

**TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
20 MARCH 2014**

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**Economic and Skills Development Partnership  
Update Briefing Report  
Assistant Chief Executive**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report highlights the work of the Bracknell Forest Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) since the last update to the Commission in March 2013. The report touches on the majority, though not all, of the work of the ESDP. In particular, the focus is on issues raised by the Commission together with top priority action and new work.
- 1.2 The Partnership produces quarterly economic indicators, in collaboration with Local Futures, a specialist economics consultancy. These are attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Members should note that the ESDP relies on partners to deliver the Action Plan as well as Council officers, and the Partnership, is fortunate, to enjoy strong support from business and other partners. With regard to the Council's contribution, this has been constrained due to staffing and resource issues. However, this has not prevented the ESDP moving forward to continue its remit of building the economic prosperity of the borough through retention of existing businesses and the acquisition of new firms. This has meant that officers (and partners) have worked in smart ways, and found opportunities to harness collaboration as much as possible. The importance of continued investment in economic development has been recognised by the Council and has led to the remodelling/augmentation of the team to form a new Business and Enterprise Team over coming months.

**2 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the Commission notes the report.**

**3 KEY ACTIONS SINCE THE LAST COMMISSION UPDATE INCLUDE:**

- a) Action Plan performance: The Partnership is strongly focused on action and has implemented a "traffic light" review of progress against its aims and objectives. We are pleased to report that over the past year, out of 46 actions, 35 are complete or on track (76%). Some actions have been shelved due to lack of resource and reshaping of the objectives in line with local economic changes.
- b) Increased business representation: New representatives from Waitrose and the TRL, bringing professional expertise in HR, training and infrastructure issues.
- c) Careers Event: Held in October 2013. Attracted nearly 80 employers and the majority of the Year 11 students from the borough's schools. Mentoring and interview/job application advice provided on a one-to-one basis in an evening session. This now brings the total students helped to over 4,000 in the past two years.

- d) **Inward Investment:** Work to build investment relationships with the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China), specifically China included being part of an outbound delegation with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, plus hosting inbound delegations from Sun Yat Sen University, Hubei, Jiangsu, Nanking and Beijing. Joint work is ongoing with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Tianjin. Resource currently constrains activity with other BRIC and now MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey), economies.
- e) **Superfast Broadband:** The ESDP recognises the changing definition of 'Superfast' but it is more about being a 'global player.' There is still more to do in this area. A contract has now been let to deliver Superfast Broadband across the borough (and the other five unitary authority areas). This will result in Bracknell Forest enjoying the highest proportion of premises served by Superfast Broadband of any Berkshire unitary (96%). Work has started and will be complete by 2015. In January, the Government announced a further £3.56m of funding under a new 'Superfast Extension Programme' to fill the gaps for areas missed out under the current contract. Officers are investigating the value for money with regard to Bracknell Forest.
- f) **Bracknell Enterprise and Innovation Hub:** Operational in Ocean House, Bracknell, and provides 1,900 sq ft of floorspace for start-up companies and small businesses. In particular, under the auspices of the ESDP, the Council has supported the creation of an innovation business lounge, where home-based entrepreneurs can collaborate, network, and access training and advice. Oxford Innovations provide the service. This space is likely to be developed into an expanded business growth hub under the City Deal (see later in this report). In the meantime, demand for the space has grown such that Oxford Innovations are planning to equip another floor for small business/start up accommodation.

The Partnership recognises the importance of networking in a 'knowledge economy' and is in the process of developing a new workstream around 'business community' to enhance the cross fertilisation of ideas and new entrepreneurs.

- g) **Local Enterprise Partnership: Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).** For the first time, the LEP has written a plan, driven by the needs of business, to secure Government funding in support of the Berkshire economy. The ESDP works closely with the LEP (indeed, one of the LEP Forum Directors is the Chairman of the ESDP, and the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development is also a Director on the Forum). The ESDP has formally responded to the draft SEP to ensure that the borough's needs are understood by the LEP but also ensure the borough benefits through active participation from a Berkshire-wide view of economic development.

Strategic Berkshire infrastructure developments need to consider the borough's direction and the LEPs' Implementation Plan will have an impact on the direction of the ESDP going forward.

- h) **City Deal:** This Cabinet Office-initiated programme involved The LEP together with all six Berkshire unitary authorities. The project aims to, inter alia, halve youth unemployment, promote business growth and deliver much better co-ordination between agencies. The City Deal is overseen by the

Employment and Skills Sub Group for the ESDP, Chaired by the Principal of Bracknell and Wokingham College. The Government has allocated £2.4m to the project in Berkshire. An early winning development could be a co-ordinated impartial centre for careers advice for young people.

- i) Heathrow Airport expansion: The ESDP has written to the Davies Commission and Heathrow Airport Ltd to formally express its support for the expansion of Heathrow airport, given the Airport's fundamental importance to the economic success of Bracknell Forest. This was welcomed by Heathrow Airport Ltd, with an immediate response by their Director for Public Affairs attending an ESDP meeting shortly afterwards to share their plans for future expansion.
- j) Improved rail service to London Waterloo: A key priority for the ESDP. Following the lead from Bracknell Forest officers, an economic impact study has been commissioned jointly by the Bracknell Forest, Wokingham and Reading Councils, together with the LEP. The first draft report has only recently been received but the initial findings look very encouraging in terms of supporting the case for a faster/more frequent rail service.

#### **4 FUTURE PLANS**

- 4.1 The Partnership will focus on actions as set out above. In addition, the Local Economic Development Strategy runs to 2014. It will need to be reviewed, in the light of the final draft of the SEP which will provide an overarching framework.

Contact for further information

Victor Nicholls – Assistant Chief Executive

[Victor.nicholls@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:Victor.nicholls@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

01344 355604