

<b>Joint Report of:</b>	Executive Members For Finance and Governance & Regeneration Directors Of Finance & Regeneration and Culture
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<b>Submitted to:</b>	Executive
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<b>Date:</b>	8 November 2022
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<b>Title:</b>	Business Support Strategy
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<b>Report for:</b>	Decision
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<b>Status:</b>	Public
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<b>Strategic priority:</b>	Vulnerability
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<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
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<b>Why:</b>	Decision(s) will have a significant impact in two or more wards
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<b>Urgent:</b>	No
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<b>Why:</b>	N/A
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### Executive summary

Following approval of the Welfare Strategy for Residents in July 2022, the introduction of the recently designed support strategy for Businesses now aligns existing policy frameworks and solutions, plus provides a comprehensive approach to supporting businesses who may be in need of financial assistance, advice or support.

The strategy is designed to provide a single point of contact and creates cross directorate solutions between Resident and Businesses Support and Regeneration.

The proposed decision is that Executive; -

- Approves the adoption of the Business Support Strategy
- That delegated authority to approve any future revisions/modifications to the strategy be provided to the Head of Resident and Businesses Support and the Director of Regeneration.

## **Purpose**

1. This report highlights the opportunity for efficiencies with a scale up (or down) approach according to economic climate and resource availability within the Local Authority. Working with businesses effectively from the outset streamlines processes and avoids duplication of work.
2. To co-ordinate strategies to support a holistic approach to Residents and Business services, which recognises the nature of their inter dependency.
3. To seek approval of the proposed delivery approach to support businesses.

## **Background and relevant information**

4. Resident and Business Support Services has recently developed and introduced a Welfare Strategy for Residents as part of its overall strategic approach to improving the quality of service to Middlesbrough residents.
5. The Business Support Strategy sets out a similar approach/methodology, identifying both internal and external opportunities/solutions that can support a business through its journey with the aim of providing a simplified effective route that can be scaled up (or down) according to the current economic climate and resource availability.
6. In a challenging economic climate and difficult trading conditions it is acknowledged that businesses will potentially seek additional support from the Authority to support their businesses and in some cases may face decline. At this time, some businesses may take the decision to streamline their staff complement or have to close the business permanently.
7. The overarching strategies consider both the business and the resident's circumstances. The business is supported under the relevant policies and residents who find themselves facing an unemployment situation or reduced employment hours can be signposted to the welfare solution for residents to ensure their individual needs are met. Equally the strategy will inform where Local Authority resources should be targeted, depending on where we are in the macro-economic business cycle.
8. This strategy complements the Council's Strategic Framework, directly supporting the Council's Strategic Plan (Refreshed 2022-24), the Mayor's priorities and Directorate Priorities (2022 – 2023)
9. Likely touch points for businesses into the Authority include Resident and Businesses Support and Regeneration along with other key services such as Planning, Environmental Health and Public Protection.
10. Following the pandemic, the scale and nature of businesses engagement became more significant than ever, with businesses, in some cases, realising for the first time the strength and inter dependent relationship between the public sector and private businesses. In turn the benefits of cross directorate working is enhanced across Council services.
11. As a result, Resident and Businesses Services established a close working relationship with Regeneration to deliver efficient, fast and robust Covid 19 related businesses

support programmes and sought to develop this further through a matrix management solution which established joint working arrangements between two service areas, responsible for delivering businesses solutions.

12. The alignment has provided a robust link between Resident and Businesses Support and Regeneration to provide a 'one voice' approach. A term that has been used frequently by many Local Authorities and highlighted in a recent report by the Local Government Association (LGA). The aim of this strategy is to build on joint working approaches and provide a framework for working with businesses to ensure that the Authority provides a cost-efficient service, utilising supporting policies in order to achieve:

- A stronger and more sustainable local economy.
- Improved collection rates.
- Improved relationships with businesses.
- Public service excellence.
- Inclusiveness - To ensure all businesses are treated fairly.
- Quality support to businesses to maximise their growth potential and future stability
- Improved perceptions of the Council as the 'go to' independent service able to offer help, support and signposting where possible.

Objectives include:

- A clear and consistent businesses journey through the Local Authority.
- An understanding across service areas of the Businesses Support available.
- Strengthen and highlight the value further of cross directorate working arrangements.
- Identification of a businesses in distress and the support available.
- A single point of contact (SPOC).
- Accurate and compliant database information.
- Connections with all businesses networks designed to be far reaching across a wide range and diverse section of the businesses community.
- Up to date web pages and easy reference points within the Council's web pages.
- Agreed referral mechanisms between service areas.
- Faster approach to identifying gaps across the service areas for the businesses.

13. It is important the Council continues to reinforce the relationship with the private sector to provide businesses with a positive and efficient customer experience that supports the welfare of the businesses. Strategic business support programmes operating across the region complement the Authority's statutory services to enable the business to access the full range of training, advice and guidance to become a sustainable, self-sufficient operation.

