

TO: EXECUTIVE
23 SEPTEMBER 2014

WORK PLAN FOR THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE SERVICE
Assistant Chief Executive

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks the Executive's endorsement to the work programme for the newly-established Business and Enterprise Service (BES) and requests authority from members to draw from the Economic Development Reserve to fund the plan for the period up to 31 March 2016.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Executive endorses the work plan for the Business and Enterprise Service (BES) as set out at Annex One and authorizes funds to be drawn down from the Economic Development Reserve to fund the plan for the period up to 31 March 2016.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Council's sixth strategic priority is to "sustain economic prosperity" for the Borough. The Council has recently created a dedicated team to support the delivery of this priority and the team's work plan is presented for endorsement.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None. The work plan is a fundamental requirement to ensure that the new team has a clear and deliverable programme of work to support economic development within the borough.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 In 2012, members established a task group to better understand the local economy and the drivers of economic success in Bracknell Forest, to develop a council vision for business, and to set a direction to support that vision. Considerable work has been done since then including commissioning MORI research on business perceptions, establishing the member vision (set out in the draft work plan at Annex 1), and developing a practical approach to supporting economic success informed by an all-member workshop. Work has also been done to develop a promotional brand for the area for business.
- 5.2 In December 2013, the Members endorsed the creation of a dedicated team in the Chief Executive's Office to deliver support for business. Since then, that team has been recruited and is now in place. Their key progress over the past eight months include: securing £7m for the borough through the Local Growth Deal and supporting Honda UK HQ relocation into the borough.

Unrestricted

- 5.3 In parallel, the Council was successful in attracting funding from the Local Government Association to support the preparation of an economic development work plan. Consultants, Renaisi, were appointed to do this work which forms the basis for the attached initial work plan at Annex One. Given the importance of this issue to members, approval is sought for this programme of work.
- 5.4 Appendix One sets out the delivery programme for the first thirty months of the new service. A key project within the work plan is to produce a robust, ambitious but achievable Local Economic Framework for the borough which will have a long term (ten-year) perspective. The plan will focus upon retaining existing businesses and helping to bring about the conditions where they can grow and thrive, attracting targeted inward investment, and supporting small and medium sized business and, wherever possible, generate indigenous enterprise, especially in the potentially high growth, technology- and knowledge-based sectors.
- 5.5 It is envisaged that the Local Economic Framework will present five Economic Priorities (EP): These correspond to priorities in the Local Enterprise Partnership recently approved Strategic Economic Plan. For the avoidance of doubt, these are not set out in priority order.
- EP ONE:** Retention and engagement;
EP TWO: Promotion and investment;
EP THREE: Generating enterprise;
EP FOUR: Skills and learning;
EP FIVE: Infrastructure improvement.
- 5.6 The new team will deliver programmes from the work plan under each of these priorities. The early work of the BES will be to put in place the foundations and systems to create a modern, responsive, well-informed and business-focused economic development operation. The number one priority (from a systems perspective) will be to start the work on creating a comprehensive Business Information and Intelligence System. At the heart of this will be business and property database, a business contact system (incorporating account management principles) and a customer relationship management programme (wherever possible utilizing existing systems and assets). Allied to this will be commencing work on developing an effective business website to replace the existing business web presence and the gradual introduction of other promotional tools. We also need to define and continuously refine the “user and customer experience” (UX) utilizing the digital services team within the Council and how this can be delivered in the most effective manner. Much of this work is underway already.
- 5.7 In addition to producing the Local Economic Framework for the borough some of the key highlights of the work plan for the next two years include:
- 5.7.1 **Engaging with businesses through the creation of a Business Contact Programme (BCP).** This will provide a step change improvement in the Council's engagement with local businesses who are of strategic importance to the borough. The programme use using established account management principles. It is envisaged that senior officers (and leading members) will be assigned key businesses to visit over the following year (it will be a rolling annual programme).
- 5.7.2 **Undertaking a series business surveys to help understand the needs of local businesses to ensure the overall competitiveness of the borough can be maintained and economy grow.** Undertaking a business survey will be a key work

plan priority for the BES. The current thinking is to produce a series of subject focused surveys rather than wait to produce one large, all encompassing, comprehensive survey. The first two surveys will focus upon infrastructure and skills needs.

- 5.7.3 **A new partnership will be established between business and statutory regulators and enforcement agencies.** The aim of the partnership will be to foster greater understanding between the local authority regulators (and wider, if possible) on the one side and business on the other. It will enable the Council to be more responsive to business enquiries generally, local understanding and trust, create greater awareness, promote engagement with the businesses and establish an important programme that, over time, promotes transformational change in relationships and new ways of working. The purpose is to help businesses and regulators understand each other, to make it easier and faster to do business.
- 5.7.4 **Creation of an inward investment strategy.** The inward investment strategy will mesh closely with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and significant efforts will be made to co-ordinate, where appropriate and in the best interests of the borough, with the Berkshire Economic Development Officers' Group (BEDOG); closer working relationships will be fostered between the Inward Investment and Re-investment division of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) and United Kingdom Trade and Investment (UKTI).
- 5.7.5 **Promotional development, (including the Bracknell Forest business “brand”) and the creation of a new business-centric web site.** The BES will build upon the promotion and branding work to promote the borough as a first choice business location. The web will be a key entry point to access the BES and a major redesign of the council website to business has already started.
- 5.7.6 **Progressing employment and skills.** The BES will work with partners to identify current and future skills needs and likely future gaps, and link to the TVB LEP, for example, where there are opportunities to draw down funding for training. A key element will be the City Deal, were external funding has already been secured to support the work.
- 5.7.7 **Develop a comprehensive Apprenticeship programme within the Council and borough generally.** The BES will lead on the issue of Apprenticeships within the Council and externally; in particular, investigations will be made to encourage construction contractors to make extensive use of apprentices, particularly in relation to the town centre redevelopment. This will co-ordinate and build upon the many activities already in train.
- 5.7.8 These are examples of key programmes under the main priorities but the full programme is shown in the work plan document (Annex One).

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 No further comments.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The costs associated with the Business and Enterprise Service work plan to 31st March 2016 are set out in Appendix Two.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 See attachment to this report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The risks are that without the council putting in place the necessary measures to assist economic prosperity that more companies might leave the area and further jobs be lost

Other Officers

- 6.5 The BES work plan has been presented to all DMTs and any comments incorporated into the report and appendices.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 We are currently consulting with members of the Economic and Skills Development Partnership. The Member Champions have been consulted and the draft plan has been consulted on widely within the Council.

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Ongoing involvement of partners during regular scheduled meetings and through the work-streams monitoring process and consultation with them about the work plan.

Representations Received

- 7.3 None.

Background Papers

None

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