

ANNEX C

Dacorum Council and SavetheHighStreet.org Covid19 Business Support – Recovery & Resilience

END OF PROGRAMME REPORT

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1. Introduction

Dacorum Council commissioned a Reopening High Streets Safely (RHSS) funded programme of support to help up to 50 high street businesses across the Borough. The aim was to help businesses to reopen successfully, recover quickly and build resilience after the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions in 2020/21.

Through a structured programme of support, 76 businesses were engaged and a further 49 were aware of the programme (through enquiries or webinar bookings).

All businesses were offered access to the Jo platform (a virtual assistant containing information and idea 'cards'), a Business Health Check Survey, a Needs Assessment Call (NAC), regular telephone calls with a Success Manager (dedicated mentor), 2 x dedicated webinars, invitations to other webinars, access to webinar recording and personalised Action Plans.

A total of 50 Health Check Surveys were completed or partially completed. A summary of the key findings and a copy of the aggregated results are included within this report.

2. The Programme

The programme was launched on 9th March via an online event. It was delivered over a 6-month period, across two cohorts. The first cohort followed a 'weekly' update of Jo ideas – the second were given all appropriate ideas in their Jo feed to improve the experience and enable a faster turn-around for the development of Action Plans.

Registrations were due to close in July, but businesses continued to express interest in receiving the help and referrals were also sent through via the Business Improvement District, which meant that recent registrations were accepted onto the programme into August.

All businesses retain access to their Jo feeds, their idea cards and Action Plans through a 'freemium' offer. A small number of businesses will receive free additional calls for a limited period of time as they entered the programme late, or have experienced difficulties in attending pre-planned calls.

The Programme was structured to cover the following 'themes':

Theme 1: Covid 19 Compliance

Theme 2: Selling in New (and Safe) Ways

Theme 3: Trading Successfully in a Post-Covid High Street

Theme 4: Collaborating as a High Street

Theme 5: Preparing for the Future

The Programme included regular one-to-one support from a team of Success Managers, together with 24/7 access to a 'digital assistant' called Jo for up to 50 high street businesses in the Dacorum Borough, focusing on the main town centres of Hemel Hempstead, Tring and Berkhamsted, but also open to outlying village areas.

In addition to the personalised one-to-one support for up to 50 businesses, two dedicated online webinar events were delivered to help businesses to adapt and improve:

- Making the Most of Social Media (14th April) – 33 registrations
- Trading in New Ways Locally (12th May) – 36 registrations

Webinar recordings were added to the Jo feed for all registered participants and additional webinar recordings were also made available via the Jo Platform.

A full range of activities were planned and executed. The SHS.org project manager worked closely with the Dacorum Council project manager to promote registration sign-ups and event bookings to meet the target numbers for registration.

Summary of Programme Delivery:

- Design the support programme 'themes' (as listed above)
- Set up the Jo platform
- Create the Health Check Survey
- Appoint the delivery team and project manager
- Design, plan and deliver the webinars, including the launch webinar
- Create a promotional flyer
- Attend a field visit to cover each key target area
- Provide 'onboarding support' the participants
- Delivery regular support (in cohorts) – via telephone and online
- Provide reports and updates
- Submit content for communications
- Create and deliver Action Plans for up to 50 businesses
- Provide a summary report and recommendations for next steps.

3. Health Check Survey

The Health Check was offered to all participants. The purpose of the survey was to identify the main issues and concerns and to establish a starting point for the 'Needs Assessment Call', which is the first stage of the one-to-one support. Not all of the businesses surveyed went on to complete the full programme; however, all businesses who took part in the programme were surveyed to some extent. The main insights from the Health Check Survey are included in Appendix 1 – Dacorum Insights.

4. Local Champions

The concept of a Local Champion is open to interpretation- i.e. it is not a job title or a role. In essence, it is someone with an interest and passion for their place who is willing and able to embrace opportunities to make a difference. It can include, but is not restricted to: business networking groups, pro-active individuals, local counsellors, large employers, landlords and others with influence in their local area.

The engagement team connected with a range of Local Champions to promote the programme and several supporters signed up for the support. Due to the nature of the RHSS remit, it was not appropriate for some of them.

As with many places, there is more to do to identify and engage with Local Champions across the Borough and this has been included in the recommendations and next steps.

5. Businesses Supported

Here are the outline numbers of businesses supported across each area:

Place:	Completed	Ongoing	Interest but didn't register	Removed	Recent Registration – NEW	TOTAL	% Engaged in programme by place
Hemel Hempstead	22	3	3	12	2	42	55%
Berkhamsted	11	1	0	1	2	15	20%
Tring	11	1	0	2	1	15	20%
Outlying Villages	3	0	1	0	0	4	5%
TOTAL	47	5	4	15	5	76	100%

Action Plans Delivered:	20 x Personalised 17 x 'templated' – using the most popular ideas from the whole programme
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Target: 50 Businesses Supported	Actual: 47 Completed 5 Ongoing 5 New Registrations 57 Businesses Supported	Achieved: 114%
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Action Plans have been provided to all completed businesses. 40 x personalised Action Plans and 17 x template Action Plans, based on the most popular ideas across the programme (see below). Appendix 2 provides a list of businesses and locations.

6. Ideas

The programme presented practical and tangible ‘idea cards’ across a range of themes to help businesses to identify opportunities to make improvements. Each idea card contained additional information and choices for how the business would like to proceed. They could either: accept or reject the idea. If they accepted the idea, the business would either ask for help to do it – or – indicate that they would do it themselves (i.e. already done or do it later). Each accepted card would be placed onto their personalised Action Plans.

