

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

Tuesday, 23rd June, 2015

Present: Cllr S M King (Chairman), Cllr S R J Jessel (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs S M Barker, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr C P Smith, Cllr F G Tombolis, Cllr B W Walker and Cllr T C Walker

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, P F Bolt, V M C Branson, D J Cure, N J Heslop, B J Luker, M R Rhodes, H S Rogers and Miss S O Shrubsole were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M C Base

ERG 15/9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

ERG 15/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board held on 25 February 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ERG 15/11 INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION

A presentation on the Borough Council's economic regeneration agenda, covering the wider economic context, West Kent partnership working and the delivery of local business support services, was provided by the Chief Corporate Policy Officer.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration welcomed the Economic Regeneration Officer to Tonbridge and Malling and indicated that this role demonstrated the Borough Council's commitment to economic regeneration and activity.

ERG 15/12 ECONOMIC OVERVIEW OF TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH

The report of the Chief Executive set out an economic overview of the borough in order to demonstrate recent trends and provided the most up-to-date statistics on the current performance of the local economy.

Annex 1 to the report provided a range of socio-economic statistics which gave an overall indication of the performance of the Borough. It was noted that the local economy continued to perform well overall within the county-wide and national context although there were still inherent weaknesses, such as pockets of deprivation.

Serious consideration was given to a range of issues, including the significance, credibility and reliability of statistics, the unemployment rate in the Borough compared to its West Kent neighbours and the disparity between males and females.

Members were pleased to note the positive position for 3 year business survival rates, which at 77.6% compared favourably to Sevenoaks District and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils.

However, concern was expressed that 20% of people aged 16 years and above had no formal qualifications at all. Reference was made to the Family Focus Programme which helped local families experiencing social deprivation improve their circumstances and education and skills represented an important aspect of this support.

It was suggested that Mid Kent and Hadlow Colleges be invited to a future meeting of the Advisory Board to outline their current educational and training programmes.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

ERG 15/13 BOROUGH ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY

The report of the Chief Executive set out proposed amendments to the draft Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy to reflect comments received as part of the consultation process.

A number of responses had highlighted the need to better promote the area for inward investment, deal with traffic congestion pinch points, including the A20, and the need to improve local mobile phone coverage. It was reported that these issues were included as new actions in the Strategy. In addition, a number of key economic indicators had been identified to help judge future progress and these had been included in the Strategy.

The revised Strategy was attached as Annex 1 to the report.

Members noted references to investment to prevent local flooding, the role of Locate in Kent in identifying employment opportunities and land; ongoing consultation regarding improvements to broadband and the potential opportunity for private investment to improve this in rural areas. It was noted that currently the target ambition of central Government was 95% broadband coverage by 2017.

Particular reference was made to business rate retention and the impact that Aylesford Newsprint going into administration had created for the Borough Council. It was also reported that correspondence had been sent to the Minister for Local Government regarding the loss of this significant business, which demonstrated a disproportionate impact on a local authority. In addition, this example would be incorporated into the Borough Council's response on a business rates review consultation.

RECOMMENDED: That the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy, as set out at Annex 1 to the report, be approved; subject to a minor amendment to the 'success measure' for securing high speed broadband services across the Borough to reflect the Government's ambition of 95% by 2017.

***Referred to Cabinet**

ERG 15/14 BUSINESS SUPPORT AND ADVICE

D150051MEM

Members were provided with an overview of the current business support and advice programme available to the local business community. Proposals to further develop the business support programme to meet local business needs were also set out.

As part of the Kent and Medway Growth Hub programme the County Council had allocated £10,000 to each district and borough in Kent and £20,000 to Medway. This funding aimed to deliver business support at a localised level. The Borough Council was looking to continue the delivery of business support through the West Kent Partnership. Business support proposals had to be submitted by 30 June 2015 and currently included the continuation of One to One sessions; development of business workshops across West Kent; sector specific support and web based support. Further details were set out in paragraph 1.3.2 of the report.

The Economic Regeneration Officer volunteered to undertake further analysis on the satisfaction levels of the business support programme, particularly those offered by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, as monitoring feedback from customers enabled a better focus and targeting of support.

Members discussed the promotion of business support services and suggested co-ordination with organisations such as 'Produced in Kent' and local banks.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed approach to future business support activity, as detailed in the report, be approved.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**ERG 15/15 BETTER BUSINESS FOR ALL**

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health provided an update on the progress being made with the Better Business for All initiative in Kent and Medway.

Since the initiative was reported to Members in February 2014 significant progress had been made in developing the programme, including setting up a long term Business Engagement group; the development of a website, which was anticipated to go live in July; and a training group focused on delivering a culture change programme for regulators.

Members recognised that reducing regulatory burdens on businesses was important and beneficial to the local economy.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**ERG 15/16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm