

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 SEPTEMBER 2017  
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY 2016-2017

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Council adopted an Economic Development Strategy in 2015 and appointed an Economic Development Officer in January 2016, with the purpose of providing additional support to local businesses, business representatives and others.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to review the success of the function to date and to remind councillors of the future vision/objectives and actions.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the economic development activity that has taken place in the period from 2016-2017 and the actions planned for 2017-2018 and beyond.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 The Economic Development Strategy 2017-2020 sets out a vision that Welwyn Hatfield is *“an economy with a thriving entrepreneurial culture that actively supports and promotes sustainable living and working communities, which will make the most of its natural, physical and human capital assets; which attracts and retains and grows well connected businesses that are staffed by a highly skilled and motivated workforce, producing high value goods and services.”*
- 3.2 Its four priorities are: (1) inward investment, care and retention, (2) land and premises, (3) skills for growth and (4) a business friendly council.
- 3.3 The Council has created the **Welwyn Hatfield Business Forum** in partnership with about twelve local businesses of varying sizes and industries. The partnership meets quarterly and this provides an opportunity for businesses with an interest in developing and growing the local economy to come together with the Council to steer future economic development activity.
- 3.4 The Council’s website now contains **business support webpages** which provide information on relocating to the area, business events and supporting organisations.
- 3.5 A new economic development website was launched in May which includes an **online business directory** to help support our local businesses grow and expand their internet presence.
- 3.6 Over 40 **business interventions** took place via face-to-face meetings, email and telephone conversations. Activity included apprenticeship advice and guidance and referrals to training providers, commercial property searches, referrals to appropriate council departments and supporting organisations including Herts

Growth Hub, updates on planning applications, information on business grants, business start-up information and organisations that can support start-up activity.

- 3.7 A **customer satisfaction survey** was introduced at the end of September 2016 to capture how valuable businesses found the support offered by the economic development function. Comments included: *“The Economic Development Officer was very knowledgeable and helpful; her follow up is excellent, her assistance is really important in giving us confidence in moving into the area. This support does make a difference to a new business”*.
- 3.8 A **newsletter** containing relevant focussed news is emailed out to just under 2,000 businesses on a monthly basis. Articles have included information on changes in legislation, the impact of Brexit on business, employee supported policing and funding to boost British businesses.
- 3.9 The economic development budget sponsored a Welwyn Hatfield **Business of the Year Award** at the FSB (Federation of Small Businesses) Awards. There were eight applications from within the borough, more than any other sponsoring local authority. The winner was Crane and Staples Solicitors.
- 3.10 Presentations have been given at a number of **networking events** to promote the economic development function. Attending a range of networking events has resulted in strong relationships being built with the boroughs business community and key stakeholders.
- 3.11 The economic development officer led on the preparation of the ‘Hertfordshire Perfectly Placed’ stand in partnership with Herts LEP at **MIPIM UK 2016**. This is a commercial property exhibition that took place over 3 days from 19-21 October at Olympia. Other partners included seven other Herts boroughs/districts, the University of Herts and Herts Growth Hub who worked in collaboration to showcase the region.
- 3.12 The original Economic Development Strategy was refreshed and this was launched at the Alliance Conference in November 2016. The **2017-2020 strategy** sets out a common framework and vision towards which the council and its partners can focus their work in support of a robust and sustainable local economy.
- 3.13 The **business rates pamphlet** which is sent out to businesses with their rates bill was redesigned to make it more relevant and included information on how the economic development function could support businesses. Also included were Council champions from our business facing teams with their contact details, so that businesses could contact our staff with any questions they may have.
- 3.14 Over 60 businesses attended the ‘Apprenticeships Brilliant for your Business’ **breakfast seminar** organised by the economic development officer in partnership with Oaklands College. The event informed local businesses of the Apprenticeship Reform which came into effect in April 2017.
- 3.15 Regular contact is made with businesses through **social media**. A Welwyn Hatfield business community LinkedIn group has been set up which has 101 members at the time of writing and there is now an economic development twitter handle @WHBizMatters which is used to communicate news and events.
- 3.16 A range of **business workshops** were organised including ‘Tendering for Public Sector Contracts’ and ‘Harness the Power of LinkedIn’. This generated an income of £2,147 to boost the economic development budget.