14. Early recognition of the needs of a business, leads to an efficient interaction for both parties and determines from the outset which phase the businesses is in and the support needed. In turn the Local Authority benefits from a positive proactive and responsive relationship with the businesses, improved knowledge of local issues, improved confidences and clearer links with officers within the Local Authority.

15. It is recommended that any businesses presenting themselves to the Local Authority will have their circumstances evaluated as early as possible, with Residents and Businesses Support and Regeneration being the primary points of contact to support businesses through payment planning, support leading to the potential for more in-depth strategic support conversations.

16. A consistent approach will be adopted, essentially to minimise duplication, provide effective strategies for reducing multiple touch points, whilst delivering a rapid response. This approach encourages a deeper understanding for businesses with a cross directorate solution, thus providing a far more intuitive and positive experience for both the businesses and the Local Authority.
17. A 'one voice' approach will be further implemented to provide consistency, an approach that worked extremely well throughout the pandemic for businesses, providing a controlled dissemination of information to minimise information overload.

### **What decision(s) are being recommended?**

18. The introduction of the recently designed Business Support Strategy now aligns existing policy frameworks and solutions and provides a comprehensive approach to supporting businesses who may be in needs of financial assistance, advice or support.
19. The strategy is designed to provide a single point of contact and create cross directorate solutions between Resident and Businesses Support Services and Regeneration.

The proposed decision is that Executive; -

- Approves the adoption of the Business Support Strategy
- That delegated authority to approve any future revisions/modifications to the strategy be provided to the Head of Resident and Businesses Support and the Director of Regeneration.

### **Rationale for the recommended decision(s)**

20. The strategy actively supports the local economy by providing a co-ordinated business support approach.
21. Co-ordinated strategies provide the opportunity to deliver a holistic approach to both resident and businesses, recognising the nature of their inter dependence.
22. The strategy highlights the opportunity for efficiency measures and a scale up (or down) approach by working with businesses effectively from the outset to streamline processes and avoid duplication of work.

### **Other potential decision(s) and why these have not been recommended**

23. No other potential decisions have been recommended as the approach is in response to directed actions within the Council's Strategic Plan as approved by Executive on 5 April 2022.

### **Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)**

## Legal

24. There is no legal requirement to have a Business Support Strategy, although the rationale and justification is outlined above. Many of the existing policies are however adopted under various legal powers such as the Local Government Finance Act.

## ***Strategic priorities and risks***

The proposed policy will contribute as follows to the Council's strategic plan.

People	Place	Business
Supporting businesses directly impacts the lives of local people through employment, leisure and communities and seeks to strengthen work and leisure opportunities the lives of local people.	Supporting businesses improves Middlesbrough's economic infrastructure, its visual 'high street' attractiveness and enhances the area's reputation as a 'business friendly' area that is 'open for business'. It creates opportunities for local people and maintains the Authority's finances (MTFP) through efficiency measures and streamlining of processes.	Actively supports the local economy and sets a framework to work as effectively as possible to support the Authority's ambitions and meet the needs of the current economic climate.

25. This policy will impact on and seek to address the following risks:

- i. (01-050) Economic Growth - Continuing national decline in retailing environment has the potential to manifest further in Middlesbrough's town centre. The strategy seeks to implement a robust welfare strategy to identify support through strategic engagement.
- ii. (08-059) Efficiency savings, minimising duplication to support the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
- iii. Recovery of local communities, businesses and the Council's operations from COVID-19, taking opportunities to build back more support and improved services

## ***Human Rights, Equality and Data Protection***

26. An initial Human Rights and Equality impact assessment has been undertaken, which did not identify any significant issues at this stage (see appendix C)

27. The Council processes significant amounts of information on a daily basis, the majority of which relates to individuals. The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016, Data Protection Act 2018, and associated legislation Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 will be adhered to, with additional guidance and

training sought from the DPO officer where required to manage the potential for data breaches from cross directorate working.

### **Financial**

28. The strategy sets a framework that aims to deliver overall efficiencies. It will be flexible to meet ongoing organisational needs and can be tailored to adapt to the current economic climate. Overall, the strategy seeks to maintain businesses stability and sustain/improve collection rates; as such it supports the Council's budget position and MTFP.

### **Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)**

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Business Support Strategy	Janette Savage	5 October 2022
Develop and introduce a cross-directorate Action Plan	Debbie Ingoldsby	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023

### **Background papers**

Body	Report title	Date
Local Government Association	Supporting Councils with Businesses Engagement	<a href="#">Supporting councils with businesses engagement   Local Government Association</a>

### **Appendices.**

- Appendix A Business Support Strategy
- Appendix B Middlesbrough Council Executive report – Refreshing the Strategic Workplan for 2022-24
- Appendix C Impact Assessment

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