



Champions' Annual Report

2013-14

Contents

Introduction	2
Corporate Business Champion – Councillor Heydon	3
Commuters' Champion - Councillor Harrison	5
Older People's Champion - Councillor Thompson	7
Small Business Champion - Councillor Wade	10
Voluntary Sector Champion - Councillor Finnie	14

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to appraise all Members of the work and progress undertaken by the Council's Champions during the year 2013-2014.

The report informs Members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future activities.

Corporate Business Champion Councillor Heydon



1. Introduction

Bracknell Forest Council's (BFC) published **Priorities** and **Medium Term Objectives** include "Sustain the economic prosperity of the borough".

Being in the south east of England, and the Thames Valley, we lie at the hub of UK PLC in the centre of innovation, technology, location, government, and communications. In addition BFC has a skilled work force, excellent educational facilities and it is a great place to live.

There are a number of world class organisations based in BFC, and we are gaining more new organisations - both established UK, and overseas, companies looking for UK and even European headquarters. This represents an asset and reputation which we are keen to protect, nurture and grow.

2. Objectives

These continue to be:

1. Establishing a working dialogue with our major corporate organisations based within the borough: so that we understand their requirements and ensure that we grow our reputation as a great Borough for business.
2. Understanding why so many organisations are based in the borough and why we are continuing to attract new organisations – this will then become a key input into the Borough's Economic Development planning.

Meeting these objectives demands a great deal of co-ordination with other "interested" bodies and depends upon close interworking with the Officers of the Economic Development Group and other Members.

3. Scope

The Corporate Business sector is identified as those organisations with 200+ employees, i.e. the organisational sector above SMEs. There are approximately 40 organisations in the Borough falling into this category.

In addition there are a number of other significant organisations with UK HQs in the Borough.

Some of the detailed activity will remain a matter of commercial confidence – however the scope covers:

- a) Major UK operational headquarters – Waitrose and TRL.
- b) Major international organisation such as Vodafone, HP, Dell, 3M, Syngenta, Honda, Boehringer, Fujitsu and Panasonic.
- c) Major companies operating in the UK primarily from the technology and software businesses such as JDA, RSA, Cadence, Brocade, Software AG and Sharp Telecom.
- d) Significant locally based organisations which are growing quickly such as Redwood Technologies and Content Guru.

- e) Major UK based operations with administrative functions based in BFC such as Towry Law, Rowney, and Lloyds register.

Major employers:

Bracknell Forest Council itself is the largest employer in the borough. Additionally the major retailers in total are also the largest combined employers – this includes J Sainsbury, Morrisons, Marks & Spencer and the largest of them all Tesco. We currently do not include any of these organisations in the contact plan.

4. Modus operandi

The modus operandi is to follow the tasks and activities defining Community Champions as published, i.e.

- Liaising with local organisations concerned with the community to establish effective and regular consultation arrangements
- Acting as an advocate on behalf of the community represented
- Representing the views of the communities to the council, executive, overview and scrutiny and other committees and to council officers
- Becoming familiar with the needs and priorities of the community or the range of activities concerned and to weigh up interests expressed in order to provide sound advice on the implications of alternative courses of action
- Feeding back decisions of the borough council and explaining the council's position on specific issues of concern to representative organisations and to individuals involved
- Publishing an annual report on work carried out each year for consideration by the council.

Councillor Peter Heydon

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Commuters' Champion Councillor Harrison



1 Rail Networks – Gathering Momentum for Improvements

Last year, the Commuters' Champion reported to Council on the top three main issues of concern for rail commuters using Bracknell.

These are:

- Overcrowding on peak services
- Slow service between Bracknell and London Waterloo (compared to other towns at a similar distance)
- The rising cost of train fares

Since that report was produced, the response within Bracknell Forest Council has been very positive. The importance of better rail services to Bracknell's economic development has been recognised at the highest levels within the Council and Executive Members and senior officers have embraced a vision to improve the Bracknell to Waterloo service.

Last year's report stressed that, acting by itself, Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) would not be able to create meaningful change in the rail service. To make the sort of improvements our residents want to see has seen Bracknell Forest Council bring its ideas and resources together with other partners to present a coherent vision to Central Government.

Working through the Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), a business-led body set up to boost economic growth in Berkshire and direct billions of pounds of government infrastructure investment, BFC has promoted the importance of improving the Reading to Waterloo line and better rail connectivity to Heathrow airport as vital to commuters and businesses in Bracknell and the wider Berkshire economy.

