



**Plymouth City Council Economic Development
David Draffan Service Director Economic Development
Covid 19 Blog**

No 7 - Thursday 9/4/2020

Hi Everyone,

My name is David Draffan and I am the Service Director at Plymouth City Council with responsibility for Economic Development. As a department we have been wondering how to get our key messages out. It occurred to me that a more informal, human blog might be useful, in addition to our normal methods, so that I can perhaps reach a different audience; but also so that people can understand the work that is going on behind the scenes. I intend this to be regular and short rather than longwinded given the massive amount of communication currently

This week has had a few different themes. We have experienced many very happy businesses who we have been able to help and support. This however is to be contrasted with the anguish for those businesses who currently fall outside the governments support. It's truly been heart-breaking listening to those stories and at the same time feeling helpless to help. We have therefore been lobbying so hard this week on these gaps with the Chamber and FSB. It's very clear that the pain to business will only get more acute as we move towards April Payroll and that the current support package will only last 3 months

Conversations are also shifting nationally to recovery and the associated scenario planning that is required give uncertainty. Government is currently asking local government to model a variety of scenarios from; this all ending in June to dealing with multiple future waves of the disease. All eyes are currently on China in this regard. Our Cabinet will be focussing more on these issues from next week.

On a human level this week was dominated by a 41 year old healthy member of my department who was taken into hospital on Sunday with breathing difficulties and very high temperature. After being diagnosed with c19, seeing the personal battle he faced this week supported with oxygen was sobering. He is thankfully now symptom free for 2 days and will hopefully leave hospital in the coming days.

The final theme of this week was starting to fathom the impact on our own budget. I have driven our department's income from £8 to £20m in 6 years and we are now cost neutral to PCC. The downside is we are exposed to the market just like a business in ED

Important things

Small Grants – We have paid £24.6m to 2069 businesses. We have received 2781 applications of 3965 eligible businesses. We have had 236 calls today our highest yet.

Lobbying: We have today written to the Chancellor, LGA and local MPs clearly setting out the gaps we believe that need to be filled in government support. More below.

PCC Rates deferral – If you pay by direct debit we will not be taking payment in April or May. More information can be found here:

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/businesses/businessrates/coronaviruscovid19supportbusinesses>



Plymouth City Council Emergency Planning

The City's mobile testing facility was up and running this week at Derriford. My surveyors were very involved in prepping the site and facilitating the lease agreements for access to our land.

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsroom/pressreleases/drivethroughtestingcentreopensplymouthhealthandcarestaff>

It's not just business support the Council is engaged with, we have been extremely busy this week supporting residents with Council tax support which at its peak was over 100 call a day.

Operation Shield – shielding the elderly and most vulnerable in their homes – is progressing really well with meals and support now flowing well.

Our community hub is also getting really good volunteer support with 400 volunteers to date. If you're furloughed please encourage your staff to volunteer here:

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/goodneighboursscheme>

The Council has summarised its activity here on a revamped c19 web page <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/covid-19>. It's rather good and worth a look.

Council Press Releases

Did you know all the Council's press releases are listed here and it's a great way to keep in touch <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsroom>

ED Newsletter – are you signed up?

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/economicdevelopmentplymouthcitycouncil/>

Business Grants Update

It's been a fraught week on the grants front with a huge volume of enquiries and everyone understandably desperate to get theirs approved. As of today we have paid out £24.6m of our grant allocation to 2069 businesses. We have 2781 applications received which will be paid early next week at which point we will have soon paid 100% of those who have applied. **But at this point that means there are c 1300 businesses eligible for grants who have been written to and have not applied – IS THIS YOU? A reminder that the hotline will close at 7pm this evening and will reopen Tuesday 9am.**

The helpline has taken 236 calls today – the highest so far – and 1847 in total. Sadly 38 callers made multiple calls today when they weren't necessary. Most were due to them having given the incorrect information to us at least once – 272 businesses have had their applications declined for this reason

I did want to say a little about the process as I have taken pride in getting the Council's system up and running before almost anyone else. We have a duty to check for fraud and in yesterday's payment 10 of 140 payments were to companies that have already been wound up and are ineligible. Our payments are slowed slightly by these checks including an online system provided to us by Government and I hope you understand why.



Loans

We're still getting feedback that the banks are not lending perhaps as the Chancellor has envisaged. We would very much like examples of this if you're facing problems. We'd like good feedback too of course.

Gaps in Business Support

Here is an update on our lobbying activity in partnership with the FSB and Chamber <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsroom/pressreleases/cityorganisationscallpluggapsupportsmallbusiness>

Fishing Industry Support

Follow our activity here:

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsroom/pressreleases/plymouthleadsfightsupportfishingindustry>

PCC Business Support Infographic

This is cool check it out here: <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/guide-covid-19-business.jpg>

Call 4 fish <https://www.call4fish.com/>

Keep supporting local fishermen and but direct. More boats are going out and the trade price is slowly rising. Our scheme in Plymouth is now being replicated nationally

Sector funding opportunities

This week we have seen a plethora of funding opportunities focussed at various sector including Arts Council, HLF, and Sport England, Visit Britain, BFI etc. We have brilliant sector support in the City so make sure you keep in touch with Amanda Lumley at Destination Plymouth, Hannah Harris at Plymouth Culture, Steve Gerry at Plymouth Manufacturers Group and our 2 business improvement districts – PWP and CCC. All are running seminars and help sessions which are tailored to your sector.

Growth Hub

Did you know we have a dedicated business support service in Devon and you can speak to a trained business advisor for free? <https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19-guidance-for-business/>

Share widely

Please do share this blog widely and not via the usual channels as it's important we get the message of support and solidarity to Plymouth businesses not connected in the usual way



Feedback

If this blog is useful let me know and if it is simply more noise in the system I won't be the slightest bit offended! I will try and do updates a few times a week as anything changes. I hope you get some small comfort from that fact that you are not alone. There is a dedicated groups of people committed to ensuring your survival and will stop at nothing to help.

Contact

My mobile number is 07919226965 and my email is david.draffan@plymouth.gov.uk

Please text or email any time if you think I can help – I'm a night owl and will most likely be sitting with the laptop at the kitchen table.

All the best

David