



Congleton Town Council

Historic Market Town

Chief Officer: **David McGifford CILCA**

Business Support Working Group

Minutes

15th May 2020

Attendees: Cllr David Brown, Cllr Russell Chadwick, Cllr Robert Douglas, Cllr Sally Ann Holland, Cllr Kay Wesley. Officers; Jackie MacArthur, David McGifford, Martha Hayes.

Apologies: Cllr Suzy Firkin.

1. **Appoint a Chair of the Group-** Cllr Russell Chadwick was appointed chair of this working group.
2. **Agree Terms of Reference-** attached.

Discussed to develop a business plan for the businesses in Congleton, suggestions to ring businesses to see what their requirements are and what difficulties they face opening up after the current COVID-19 situation. It was decided that a questionnaire would be a good route, to get the businesses to fill out as we then have all the answers in one place. Noted that JMac has sent out specific sector advice to the shops.

JMac raised a concern that this working group needs to be careful on the knowledge and advice given out, as a Town Council we are not the main area for business support.

Agreed that the plan would include advice from professionals and the CTC website page to be used more for a signposting page linking to other websites for up to date advice.

SAH suggested a business support telephone line much like the COVID-19 helpline.
3. **External Membership Requirements-** RC has been in contact with the East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce asking about the possibilities of the individual businesses giving free advice, not just to chamber businesses, but for businesses that need it in Congleton. **ACTION RC** is looking at getting a team of expertise together to help with the short term queries for businesses e.g- financial support, business advice, legal advice etc. It has been identified that businesses need guidance about changes in laws and legislations e.g- childcare, benefits, grants etc.
4. **Early Ideas-**
 - How do businesses access grants? This could go as signposting links on the CTC website- once live, communicated out to businesses. JMac & MH have a database of Town Centre shops and businesses.
 - KW suggested an online forum for businesses to communicate and offer advice to each other in a closed group.
 - Suggested that businesses need contacting to find out their current situation, where they see their gaps are and what could be done to help this. SAH mentioned that Dave Holland has knowledge on this area and should be able to help with some of the questions. The questionnaire needs to be kept short and snappy. **ACTION ALL-** put together some questions and send to DMcG. Also DMcG to



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approach Dave Holland to discuss questions. SAH mentioned about the eco-business environment, regarding accessing LEP funding.

- DMcG suggested to see what Cheshire East Council are doing on this matter, have they already got a survey? **ACTION DMcG** to chase on this and to try and get a copy of the questionnaire if they have one. If this working group created a survey, we could ask CEC to send out on CTC behalf to all CW12 businesses.
- Some of the shop fronts in town look unsightly due to not being used, possibility to look into vinyl's to make more attractive in the short term. This is slightly harder project as CTC don't own the shops and it would be up to the local landlords. Need to cost out this project. Also suggested for pop-up shops to fill empty shops. **ACTION JMac** to consider cost of vinyl's.
- Suggestion to have a shop-front grant available. Need to ask the shops that if this was available, would they take advantage of it? Also need to look into the legislations around this for local councils granting funds to businesses. **ACTION RC** to consider options for shop front grants.

Future Projects to look into-

- Places of free Wi-Fi
- Project to look at using the Town Hall for hot-desking/ rent a desk, for businesses to take advantage of.
- Using Capitol Walk as an eatery outlet?
- Business Fayre in the Town Hall.

5. **Date of Next Meeting-** In the next 2/3 weeks, to be communicated via email to group.