

# ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 FEBRUARY 2021

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## STATEMENT ON BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

On 16 February 2021, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed Business Support Programme and agreed to support the recommendations to the Leader of the Council (Executive Councillor for Resources and Communications).

The Committee congratulated the officers who had prepared the report and made these additional comments in support of the scheme:-

- Owing to its prudent financial management, the County Council was in a position to provide financial assistance to assist businesses
- Businesses need access to finance for survival and to sustain their forward plans, which was not often available from banks.
- The programme would both help create and protect jobs.
- This rapid roll out of type of scheme, with the first payments being made as early as mid-March, was desirable because of the difficulty faced by businesses and it is a good example of how devolution would benefit local communities.

With regard to the risks of a rapid roll-out, these needed to be balanced against the need of local businesses, many of whom had limited cash reserves. The Committee recognised that there needed to be a greater appetite to risk than in other programmes, because the risk of business failure to the local economy was great. The Council would be entering into a pilot scheme with the National Fraud Initiative which would enable information to be shared, in particular from district councils who had been administering the national scheme on behalf of the Government.

Compiling evidence in support of an application, such as three quotes, would be difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the process would need to recognise this potential difficulty. It was confirmed that businesses, who had been in existence since 20 December 2020 to qualify for consideration, would be asked to provide other evidence such as bank statements, invoices, receipts, cancelled orders, bookings etc.

Co-ordination with business representative organisations and with district councils would be useful, especially to get the message out far and wide amongst the business community.

Where businesses agreed to the sharing of information, it could be passed to local Councillors on both local grant awards and refusals. Local councillors also offered to provide advice about some of the businesses and the applicants if that would help officers to take decisions.