The work done by the Executive Members for Economic Development and for Transport and the officers supporting them on these bodies has been instrumental in taking Bracknell Forest's priorities forwards and gaining the support of other councils to make a case to Government. This is bearing fruit. The TVB LEP commissioned and has recently published a study into how much economic growth could be generated by reducing journey times and increasing service frequency on the Reading to Waterloo line. This concludes that the benefit to the economy would be significant and would justify a large amount of investment in the rail infrastructure to achieve it.

2 Consultation

Early in 2014, the Commuters' Champion issued an appeal to residents asking what they think Bracknell Station is lacking. This call was taken up by the Bracknell Times and as a result, a helpful number of email responses were received.

Although not a large enough number to be a demographically representative sample, all the respondents made constructive points.

The top issue raised was the lack of toilet facilities. This was completely unprompted by any of the suggestions I made, so I think it is a genuine need.

Closely behind that was the request for a waiting room on the rail side of the ticket barriers and to extend a canopy to provide shelter along the full length of each of the platforms. This makes sense because passengers are always being urged to "use the full length of the train" and during inclement weather it would help get people on and off the trains quicker by reducing crowding at the doors and remove the need for people to use umbrellas on the platforms.

A desire for better, more secure cycle racks is another issue that was raised.

The Commuters' Champion is now working with officers to see how these objectives can be addressed.

Respondents also volunteered criticism of the speed and frequency of services between Bracknell and Waterloo. This concern is addressed elsewhere in this report but is included again here to acknowledge those who contributed their views.

3 Addressing Rail Overcrowding

South West Trains has been seeking to address overcrowding by adding new capacity in a phased improvement programme. It has ordered reconfigured carriages, previously used on the Gatwick Express service to allow some trains to be extended from eight to ten carriages and is extending platforms where this is needed. To create more capacity at Waterloo, platform 20 will be opened for commuter services from 19th May. Although there have been some early problems while testing the new carriages, this is being addressed with suppliers and South West Trains is confident that the issues can be ironed out soon.

Passengers in Martin's Heron and Bracknell will benefit from four additional peak-time services in Phase 1 of the improvements. These services will be introduced later this year:

06:24 Reading to Waterloo
06:54 Reading to Waterloo
18:05 Waterloo to Reading
19:35 Waterloo to Reading

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Older People's Champion Councillor Thompson



In presenting my report for the last year as the Council's Older People's Champion I confirm that my approach has been in accordance with the Council's constitution, namely to act as a positive focus at elected member level in respect of older people so as to ensure that full consideration is given to the impact of Council activities and decisions upon older people.

Alongside my role as Older People's Champion other positions I have include: Chairman of the Access Group, member of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel, a Council representative with Age Concern Bracknell Forest, Berkshire Age UK, Bracknell Shopmobility, Older People's Partnership Board and the Over Fifty Forum. In my connection with these I am able to promote the role which I do generally. I also attend public meetings of other bodies such as Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action and the Citizens Advice Bureau. I also monitor reports to the various Committees and Panels. I continue to visit the Look In at its Great Hollands' location. I attend workshops and meet regularly with senior officers of the Council.

On 19th July 2013 I fronted a Disability and Access Conference for residents and groups promoted by the Council through the Access Group with the two main programmed items being a presentation on the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre and to seek opinion on how best to make the Borough's shops services and amenities more accessible to people with disabilities. There was plenty of opportunity to make points and some valuable suggestions were made. The elderly were well represented and their voice was heard.

Very recently arising out of this a retailer's guide has been produced by the Council with support from the Regeneration Trust and will help towards making Bracknell Forest a welcoming place for all. This is in addition to Disabled Go, the website guide for disabled and vulnerable to premises and facilities.

A main aspect is access to information and services. The Council provides a range of access and communication channels such as Customer Services at Time Square, telephone through the main contact centre or alternatively a dedicated social care line. A website which has an accessibility accreditation is updated regularly and the Town and Country newspaper is a main source of information. The Community Directory on the web is being developed to provide a wider range of information. A project is under way to develop digital inclusion and is taken up mainly by older people.

The interests of older people feature on the national agenda and this is reflected locally.

Adult Social Care has identified enhancing quality of life for people with care and support needs, promoting independence, delaying and reducing the need for care and support, ensuring people have a positive experience of care and support and safeguarding adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protecting them from avoidable harm, and is working towards these objectives. In doing its work the department has a number of teams. The Community Response and Reablement Team has Front Desk staff to make sure people are put in touch with the right team. Those other teams which include Emergency Duty Service Team, Older People and Long Term Conditions Team, Direct Payments Team and Safeguarding Team, work towards helping and supporting people and work with partners including

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Public Health. Forest Care provides emergency and out of hours care with a responder service.

