

From: Mr Andy Booth, Chairman, Scrutiny Committee

To: Scrutiny Committee - 24 July 2020

Subject: The Visitor Economy – Short Focused Inquiry (SFI)

Summary:

This paper provides an update on progress of the Short Focused Inquiry – The Visitor Economy.

Recommendation:

Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

Introduction

1. The Covid-19 pandemic has already had significant impacts on the Kent economy. Overall, it is estimated that Kent and Medway face an output loss of around £5.3 billion in 2020. Almost all sectors of the economy will be affected by this, although the impact on hospitality and tourism, retail and the cultural sector is especially severe.
2. The Government responded quickly at the end of March 2020 with a substantial package of measures to protect jobs and businesses, including the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme (the Furlough Scheme) and a series of grant and products for business. This has since been adjusted in response to evidence of economic need, and the package has helped to avert widespread business closures and redundancies.
3. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Kent County Council has worked hard to support the visitor economy. However, the Coronavirus crisis has hit Kent's large visitor economy severely, and much still needs to be done to support the sector as it prepares for reopening.
4. The aim of this inquiry is to identify additional measures that KCC could undertake to boost the visitor economy in Kent in reaction to the impact of Covid-19.

Scope

5. The scope of the inquiry, which was discussed and agreed by the Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Opposition Group Spokespeople on 6 July 2020, is the following:
 - a. To define and briefly put into context the visitor economy.
 - b. To explore the impact of Covid-19 on the visitor economy in Kent.

- c. To identify additional measures that KCC could undertake to boost the visitor economy in Kent in reaction to the impact of Covid-19.

Evidence Gathering

6. As part of the Visitor Economy Short Focused Inquiry, both written and oral evidence will be gathered.
7. A wide range of organisations have been invited to submit written evidence (both national-level and more local evidence). The deadline for the submission of their evidence is Tuesday 21 July 2020.
8. Written evidence requests have also been forwarded, as requested by the Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Opposition Group Spokespeople, to all KCC Members, to seek information and evidence from their own Divisions' perspective. The deadline for the submission of the evidence is also Tuesday 21 July 2020.
9. All the written evidence received will then be collated and forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration before the Committee makes its recommendations at an informal session.
10. A number of informal, virtual briefing sessions (on Teams, about 45-60 minutes) are also being organised, to help the Committee gather information and evidence. These sessions are planned to take place in July. The first informal briefing session has already been arranged (Friday 17 July, 2pm).
11. It is intended that, at the end of July, an informal, virtual meeting will be arranged, where the Committee will have the opportunity to clarify any final issue in a wash-up session, just before making its recommendations.
12. The production of a brief report, which will include the Committee's recommendations, will follow. This will be discussed at a formal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

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