the council to ensure that progress is tracked against the commitments set out in the plan.
20. **Recommendation 2: The Commission recommends that the Council actively explores supporting new community ownership structures. To practically support this, the Commission recommends the Council reviews its existing asset portfolio with a focus on identifying which assets present the strongest case for going into community ownership.**
21. The council is currently reviewing its approach to premises for the Voluntary and Community sector and plans to report its recommendations to Cabinet this autumn. This is a complex proposition for both communities and the priorities the council seeks to support through the use of its assets.
22. Nevertheless, we will be looking carefully at the options, and how they support and interact with the high streets workstream. We will look also to the overarching principles of the council's newly adopted Corporate Asset Management Plan, agreed by Cabinet in January, in formulating the strategy.
23. **Recommendation 3: The Commission recommends that the Council explore early involvement with the GLA's nascent Landlords' Charter as a means of getting private developers and landowners to support more community-led activity.**
24. The development of the GLA Landlord Charter will be monitored and explored by the Director of Planning and Growth, as a means of stimulating community led activity amongst private developers and landowners. A separate workstream is underway to look at the future strategy for voluntary and community sector use of council owned buildings. Any new opportunities or complimentary activities should also be considered and made known in the context of this work.
25. Southwark Council recognises regeneration is about improving the lives of people in the borough, including bringing about improvements to the buildings and environment around us. It is important that everyone has a voice and is able to influence change and our approach to the way we invest in the borough. The Development Consultation Charter is our promise to the community to deliver 'Regeneration that works for all'.

26. This way of working together requires providing the community with:
- Clear guidelines for consultation and a better understanding of the planning process
  - More timely and accessible information online
  - Accessible, online information on how the engagement and feedback has shaped discussions and proposals
27. This will help developers to present a proposal influenced by working closely with the community. We can then make informed, open decisions on development.
28. **Recommendation 4: The Commission recommends the Council take a more active role in finding creative new uses for the high street, with an explicit focus on place making that creates community wellbeing spaces and a greater health focus for high streets and town centres.**
29. The High Street Recovery Fund has launched with a specific theme, requesting project ideas that support “Healthy and Safe High Streets”. Projects for this theme should be activities that support the safe reopening of high streets, and make them safe and welcoming places to visit. As well as interventions in mobility, connectivity of high streets, social interaction and cohesion, reduction of health inequalities and promotion of access to health-promoting goods and services.
30. We are working closely with the public health team to deliver the HSRF. We will also refer to public health colleagues for input as part of the evaluation of the HSRF, relying on their expertise to ensure we award projects that compliment and add value to the work public health colleagues are currently delivering and set out to achieve clear objectives that link with safe and healthy high streets. We will continue to ensure there is a joined up approach and make links with public health work and initiatives where appropriate.
31. We are also working to establish taskforces for each of the priority town centre areas that will support us in identifying new opportunities to support the vitality of our high streets. The taskforces will allow us to do this with the input from key stakeholders including residents and business owners, as well as relevant officers and members.
32. **Recommendation 5: The Commission recommends that the Council ensures that the funding from Arts Council England has been used effectively and restarts work on a “Cultural Compact”, creating a strategic partnership between the borough’s cultural and creative industries, education providers and the health sector to drive forward the Council’s recovery plans.**
33. In 2019, £20,000 funding was secured from Arts Council England to support the research, development and launch of a Southwark Cultural

Compact via a three stage process:

Stage 1 - Research and engagement

Stage 2 - Development of the Compact model

Stage 3 - Support the strategic direction of the Compact

34. This was as part of a national programme that was already underway in towns and cities around the country; London had not previously been within the scope of Arts Council's Compact project, so Southwark's research into the potential of a borough Cultural Compact has always been at a later stage of development than other nationwide examples.
35. Cultural partnership specialists The Revels Office were appointed via an open process and had begun the Stage 1 research and development activity at the point that work on this project was paused due to the pandemic. A Cultural Compact Conference had been due to take place at Mountview Academy on 22 April 2020, with capacity for 100 delegates, at which initial options for the Compact model would have been tested as Stage 2.
36. Before recommencing activity on the Compact in 2021, it was thought to be appropriate to re-engage with the cultural and business sectors locally to ascertain their views about the continuing relevance of developing the Compact in the light of COVID and as we progress plans for borough-wide recovery and renewal. This consultation activity was conducted during May-June 2021 by The Revels and sought to understand how the Council could best support the borough's cultural recovery.
37. However, as engagement with the survey was not fully representative of the cultural sector and did not gain a response from the business sector (despite their previous participation in the Compact research), officers are now seeking to elicit more diverse perspectives on the relevance of a Compact framework for culture in the borough, aligned either with the implementation of Southwark's Cultural Recovery Plan or, in the longer term, with the development of a new Southwark Cultural Strategy for 2023 onwards.
38. **Recommendation 6: The Commission notes the immense impact that measures related to the pandemic are having on young people and supports the Council's commitment to maximising apprenticeship opportunities and using initiatives like the Southwark Pioneers Fund to support young entrepreneurs.**
39. Work continues to supporting our young people into quality apprenticeship opportunities and we will continue to integrate our apprenticeship programme into the broader Youth New Deal offer. For the refreshed Southwark Pioneers Fund (SPF) we plan to have specific 'start-up' enterprise support, which will be able to support young entrepreneurs who are seeking to start, or have recently started an enterprise that can add social value to the local economy. Grants will be made available to eligible

enterprises in order to support their growth journey, with priority for those who are committed to taking on young local interns and providing suitable training / development / match funding etc. We expect the SPF to launch in March 2022.

40. The council has also launched a Young People's Opportunities campaign; the regular email bulletin for which is reaching over 1,000 subscribers with news of training and employment opportunities.
41. **Recommendation 7: The Commission recommends that the Council also explores:**
  - **Creating incubator hubs on high streets to showcase and support new and diverse economic uses such as social enterprises**
  - **Making targeted funds available to support high streets in lieu of funds such as the High Street Challenge. These funds should be explicitly focused on helping businesses reconfigure and test new innovations in response to shifting trends in high streets and town centres.**
42. The council's emerging Policy P30 obligates developers to set aside 10% of upcoming workspace as affordable for an overall lease of 30 years. Our section 106 negotiations also put boundaries on usage on this space to encourage and obligate such usage as incubator and accelerator space for micro businesses, and those with green and social aims.
43. The relaunched Southwark Pioneers Fund will take into account the emerging and fundamental changes to the local economy that have been experienced in recent years (e.g. COVID-19), and reflect the priorities of the council, which includes support for social and community enterprises and start-ups and residents exploring routes to self-employment. Grants will support growth in a variety of ways, including provision of affordable workspace, i.e. via a subsidised rent scheme or equivalent in high street and town centre locations where existing subsidised space may become increasingly scarce.
44. The High Street Recovery Fund (HSRF), which launched 15 June 2021, is part of our approach to supporting town centre recovery. This has been based upon the previous High Street Challenge programme, which generated numerous ideas for revitalising our town centres and high streets. The application window was open for 6 weeks and closed on the 28th July 2021. Work is underway on next steps, including agreeing any successful proposals.
45. Applicants were required to demonstrate how their project proposal met one or more of the following themes:

- *Healthy and safe high streets* - This theme opens up the opportunity to support projects that make our high streets safe and welcoming places to visit. This theme welcomes projects that can intervene in mobility, connectivity of high streets, social interaction and cohesion, reduction of health inequalities and promote access to health-promoting goods and services
  - *Cultural / community events* – This theme welcomes culturally themed projects that will celebrate and acknowledge diversity and the unique identity and heritage of our town centres, helping to foster a sense of social cohesion and promoting town centres as the heart of our diverse communities.
  - *Vibrant, resilient and connected high streets* - This theme will welcome applications that support the improvement of digital connectivity in our town centres, encouraging the development and delivery of connected services for people and businesses.
  - *An inclusive, greener local economy* – This theme will welcome projects that will support inclusive, greener economic growth in our Town Centres and High Streets, in particular within key local business sectors, including retail, hospitality, tech, biomedical, health, construction, green and creative industries, and projects that will enhance opportunities for carbon reduction.
  - *Sustainable, accessible places* – This theme aligns to the council’s vision for a 15-minute borough and welcomes projects that aim to make localities more accessible, better connected and sustainable, for instance promoting sustainable modes of transport, reducing pollution and carbon emissions.
  - *Southwark Stands Together* – applicants will be required to demonstrate how their project will incorporate the ambitions of Southwark Stands Together; increasing diversity, reducing inequalities and tackling racism.
46. The fund encourages partnership working that brings together diverse skills and expertise across our town centres and high streets. Applicants were asked to demonstrate that their approach is supported by local businesses in the town centre or high street that is expected to benefit from the activity. Projects from the HSRF are expected to begin delivery in October 2021.

## **Policy implications**

### Economic Renewal Plan

47. The Economic Renewal Plan sets out our priorities for renewing our local economy.
48. The plan is designed to capture all cross-council activities aimed at



reducing and mitigating the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to support future inclusive economic growth in the face of these new economic challenges. It aligns with the council's wider recovery and renewal planning, links into our Southwark Stands Together commitments, and takes into account the inevitable economic impact of the pandemic on the council itself.

#### Town Centre and High Streets themes

49. As part of a cross-council approach to revitalising our high streets and town centres, a set of overarching themes were developed, encapsulating the council's vision for its town centres together with objectives, policies and proposals to guide future delivery, development and change. They will help to deliver a comprehensive and consistent approach across the borough.

#### Southwark Stands Together

50. The town centres work has been designed to acknowledge that each town centre has a unique identity and diverse communities within it, and may require a more targeted and distinct neighbourhood level approach. It supports inclusive growth in the face of new economic challenges and aligns with our Southwark Stands Together commitments.

#### Economic Wellbeing Strategy

51. In December 2016, Cabinet approved a refresh of the council's Economic Wellbeing Strategy 2017 to 2022, which reinforced our commitment to supporting local people into employment and apprenticeships, improving skills through access to work related training, and promoting financial wellbeing and independence.
52. The refresh outlined our strategy to build a strong local economy for all, working in partnership with residents, businesses and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
53. The strategy promotes and encourages economic wellbeing by seeking to make Southwark a place where businesses thrive and prosper, a place with thriving town centres, as well as dynamic digital centres that are great to visit and can be enjoyed by everyone.
54. The strategy will be reviewed and updated as part of the council and borough wide approach to recovery and renewal.

#### **Resource implications**

55. There are no immediate resource implications identified as part of this report.

## Consultation

56. The cross-council approach to town centres and high streets ensures a coordinated and joined up effort. To date, we have worked with officers across various teams, and will continue to do so to ensure we are working together to coordinate and manage the ongoing delivery of council priorities.
57. In addition, we are in the process of initiating town centre task forces as part of our engagement with ward councilors, local businesses, residents and other key stakeholders, as well as relevant officers and members with a view to identify key opportunities and challenges in each of the priority town centres and develop action plans for implementation.
58. This engagement is an ongoing effort and will continue as we move forward with the delivery of the town centres and high streets work.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

### Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

59. This report is requesting cabinet to consider the recommendations set out in the Report of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission (June 2021).
60. The strategic director of finance and governance notes that there are no new immediate financial implications arising from this report.
61. Staffing and any other costs connected with this report to be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<b>Link:</b> <a href="#">High Street and Town Centres – Themes</a>	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	Laura Ahern
<b>Link:</b> <a href="#">Economic Renewal Plan</a>	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	Patrick Doherty
<b>Link:</b> <a href="#">Economic Wellbeing Strategy</a>	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	Laura Ahern

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Jason Ochere, Jobs, Business and Town Centres	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Stephen Gaskell, Director of Strategy and Economy	
<b>Report Author</b>	Laura Ahern, Senior Strategy Officer	
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<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	N/a
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
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