

Covid-19 Business Support Summary

1. Overview

Led by Nigel Brinn, Corporate Director (Economy & Environment), the Business & Economic Recovery Cell is made up of officers from the Council's Finance, Income & Awards, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Commercial Services, Communications and Economic Development Services. Its primary purpose has been to co-ordinate the Council's Covid-19 response in relation to business support through financial assistance, communications, advice, guidance and planning for future economic recovery. An action plan for the Cell is attached in Appendix 1.

2. Business Support

i. Communications

- Ongoing co-ordination of communications on Covid-19 business and economy information and issues.
- Council Covid-19 business support webpage and related service information:
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/coronavirus/helpforbusinesses>
- Issuing of regular social media, communications, videos and press adverts on key information and updates and dissemination of information through business and other networks.

ii. Advice

- A dedicated Covid-19 helpline for Powys businesses was established at an early stage and has received over 2000 calls to support businesses and residents find financial support.
- Weekly meetings taking place with Business Wales, Welsh Government and Department of Work & Pensions to help co-ordinate support and advice to businesses across Powys.
- Relevant services continue to field inquiries and calls from businesses on a range of Covid-19 related issues and are providing wider support and guidance daily. Examples include:
- Requests for 'holiday accommodation' businesses to be permitted to re-open are being considered and issued in line with the business closure regulations to accommodate persons who are 'homeless, vulnerable or key workers'.
- Support and advice has been provided to local takeaway and food businesses in relation to operation and social distancing requirements and improvements have been noted on the back of this advice.
- Approximately 1900 Commercial Business Operators within Powys, have received advice via on the Legionella risks in vacant properties where water can stagnate within water systems.
- Advice to businesses on scams targeted at legitimate businesses-leaflets/associated with COVID.
- Dissemination of information and advice to the tourism sector via tourism networks and local destination partnerships.

a. Business Grants

- The Council has administered just under £50m of grant assistance to around 4,225 businesses and organisations. This is the second highest number of payments made by a council in Wales.
- The funding package includes £10,000 grants to all businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, and grants of £25,000 to businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000.

b. Business Rate Relief Scheme

- Revised business rate bills have been issued to 1000 businesses and organisations qualifying under the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief and Small Business Rates Relief schemes for a total of £10m relief being awarded.
- All retail, leisure, and hospitality businesses in Powys with a rateable value of less than £500,000 are receiving a year-long business rates holiday.

c. Support for Charities

- Around 300 charities and not for profit organisations across Powys are receiving a grant of £10,000 administered by the Council. This is part of a £26m Welsh Government support package which is an extension to the Covid-19 business grants scheme to provide some small charities within retail, leisure, and hospitality with financial support.
- The Council is processing the grants to a wide range of organisations including charity shops, sports clubs, and community centres, which up until now have not qualified for financial support.
- Eligible organisations must be already in receipt of discretionary rate relief, charities relief or community amateur sports club relief and have a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

d. Fraud and Error Risk

- Given the high potential of risk of fraud and error occurring, all grant award payments are verified before payments and are being analysed post payment.

iii. Commercial Services

- Implementation of procurement policy note advice and guidance regarding Council contracts and suppliers.
- Acceleration of payments to suppliers and contractors (now 10 Days or less)
- Discussions with key suppliers/contractors on Covid-19 issues and advice to supplier at risk of financial hardship.
- Active sourcing and procurement of PPE and pro-active liaison with Powys companies who may be able to support its manufacture.
- Preparation of Covid-19 Procurement Strategy for Recovery

3. Opening-Up Phase

- Following the announcement by Welsh Government on 19th June regarding the opening up of non-essential retail, the Council has prepared a range of advice for businesses which is available on the Council website: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/9273/Advice-for-businesses-on-latest-changes>.
- Officers are providing direct advice and support to businesses in response to inquiries received and a guidance leaflet providing health and safety advice has been emailed to retail premises that are currently permitted to re-open.
- The Council has secured funding from Welsh Government under their Local Sustainable Transport Covid-19 Response Fund 2020-21 to provide temporary measures in our main towns that will assist in facilitating social distancing in those high streets. Over the coming weeks and months engagement will take place with Local Members and Town/Community Councils during the development and implementation of plans.

