

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT

Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee - 17 March 2016

Report of Lesley Bowles - Chief Officer for Communities and Business

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of: Supporting and developing the Local economy from the Corporate Plan and supporting the Dynamic and Sustainable economy priorities in the Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Roderick Hogarth

Contact Officer Emily Haswell - Economic Development Officer

Recommendation to Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee:

To be updated on progress with delivery of the Economic Development Strategy and its associated action plan.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform Members of the progress made to date with delivery of the Council's Economic Development strategy and associated action plan.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Economic Development Strategy sets out an extensive action plan to be delivered in conjunction with partner organisations. The majority of actions are expected to be completed by the end of 2018. However it is recognised that this strategy has a number of ongoing activities and will need to evolve to fit economic conditions and external changes during the strategy lifetime.
- 2 A summary of progress to date is given below and further monitoring information will be circulated in advance of the meeting. The majority of actions remain on target for delivery during the lifetime of the strategy.
- 3 **The Economic Development Strategy** is a broad-ranging document with challenging targets, some of which are influenced by external factors. At the time the document was adopted the economic downturn had affected the national economy. Sevenoaks as an area with over 90% small and micro businesses also felt the impact. West Kent although seen as a prosperous area has a high cost of living and a direct relationship to the city of London,

meaning the impacts of the downturn in London were felt locally. Despite the economic climate, Sevenoaks District has continued to maintain its position relative to other local areas and has continued to have low unemployment, 0.8% (NOMIS 2015) high numbers of Micro businesses 90.3% (0-9 employees) (NOMIS 2015) and a high percentage of people working from home. Our work on the Economic Development Strategy Action plan is therefore important to maintain and enhance our Economic position and to provide additional support services for our business community alongside our residents.

4 Strategic Objective 1 - Inward Investment.

Future activities will include a brochure marketing the District as a potential location for new business including information on forthcoming development projects. Changes in permitted development rights have had an impact as they now allow changes of use from office to residential and this is expected to present a significant threat to the supply of office floor space in the District meaning that some targets are likely become difficult to achieve. As part of the Local Plan review the Council has appointed a consultant to undertake an Economic Needs Study. This study will indicate the amount and type of employment land which the District needs to remain sustainable. Planning and Economic Development Teams are working jointly on this study.

5 Strategic Objective 2 - Skills and Support

A number of different forms of business support are in place and programmes are being delivered. LEP funding for business support has been received and a programme was developed through the West Kent Partnership which delivers 6 hours free business support in a number of sectors. Real Business newsletter is now being sent to an increasing number of businesses; further work is to take place to redesign the template used and to enable capture of data and feedback from readers. The new SDC website will allow an opportunity to further enhance business pages in the future. The Escalate scheme is currently closed to applications. Whilst in place Sevenoaks had 6 successful applications gaining £594,000 between them and aiming to create 33.6 jobs and safeguard 18.17 jobs. We are now working to ensure businesses are ready to access the successor scheme which will be made up from the recycled fund. Further work is required on the targets relating to education and skills, working with partners and the Community Plan sub group. These will be achieved during the strategy lifetime.

6 Related to both Strategic objectives 1 and 2 is the Team Around Your Business project. This is designed to provide a soft landing for businesses wishing to locate within the District as well as offering a single point of contact and support to businesses already in Sevenoaks. The Team Around Your Business officer group meets regularly and has considered how this project links with Better Business for All (BBfa) a Government initiative to improve the relationship between regulators and businesses. Further work is to take place to ensure that the project is on track and producing reportable outcomes.

- 7 **Strategic Objective 3 - Transport and Infrastructure**
Broadband connectivity is gradually improving, but progress is inevitably slow. We continue to work closely with Kent County Council to ensure that Sevenoaks areas are high on their agenda for support. This work will continue throughout the strategy lifetime and beyond. Swanley station is now within London Transport Zone 8 and Oyster card was available from March 2016. Further extensions to London Transport zones for Bat and Ball and Eynsford are unlikely to be achieved before 2021, and therefore represent an unachievable target. Further work is required over the next year to develop improved car parking, ease congestion and to ensure protection from extreme weather.
- 8 **Strategic Objective 4 - Energy and Sustainability**
A successful series of STEM workshops have been delivered to businesses. Further work is to be done to ensure that the better relationship with businesses developed as part of Strategic Objective 2 can help to market additional future advice and training in this area. Further energy efficiency packs are to be printed and distributed at future business events.
- 9 **Strategic Objective 5 - Places for Growth and Improvement**
As part of the development of a new local plan, Economic Development is working closely with Planning officers to help ensure the future economy is supported and are jointly reviewing and recommissioning a number of key documents and studies. The Swanley and Hextable masterplan is in progress and has enabled over 1200 people to give their views during the public consultation week. Ongoing work with a number of areas including New Ash Green, Westerham and Edenbridge will continue as well as discussions on the future of Fort Halsted.
- 10 **Strategic Objective 6 - Rural Economy**
Funding for rural businesses is now available through the Leader programme, West Kent Partnership are offering additional business support for businesses wishing to apply for this scheme. In addition local food producers have been supported by Produced in Kent funded through the West Kent Business Support Programme. - Numbers across West Kent have already exceeded the target number of businesses assisted. Continued regular engagement takes place with rural landowners.
- 11 **Strategic Objective 7 - Tourism**
The delivery of Tourism has recently become part of the Economic Development and Property Team. Much work has already been completed by the Communities team and the delivery is on target. Additional support to businesses has already taken place, a successful Bed and Breakfast workshop was delivered in November. 42 people attended and has resulted in 2 businesses opening up and 2 more in the process of setting up. Further workshops and networking meetings are planned for the forthcoming year. Additional work with local businesses and Tourism partners will take place to support Tourism businesses and to improve marketing of the District as a Tourism Destination. .

Financial

There are no financial implications for the delivery of the strategy which is resourced through the Economic Development budget and by working in partnership with other organisations.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal implications for delivery of the Economic Development Strategy Action Plan.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

The delivery of the Economic Development Strategy Action Plan is progressing well and work will continue to ensure that the majority of actions are achieved. This involves extensive work with partner organisations from Officers across a number of SDC Departments

Appendix (to follow)

Economic Development Strategy Action Plan

Background Papers:

[Economic Development Strategy](#)

Lesley Bowles

Chief Officer for Community and Business