

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE – 6TH SEPTEMBER 2011

TITLE OF REPORT – BUSINESS SUPPORT

Report of the: Corporate Resources Director

Status: For information

Executive Summary: This report updates Members on work relating to business support.

This report supports the Dynamic Economy priority in the Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder Cllrs. Mrs Clark and Mrs. Davison

Head of Service Head of Community Development – Lesley Bowles

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED that: this report be NOTED

Background

1 Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2010 indicates that Sevenoaks District has a very high percentage of small businesses. 78% of businesses in the District have fewer than 5 employees, 90% of businesses have fewer than 10 employees and 98% of businesses have fewer than 50 employees.

2 The biggest sectors within the District are as follows:

Professional, scientific and technical 19%

(However, this may change following the loss of GlaxoSmithKline and news that DSTL at Fort Halstead will be relocating over the next five years.)

Construction 15%

Business administration and support 8%

Wholesale 8%

Retail and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation at 7% each are the next two biggest sectors in the District. The ONS data does not include tourism as a sector. However, tourism is a major contributor to the local economy and is likely be a combination of Accommodation & Food Services (4%)' and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation and Other Services (7%).

Introduction

- 3 The Council's Community Development team, under the direction of the Director for Corporate Resources, co-ordinates work on economic development and support for businesses. Whilst Officer resources are limited, a programme of activity is maintained and this report updates Members on current work.

The main focus of work is currently:

- Support for businesses;
- Working with other organisations to ensure that the District's economic needs are addressed;
- Improving information for businesses about the Council's services; and
- Raising the profile of opportunities to improve broadband and, where possible, assisting communities and businesses to access these.

- 4 The following information updates Members on these four areas of work.

Support for businesses

- 5 Business Link, the government-funded provider of **business advice**, announced that the Business Link South East service will close on 25th November 2011. At the start of April 2011 the Business Link website became the Government's comprehensive online resource for businesses. Alongside this is a network of private mentoring organisations from which businesses can seek help.
- 6 Through the Kent Economic Development Officers' Group, the provision of **local assistance** for businesses is being sought through Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, who are applying for external funding and through a local mentoring agency included on the Government website. The outcome of these plans is awaited.
- 7 Business Link South East have provided in 2011, two **business start up** workshops in the District called 'Is it for Me?', helping people who are thinking of starting their own business. The first of these took place in March 2011 in Swanley and was fully booked with 20 participants, all of whom gave positive feedback about the workshop. A second workshop took place in Edenbridge in July 2011 and was well-attended by 13 participants. Feedback from participants was that they would like further networking opportunities. Younger participants commented that they particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet business colleagues with greater business experience and make local connections.
- 8 In 2010/11 the Council organised 3 **business breakfasts** which enabled local businesses to meet the Economic Development Portfolio Holders and the Leader of the Council and to take part in a short training session. As part of the event, training was provided by Business Link South East on 'funding

opportunities' and 'marketing'. Workshops in Swanley and Edenbridge were well-attended with positive feedback from participants. The workshop scheduled for Sevenoaks was under-subscribed and was cancelled. This may have been due to the very successful networking opportunities provided in Sevenoaks town by the Town Council.

- 9 Discussions with K College are taking place regarding further **workshops** once the Business Link South East service ends in November. K College is keen to make contact with local businesses and will provide expert speakers at low or no cost. The District Council will use these sessions to provide further networking opportunities. The events will be held in Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Swanley and the following topics have been agreed with K College:
- Excellent customer services
 - Business marketing (possibly combined with social media)
 - Boost Your Profits
- 10 Information about support for businesses, the economy and other issues relevant to businesses is regularly disseminated through **Twitter which already has more than 200 followers.**
- 11 Work has taken place to identify owners of **empty shops** with a view to getting permission to put local community information into shop windows or to open up shops for community groups. There has been a good response from community groups who would like to advertise or use empty shops. Unfortunately, the response from owners and agents has been very poor.
- 12 Tourism businesses are supported through Visit Kent, with whom the District Council has a service agreement.

Work with other organisations to ensure that the District's economic needs are addressed

- 13 The District Council is a member of the **West Kent Partnership**, made up of Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils. The current focus of the Partnership's work is to deliver the West Kent Investment Strategy, to make representations about the A21 and form links with other authorities along the A21 corridor, to represent West Kent views at the Local Enterprise Partnership, to strengthen business engagement, and to seek European funding to help achieve these priorities.
- 14 The **West Kent Investment Strategy** identifies local priorities such as promoting West Kent as an area in which to do business, supporting apprenticeships, nurturing graduates into the West Kent economy, developing the value of the rural economy and tourism.
- 15 As a member of the Local Strategic Partnership, the need to improve **employment and training prospects** of young people leaving school and

university has been highlighted as a priority for the Community Plan Delivery Fund, through which small pots of external funding are available to help deliver Community Plan priorities.