Public Health is involved in a number of wards with "Holistic Health" a one stop approach giving advice and support from a range of professionals, health trainers, nutritionists, GP's, exercise professionals, CAB and Community Safety. Public Health is also involved with NHS health checks for older people, influenza vaccination, enhanced home support, and dementia awareness. A new falls strategy is being developed to identify those at risk and support them before injury. Locally hip fractures due to falls are above the national trend.

Health provision has seen firstly the establishment of the local Health and Wellbeing Board whose work will be of concern to older people and secondly in April via the health community a new Urgent Care Centre at Brants Bridge which will facilitate access to medical services locally.

Accommodation for older people has seen the Council assist in procuring the development of 65 flats, under an extra care scheme, for older people at Clement House on part of the old Garth School site including 51 affordable properties.

Elsewhere there are a range of matters touching on older people including over 50's activity sessions, concessionary pricing at leisure facilities, bus passes, mobile scooter training, community transport, assistance with waste collection, parking passes.

Learning for older people provided by the Council is exemplified in Community Learning Courses at the Open Learning Centre.

Schools have been involved in inviting elderly people to lunch and to talk over times past and this has been welcomed by older people.

On Community Safety the Community Safety Plan in focussing on vulnerable groups has regard to the elderly in relation to its priorities which currently include domestic abuse and internet crime.

Trading Standards are involved in giving talks to care homes and community groups such as lunch clubs and social clubs in relation to consumer advice, food hygiene, health and safety, and rogue traders. Additionally to talks advice on nutrition and nutritional surveys and food hygiene information as for meals on wheels is given with general food sampling, including supplements aimed at the elderly, being carried out.

The above is a thumbnail sketch of the Council's activities.

The brief to ensure that full consideration is given to the impact of Council activities and decisions upon older people entails being aware of what those activities and decisions are. I seek to make myself aware of those activities and decisions.

My role is made easier by what I see as the willingness of officers to support the dignity and wellbeing of older people and I am obliged for the help I have had from them in preparing this report. In general conversation I have not been made aware of any issues.

In addition to monitoring and meeting with officers as reported above I regularly attend Council and other meetings.

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I report that the Council serves older people well but that I will draw attention to any shortcoming I perceive or where I believe improvement might be made.

I commend my report to the Council.

Councillor Clifton Thompson
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Small Business Champion Councillor Wade



1 Introduction

The past year is likely to mark a turning point for the SMEs. After five years of an uncertain economic environment, last year is expected to be the first year since 2008 with a combined increase in aggregated employment and value-added of EU's SMEs. The total employment in the EU SMEs is expected to increase by 0.3% and value-added by 1% as compared to 2011.

Preliminary forecasts expect the positive developments further accelerating in 2014. Over the last three years, an increasing number of Member States have seen their small business sectors returning to an expansion of employment and value-added, or at least a petering out of the decline. If the macroeconomic conditions hold, this development would mark the end of the most challenging crisis the European SMEs have experienced in the recent history.

Annual Report on European SMEs

2 Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership

The Group is involved with a range individual work streams including:

- Community
 - Forging links between the community and business social responsibility
- Skills and Employment
 - Jobs Fair 846 people with approximately 20 managing to secure jobs
 - Bracknell and Wokingham College had been working with industry to identify their requirements and gaps in educational provision.
 - National Apprenticeship Week had been used to promote the variety of opportunities available.
 - Fourth Bracknell Forest Careers Event in October 14
- Infrastructure
 - Exploring a range of scenarios that could contribute to improving the journey time between Bracknell and Waterloo
 - Heathrow expansion implications
- Inward Investment
- Link into the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) communications work in order to promote Bracknell Forest as a place to do business.

3 Thames Valley Berkshire LEP

The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership LEP has committed £7.3 million of capital to create a new Funding Escalator, which will offer finance to SMEs that can deliver growth, in line with the remit given to LEPs by government. This is a cornerstone of the government's strategy for LEPs – to achieve growth locally. This element is part of a balanced strategy

by the LEP that focusses on strategic infrastructure; employment and skills; and aims to develop the next generation of businesses that can contribute to job creation and the prosperity of the sub region.

The Funding Escalator is an initiative led by TVB LEP. It comprises a series of repayable loans and went live on 1 February 2013:

- £1.75 million has been allocated for a commercialisation scheme, which will support newly established companies that need limited support to enhance their market position.
- £4 million has been allocated for an expansion scheme, which will support development to scale up a business and accelerate its growth.
- £1.5 million has been allocated to a growth or equity scheme, which is designed to support ambitious growing businesses and will be released when matched with private funds.

The FSE Group (an independent not-for-profit Community Interest Company) is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority, and will be responsible for managing the Fund on behalf of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

4 Superfast Berkshire (Broadband)

Superfast Berkshire aims to improve broadband speed and coverage across Berkshire in the areas that are not commercially viable to the private sector. It is part of a UK national initiative (led by Broadband Delivery UK) and backed by all six Berkshire unitary authorities and the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP.