- 3.17 In March and April 2017, the economic development officer encouraged small businesses with less than 10 employees to apply for up to £1,000 for anything that would help grow their business. A total of 20 applications were received and 8 businesses were awarded a grant that totalled around £7,500, they were:
- Calamity Comics, Hatfield
  - Kinetic Cycles, WGC
  - Hartland Promotions, WGC
  - Chappell Solutions Ltd, Welwyn
  - Hands On Day Care Centre, Welham Green
  - Audere Communications Ltd, WGC
  - Cutting Garden Seeds, WGC
  - The Dogs With Me Ltd, WGC
- 3.18 Welwyn Hatfield Fab **networking** commenced in January 2017. This is a monthly networking group providing friendly, supportive and professional meetings for businesses that want a fun and proactive approach to business networking. This generates an income of approximately £550 per year.
- 3.19 The economic development officer has to date secured over £8,000 from Herts County Council Section 106 funding pot to pay for the charging infrastructure for the Council's **electric pool car scheme** which commenced in July 2017. This means that officers who have to carry out site visits and other work during office hours do not necessarily need to bring their own car, as they will soon be able to book a pool car.
- 3.20 The economic development officer took over the Chair of the Hertfordshire Economic Development Officers group (HEDOG) in June 2016 and as such is invited to sit on the Herts European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds sub-committee. The purpose of this committee includes identifying a pipeline of projects that meet local needs, publicising and promoting the opportunities that the funds provide for economic growth and monitoring the progress of ESI Funds implementation against the milestones and results agreed in their ESI Funds Strategy.
- 3.21 The economic development officer also attends Herts LEP's Apprenticeship Sub-Group as a representative of the Council and HEDOG. The purpose of this group is to spearhead the drive to engage new employers to commit to apprenticeship delivery in Hertfordshire.
- 3.22 The Council has very recently purchased the **GrantFinder IT system** which allows internal teams and our partners to search for a very wide variety of funding opportunities, to support business, community and voluntary activities.
- 3.23 The council promoted the borough's tourist attractions at the Game Fair which took place at Hatfield House from the 28 – 30 July 2017. An 'Enjoy Welwyn Hatfield' brochure was produced and handed out on the stand to encourage visitors from the surrounding area to visit again.
- 3.24 Wider economic development activity has included the creation of the WGC BID in April 2017, a visit to Tesco in response to the redundancies announced at its head office and an apprenticeship programme at the council.
- 3.25 Future actions include: improving business support webpages, promoting the business directory, running a 'Counter Terrorism Security Measures to Protect your Business' workshop and inviting businesses to a networking breakfast to meet the new Chief Executive.

#### **4 Link to Corporate Priorities**

4.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Business Plan 2015-2018 and particularly Priority 4 to help build a strong local economy.

#### **5 Legal Implications**

5.1 None directly arising from this report.

#### **6 Financial Implications**

6.1 An amount of £10,830 was budgeted for economic development expenditure in addition to the salary of the Economic Development Officer in the financial year 2017-2018.

#### **7 Risk Management Implications**

7.1 None directly arising from this report.

#### **8 Security and Terrorism Implications**

8.1 None directly arising from this report.

#### **9 Procurement Implications**

9.1 All procurement exercises have been carried out in accordance with the Council's procurement rules.

#### **10 Climate Change Implications**

10.1 It is intended that the electric pool car scheme will reduce the need for some officers to drive their own cars to/from the office, and will instead be able to walk, cycle or travel by public transport and book out an electric car when needed.

#### **11 Policy Implications**

11.1 The Economic Development Strategy 2017-2020 was adopted in 2016. It contains a vision and objectives that are intended to guide the activity of the Council, its partners and the Business Forum.

#### **12 Equalities and Diversity**

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with the recommendations in this report. The vision/objectives in the Economic Development Strategy and the actions in the associated Action Plan are intended to benefit the borough's economy and its business sectors and industries.

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