4. Recovery Phase

- The longer-term recovery and regeneration of the local economy and communities will require a collaborative approach with the Council working in partnership with stakeholders at a local, regional and national level.
- The Council continues to work closely with Welsh Government, Business Wales and other stakeholders to implement Covid-19 support measures for businesses and local communities.
- A Mid Wales Town Centre Action Group has been set up by Welsh Government with Powys and Ceredigion County Councils to provide a strategic approach to town centre recovery.
- A Powys wide 'support local' marketing campaign has been launched to support local businesses and purchasing (#supportlocalpowys).
- At a regional level, the Council is also working collaboratively on the implementation of the recently adopted Mid Wales Strategic Economic Plan and proposals for the Mid Wales Growth Deal, which will help support economic recovery and new investment into Powys.
- The Council has been working closely with Visit Wales and the tourism sector during the pandemic to provide advice and support to businesses. Detailed industry guidance on the opening-up of the visitor economy is being issued by Welsh Government.
- A tourism communications plan is being developed by the Council to communicate both immediate messages and advice to businesses and communities in respect of reopening and to promote Powys to visitors when that decision is taken by Welsh Government.
- To help co-ordinate the economic aspects of the recovery phase, the Council has established a Thriving & Sustainable Economy sub-group to oversee strategy and actions to support business and economic recovery. An Economic Recovery Framework and Action Plan is currently being developed as part of this work.

Appendix 1

Business & Economic Recovery Cell

Covid-19 Action Plan

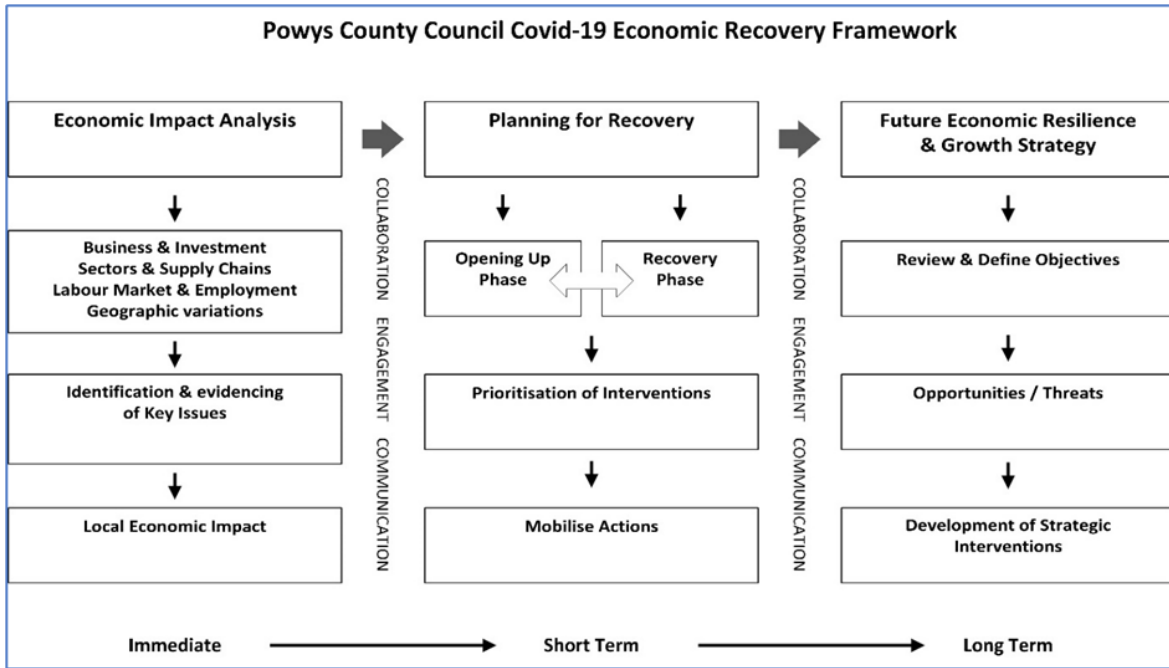
Overview

The Covid-19 pandemic is causing unprecedented disruption to the economy. The initial economic shock is expected to lead to a period of recession, a contraction of the economy and increased unemployment, depending on how quickly the pandemic can be managed and restrictions lifted. The timing and pace of economic recovery is highly uncertain. While the UK economy is expected to start to recover as restrictions are lifted, there is considerable uncertainty about the long-term impact.

Strong leadership and co-ordinated action to support Powys businesses will also be critical to address the impacts of Covid-19. The Council and other stakeholders face the urgent task of understanding the evolving implications of Covid-19 for the county and how to respond most effectively. This requires an understanding of the local dimensions of the economic shock, followed by a focused action plan to support the short-term, phased opening-up of the economy and subsequent recovery. A longer-term strategy is also required to guide future economic resilience and growth.

The following integrated framework is proposed:

- **Economic Impact Analysis:** assessment of the impacts of Covid-19 across key components of the local economy to shape our local and regional response.
- **Planning for Recovery:** identify and prioritise key interventions to address these impacts and support businesses in the short term.
- **Economic Resilience & Growth Strategy:** long term strategy to build future resilience and growth to take account of the impact of the pandemic.



1. Economic Impact Analysis

The impacts of the pandemic are still being realised and will only manifest over time. These will vary across different businesses, sectors of the economy and geographically. The real time nature of the crisis and potential scale of the impact means that currently there is limited data to work with and much is still unknown.

Understanding the impacts and support required by Powys businesses and its rural economy will be vital to developing and influencing local, regional and national actions to support economic recovery and subsequent growth. Key to this is effective business and stakeholder engagement which will play a valuable role in helping to inform and support recovery and build resilience in the local economy.

2. Planning for Recovery

An overlapping, phased approach is emerging to the recovery stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. This consists of an 'opening up' stage as businesses return to work and recommence their operations as restrictions are progressively lifted. This will take place over an extended period depending on the nature of businesses and sectors.

Secondly, an 'economic recovery' stage delivering existing and additional actions to support businesses and the local economy over the short and medium term.

3. Future Economic Resilience & Growth Strategy

The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have a long-term impact on the Powys economy. Flexibility in approach and capitalising on new opportunities will be fundamental to supporting long term economic recovery and future growth.

A review and updating of current strategies and actions will be required to respond to the needs of businesses and help build resilience into the Powys economy. The pandemic has identified weaknesses in current practices, new ways of working and potential lessons learnt that provide an opportunity to 'build back better' and support a smarter, more robust, and sustainable economy going forward.

Covid-19 Economic Resilience Framework – Draft Action Plan

Ref	Action	Lead
1.	Economic Impact Analysis	
1.1	Powys County Council Covid-19 business survey – concise survey to be promoted through website, comms and networks to provide a more in-depth picture and understanding of the key issues and challenges facing Powys businesses and the local economy.	Econ Dev/ Comms
1.2	Central point of intelligence gathering on the impact of Covid-19 through direct engagement and discussions with businesses, networks and sector groups	Business Intelligence
1.3	Input and engagement in national, regional and sector specific recovery work / surveys / analysis of data.	All
1.4	Collation of intelligence/evidence through collaboration with key stakeholders/networks eg. Welsh Government, Business Wales, Visit Wales, WLGA, other LAs	Econ Dev
1.5	Research / data analysis of Powys businesses, sectors, employment change, rural economy, market intelligence, current & future trends, best practice etc.	Business Intelligence
1.6	Impact assessment on Council suppliers and contractors. Intelligence to better understand Powys supply chains / suppliers	Commercial Services
1.7	Capturing positive delivery models, good practice and lessons learnt from PCC/Powys business support and wider response to date	All
1.8	Collaborative work with Visit Wales, Destination Partnerships and other stakeholders on intelligence and support for tourism / events / hospitality sector	Econ Dev
2.	Planning for Recovery	
a.	Opening-Up Phase	
2.1	Collaborative work with key stakeholders to influence and co-design ‘opening up’ phase appropriate to needs of Powys	Cabinet / All
2.2	Continuation of existing advice and financial support to Powys businesses / third sector and administration of new support schemes where applicable	Income & Awards / Econ Dev
2.3	Guidance, advice, and signposting regarding restarting of operations, safety at work, social distancing etc to ensure that businesses have access to the most up to date information and support	Env Health /Trading Standards
2.4	Ongoing co-ordination of contact tracing to help minimise spread of Covid-19 – Test, Trace, Protect	Env Health

