

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

23 June 2015

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY

To set out proposed amendments to the draft strategy in the light of comments received on the consultation draft and to recommend adoption of the strategy as amended.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A report was made to this Board on 25th February 2015 setting out a draft strategy to guide our work on economic regeneration. The need for a clear and concise strategy was recommended by the Council's Peer Challenge review which took place in 2014. This involved an independent team of senior council officers and Members from other local authorities, appointed by the Local Government Association, who reviewed the Council's corporate business but with a particular focus on our work on economic regeneration. Specifically, the Peer Challenge team recommended that a more formal economic regeneration strategy was required which:

‘links and guides the Council's investment across a range of services and projects, jointly owned by elected members and officers across the Council’.

1.1.2 The draft Strategy has now been the subject of consultation and the purpose of this report is to present a final draft for approval, amended to take account of the comments received and to reflect views of local businesses on future economic priorities for the West Kent area.

1.2 Results of Consultation

1.2.1 A number of formal responses were received during the consultation period which can be summarised as follows:

- The need to strengthen references to the role of Council's procurement processes in supporting local businesses and social enterprises;
- A need to refer to the key role of the new local plan in allocating sufficient land to meet future employment needs;

- Reference needed to the employment training role of East Malling Research;
- References needed to the role of Town and Parish councils in supporting economic regeneration including via neighbourhood plans;
- Inclusion of needed improvements to the A20 corridor to relieve local congestion;
- A need to encourage the provision of new housing to meet local skills needs including that for key workers;
- Wider recognition of tourism as a borough-wide activity.

1.2.2 In addition to these comments, a number of organisations have indicated their support for the strategy including Mid Kent College, the Centre for Micro Business, West Kent Partnership, Sevenoaks District Council and Circle Russet Housing.

1.2.3 Feedback from local businesses is also important in helping to shape the final version of the strategy. The West Kent Partnership hosted a business breakfast in Tonbridge as part of a West Kent Business2Business event in March of this year and this event was used to consult on local economic priorities. Some 80 participants attended the event. In summary, the following key issues for local businesses were highlighted:

- a need to attract new businesses and additional inward investment into West Kent via marketing and promotion and the identification of new site opportunities for business and industrial use;
- Improving connectivity and traffic congestion by focusing investment on tackling key pinch points in the road network;
- A need to improve both broadband and mobile phone coverage focusing on specific locations where services are currently poor;
- Recognising and dealing with local skills shortages including lower level skills and the housing difficulties faced by workers on lower incomes;
- The provision of additional support for businesses both for start-ups and those wishing to expand.

1.2.4 A number of the issues raised are already generally covered in the Strategy's draft action plan. However, references to the need to better promote the area for inward investment, dealing with traffic congestion pinch points including the A20, and the need to improve local mobile phone coverage could usefully be included as new actions.

1.2.5 In addition to the above amendments, a new section has been inserted into the strategy dealing with future monitoring arrangements and suggesting a small number of key economic indicators to help judge future progress.

1.2.6 A final draft of the revised strategy is attached as Annex 1 to this report.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 The actions set out in the strategy can be funded from existing budgets.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 n/a

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 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.

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 That the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy, as set out at Annex 1 to this report, **BE APPROVED**.

Background papers:

Nil

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