Calls with the Success Manager then provided additional help and guidance to support the business towards progressing each idea. The most popular ideas across the Dacorum programme fall into 6 key categories:

DIGITAL	MARKETING	COLLABORATION
EFFICIENCY	DIVERSIFICATION	SAFETY

Appendix 3 provides a breakdown of the top 45 ideas across the ‘help me do it’ and ‘do it myself’ options.

7. Feedback & Engagement

We have received a number of testimonials from businesses on the programme:

“Being a new business, I was very keen to work with the JoinJo Success Team to understand what I could do to improve and grow my business. The dashboard is very easy to use and a great reference point for the different areas of focus. The best part was having weekly calls with a team member that really wants to help grow your business.

I had Majella who was excellent at helping me go back to basics, ensuring I had everything set up correctly. Majella helped generate successful promotions and instore interactions with my customers.

I would highly recommended JoinJo to any business big or small!”

Brian Green, Sales & Marketing Director, Topdec Decorating Supplies, Hemel Hempstead

“With excitement and a little anxiety during the start of my new business, my mind was full of thoughts as I filled whole scrap books with lists of mish-mash ideas and practical “to do’s now” “to-do’s later” that I felt exhausted and overwhelmed.

I wasn’t quite sure where to begin (except with those never-ending lists)! One item on the list was to see where I might find help, and perhaps even funding. A good place to start! An online search brought me to my local council’s website that led me to the business section, and then to a contact name and number – and of course a short form to complete.

Before I knew it the phone rang and on came this wonderful reassuring voice who introduced herself as my personal help-manager. I don’t know why, but I was impressed just to get the call! Marcella wanted to first know what my business was about, whether it was a new venture or an

existing one, where I was with it, and what sort of help was I looking for. In reply to the latter question I focussed on my weaker areas.

The first thing I noticed, was her genuine interest and that she was listening. She kept the half-hour agenda on track and whilst imparting encouraging words on what a great business idea it is (thank you!) she told me how and where and in what time frames she and her team could assist me – for free (I didn't think anything was free these days)!

I found the areas of help where I lacked a little confidence, most useful as well as uplifting to my morale. Together, we opened the "Jo" platform and from there I also got onboard with the "Trello" Action Plan platform, not just 'on-board' but using it with her by my virtual side until I got used to it. Brilliant; It's a bit like a home-work sheet divided up by subject and in small manageable chunks, with the added bonus of the teacher (Marcella) doing some of it for you, i.e. the bits where you do need help.

More half-hour slots were scheduled over the following weeks where together we were able to tackle the "to-do's" which provided great satisfaction, yes - but more importantly, progress! Marcella was a great sounding-board, full of ideas I hadn't thought of, and offered me potential funding avenues as well as lists of extremely useful free webinars I can attend online and with full flexibility.

What an amazing service, thank you."

Larry Hesse, Lawrence of London Travel Service, Kings Langey

"The Dacorum Business Support Programme has been very good, there's a lot of information that I didn't know about before that has been helpful. It's been good getting support from someone locally who has helped make me aware of what different ideas can be implemented to help my business grow during these difficult times.

The Jo platform gave me a lot of weekly ideas that I wouldn't have even considered before, this was very useful and reassuring. I would definitely recommend this programme to any business in need of help and support."

Lloydie Gardiner, Not Just Travel, Hemel Hempstead

The engagement team visited the area and conducted a positive field visit during the programme delivery. This included working 'on the ground', directly with the Dacorum Council's own Economic Development Team.

A face-to-face 'meet the council' event was planned in August and promoted to participants, but due to it being the main holiday season the confirmed numbers were low. The event will be rearranged in the early autumn. The intention is to ensure that businesses feel supported by the council on an ongoing basis, even though the one-to-one Success Manager calls have ended.

As part of the next steps, a feedback survey will be circulated to collect additional information and permissions for the Council to enrol businesses in their regular newsletters and other communication channels.

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

It has been a pleasure working with the team at Dacorum Council, supporting the high street businesses across Hemel Hempstead, Tring, Berkhamsted and surrounding areas and we look forward to continuing our work together.

SaveTheHighStreet.org remain committed to supporting every place we engage with, either on a funded or 'supported' basis. Access to the Jo platform remains available free of charge to all businesses who joined the programme.

How we Addressed the Programme Requirements:

- We identified core themes to help businesses reopen safely and recover quickly
- We delivered the programme through a Health Check Survey, Success Manager Calls, the Jo Platform, themed weekly ideas, webinars, action plans and access to partner services
- The Success Managers collected details of goals, challenges and capabilities during their initial calls, enabling a focused support on the individual needs of a business
- We offered action planning sessions for all businesses and provided template Action Plans where needed to help businesses to complete their programmes
- We connected businesses with partner service providers who could help them implement their ideas and actions.

Recommended Follow-on Support

A proposal document (appendix 4) contains additional information about recommended follow-on support. Here is a brief summary:

- 1 We know from our experience in other areas that the creating an Action Plans is a big step for an independent business. Additional value can be derived from providing support to implement those plans.
- 2 Digital implementation support is evidently required and we would recommend a programme specifically designed around helping businesses to embrace digital and social media to increase online trading. Alternatively, any future business support should include digital content as standard.
- 3 A start-up programme would be recommended to encourage the next generation of entrepreneurs. We can also run interventions to help fill empty shop units.
- 4 We can work with the Council to design and deliver a Local Champions Support Programme, including the formation of one of more Traders Associations.
- 5 Smaller projects can be designed and delivered to support other initiatives and co-ordinate the signposting for other support across the Borough.

NEXT STEPS:

- Review this draft End of Programme Report and discuss any amendments
- Consider the recommendations and suggested follow-on projects
- Discuss RFQ procedures and prepare specifications for any project briefs as required
- Continue to work together on a funded or supported basis.

Note: All businesses will continue to access the Jo platform, their ideas and their Action Plans.

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