Superfast Berkshire has signed a contract with BT to deliver improvements to the broadband infrastructure across the county, which is expected to be completed by September 2015.

In February 2014, Berkshire received an indicative allocation of £3.56m from an extra £250m of government funding to increase the superfast broadband coverage to in excess of 95% of the county by 2017.

5 Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)

Latest research from the FSB shows that more small businesses than ever are looking to export goods and services. Findings from the FSB's quarterly business index found that a net balance of 24 per cent of the FSB (200,000) members expect exports to rise in the next three months.

The FSB are working with Bracknell Forest Council, Bracknell Regeneration and our local MP to ensure that local businesses are consulted and have input to the redevelopment.

The FSB provide a very wide range of advice on their website:

- Education and Skills
- EU and International
- Employment and Regulation

- Environment and Rural Affairs
- Finance and the Economy
- Infrastructure
- Local Government & Communities
- Trade, Industry and Energy

6 Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub

Over the first year, Bracknell Enterprise & Innovation Hub has experienced a period of significant growth, which looks set to continue with four new businesses already signed-up this year.

Funded by Schroders and in partnership with Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and Bracknell Forest Council, the Hub is located in Ocean House and was created to provide essential and office facilities as part of the town's significant regeneration plans.

The first year has been an exciting time for since opening the Enterprise & Innovation Hub has expanded to an additional floor and has launched the Club B Lounge.

The level of interest already received this year, illustrates that Bracknell businesses are looking forward and emerging from difficult times to punch above their weight in helping to revive the local economy.

Managed by Oxford Innovation, the UK's leading operator of business and innovation centres, the Bracknell Enterprise & Innovation Hub offers a variety of space varying from 100 sq. ft. to 450 sq. ft. Shared and virtual offices are also available.

7 Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

The Chambers of Commerce's Quarterly Economic Survey published in April provides further evidence that the UK economy is continuing to grow. The results show that both export orders and sales in services are at new all-time highs, and many key manufacturing balances are also at record levels, showing that growth is strengthening in the short-term.

However, the Chamber believes that the recovery must become more balanced in the months ahead as it is still too reliant on consumer spending.

Access to finance remains a critical issue for businesses as they look to expand and meet growing order books, and rectifying this is vital if we are to transform our economy from being merely good, to being truly great.

8 Conclusion

The vast majority of SMEs are predicting strong growth in 2014. This supports recent reports that the UK will remain the fastest growing major European economy in 2014.

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There is a greater sense of optimism and enthusiasm among SMEs today for running their business as compared to previous years. It is also a promising to have so many businesses say they still really enjoy what they do.

SMEs appear to be interpreting market conditions better; after all, business acumen is really important in judging when to be prudent and when to grow.

Councillor Bob Wade

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Voluntary Sector Champion Councillor Finnie



Our Borough continues to be served by excellent very efficient volunteers who assist many of our residents of all ages from babes to senior citizens.

Many of us do not realise how much we rely on volunteers. Youngster groups such as brownies, guides, cubs, scouts, youth clubs, Sunday school classes, out of school classes and similar activities all exist as a result of volunteers.

Senior citizen clubs also rely on volunteers who provide tremendous support to our elderly who deserve to be looked after often after a lifetime of helping others.

One thing that I have found is how much many of our volunteers have benefited by helping others. Many have told me that they never realised how much they have enjoyed volunteering and how much they had gained.

However, what volunteers gain and enjoy is insignificant to the pleasure that they give to others and we are very grateful to them for their contribution.

The demand for volunteers increases with our rising and aging population. I would ask everyone to consider if they could do a little to help others. I realise many people have very demanding jobs but so do many of our hardest serving volunteers.

Our health facilities are making increased request for volunteers – this is the case with patient participation groups and the many charity groups assisting those of us with many of life's challenges. There are also requests for volunteers from Healthwatch and the new Urgent Care Centre.

Possibly the greatest challenge to local voluntary groups has been the changes to Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action. However, this is now settling down with Janet Dean as Chief Executive and I have arranged to meet Janet regularly to give what support I can.

The Borough Council are very grateful to voluntary groups and individuals and I would be pleased to hear from anyone experiencing any problems at present and I will try to assist. Unfortunately, one of the problems of the Borough Council freezing the council tax for several years means that Council grants are very restricted but we may be able to advise on places for financial support.

Working together in order to help one another is the ideal aim of volunteering and, I do not believe, no one should disagree with this so let us all try to do a little more as we can all gain.

Many thanks to ALL VOLUNTEERS.

Councillor James G. Finnie

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