- 16 The team has worked with Voluntary Action Within Kent (VAWK) to offer to volunteer **internships** to newly qualified graduates. This project enables local businesses and other agencies to benefit from the skills and enthusiasm of newly-qualified graduates resident in the District. At the same time local young people benefit from training and mentoring opportunities with senior managers and the local economy retains the knowledge of local graduates.
- 17 Following the announcement concerning the relocation of DSTL from **Fort Halstead**, an approach was made by the Leader of the Council and local MPs to the Minister at MoD asking for assistance to deal with the immediate impact of the relocation on the local community and local economy and to work towards a long-term solution regarding the site. Further meetings are taking place between the landowners and their agents with the Leader and Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources. Contact has also been made with Job Centre Plus, Locate in Kent, Kent County Council and DSTL.

Improving information about the Council's services

- 18 In an attempt to improve local businesses' access to Council services, a new business pack is being developed, to be included in the Economic Development pages of the Council's website. The pack will give concise information about the services that the Council provides that are relevant to businesses. As part of this work, a library of photographs suitable for promoting business in the District will also be compiled. The services covered will include:
 - Advertising in In Shape
 - Apprenticeships and graduate recruitment information
 - Business rates
 - Business support
 - Building Control advice
 - Business parking permits
 - Corporate health and fitness membership of leisure centres
 - Crime reduction advice, Pubwatch and Shopsafe
 - Licensing
 - Local searches
 - Markets
 - Pest control
 - Pre-application planning advice
 - Private landlord accreditation scheme
 - Procurement and the prompt payment code
 - Sustainable business (climate change)
 - Support for tourism businesses
 - Trade waste and recycling
 - Volunteering opportunities for staff

Broadband

- 19 Officers are raising the profile of opportunities to improve broadband and, where possible, assisting communities and businesses to access these. Currently, there are two opportunities:
- 20 Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK)
- The first round of the BDUK winners were announced on the 27th May.
 - The successful projects were awarded to Norfolk, Wiltshire and Devon and Somerset who will now share a £50 million fund to improve their rural broadband. KCC had made a £42 million bid which was unsuccessful.
 - Early indications are that the KCC bid did not match the BDUK assessment of the need in Kent. KCC have been allocated funds but at the moment are still awaiting details of the amount.
- 21 Kent County Council Superfast Broadband Pilot
- The results of the first round of the Superfast Broadband Pilots were announced by KCC on the 20th May 2011. Each successful bidder was given up to £100,000 to improve broadband in their area. None of the parishes in Sevenoaks District made a bid for this fund in the first round.
 - We have been told that the next round of funding will start in August 2011 with bids having to be submitted at some point in September. We will be looking to support and assist any of our parishes who are interested in bidding. However, it is absolutely clear that successful bids are most likely to come from communities where considerable local effort has been made in identifying need and it is therefore essential that any bids are supported by enthusiastic communities who have the time to compile evidence.
 - The following parishes may make a bid in the next round: Seal, Weald, Hever, Cowden, Eynsford, Chiddingstone, Sundridge and Ide Hill and Edenbridge.

Key Implications

Financial

- 22 Work on economic development and business support is funded from existing budgets. In addition, external funding is sought wherever possible to support new pieces of work or projects.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 23 There are no legal or human rights issues associated with this report.

Resource (non-financial)

- 24 Staff time available to devote to business support is limited to half of the Community Planning and Project Officer's time and a graduate intern post. In addition, a corporate working group of officers whose work impacts on economic development meets regularly.

Risk Assessment Statement

Risk	Mitigation
Resources to deliver this work are limited	A network of colleagues and organisations who are able assist in the delivery of business support is maintained. The Corporate Resources Director chairs a corporate working group which co-ordinates input to economic development from other teams in the Council. This includes, for example, planning, the use of the Council's own property, tourism, leisure, the Hero project, the Leader project, business rates.

Sources of Information:

Department from Business Innovation at Skills
"Bigger Better Business: Helping small firms,
start-up, grow and prosper" (BIS, 2011)

West Kent Investment Strategy

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