2.5	Communications to support 'opening up' phase	Comms
2.6	Advice and assessment of applications for key worker accommodation	Env Health /Trading Standards
2.7	Preparing town centres and public spaces for reopening and social distancing	HTR
b.	Recovery Phase	
2.8	Collaborative work with UK and Welsh Govt and other key stakeholders to influence and co-design recovery phase and crucial interventions appropriate to meet the needs of the Powys and Mid Wales economy and communities	All
2.9	Continued dissemination and signposting of information and support for businesses / third sector through communications, networks and service delivery, inquiries etc	All
2.10	Marketing & promotion of tourism, hospitality sector and the visitor economy - at the appropriate time as restrictions are lifted	Econ Dev/Comms
2.11	PCC Procurement Recovery Strategy - restarting services, capital projects and procuring new contracts which Powys business can tender for and deliver, measures to support small businesses apply for contracts, market/supply chain intelligence.	Commercial Services
2.12	#Support Local Powys marketing campaign	Econ Dev / Comms
2.13	Employability Programmes – advice and support to help with redundancies and to support people back into work through Communities for Work Plus and collaborative work with Dept of Work & Pensions, Welsh Government, Job Centre and Careers Wales to provide a joined-up approach to support services	Econ Dev
2.14	Delivery of existing External Funding Projects / Programmes – delivery of eg. Arwain, Tri town centre regeneration, tourism etc with refocus on recovery	Econ Dev / All
2.15	Resourcing of Council business support focused services where these have been reduced due to Covid-19 response eg. planning, building control, environmental health, commercial services, economic development, trading standards	All
2.16	Library Service – explore potential to provide business support opportunities	Libraries
2.17	Development of Powys Digital Local Purchasing Platform	Transformation/Econ Dev
2.18	New business start-up signposting and support	Econ Dev/Income & Awards
3.	Economic Resilience & Growth Strategy	

3.1	Mid Wales Strategic Economic Plan – implementation of strategy to take account of the impact of the pandemic with Welsh Government & other key stakeholders	Econ Dev
3.2	Mid Wales Growth Deal - development of strategic interventions to support private sector investment to support long term Covid-19 recovery and economic growth	Econ Dev
3.3	Mid Wales Collaboration/Programme Office – development and support of regional capacity building and collaborative working to support the regional economy	Econ Dev
3.4	New External Funding Opportunities - prioritising and targeting external funding bids to bring additional funding and investment into the Powys economy. Shaping new funding programmes and opportunities to try and ensure maximum benefit to the Powys economy and businesses	All
3.5	Interventions to support digital connectivity & exploitation of technology by businesses and communities eg. PCC website, new WG local broadband grant scheme	Econ Dev / ICT
3.6	Collaborative work to deliver key infrastructure investments to support growth and resilience of Powys economy	All
3.7	Implementation of interventions to support resilience and growth of key sectors eg. tourism & events, agriculture, manufacturing, foundation economy	All
3.8	Mid Wales Learning & Skills Partnership – tailored regional approach to identifying and addressing skills and recruitment gaps.	Edn
3.9	Interventions to support future resilience of supply chains	Comm Services
3.10	Development of post Covid-19 Powys CC Economic Development Strategy	Econ Dev
3.11	Collaborative approach to supporting and transforming market towns	All