

# **BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF BUSINESS SUPPORT**

**February 2015**

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## **Foreword of Councillor Keith Bowman Chair of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee**

Annual Scrutiny Conference decided last year that the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee would undertake a comprehensive review of the Growth Strategy following its implementation. Considering this further, it was agreed that we would review the support that the District Council offers to Businesses throughout our area.

This review and its findings will be crucial to the future of the Authority in the next few years and it is opportune that the new incoming Administration after May of this year will have a base document to refer to.

During the course of the review we visited two Business Parks, namely the Tangent at Shirebrook and Pleasley Vale Mills, took evidence from Economic Development Officers and the relevant Assistant Director.

We did want visit other Business facilities such as the Co-op at South Normanton but due to the pressure of time to complete our review it was not feasible. Nevertheless we are of the opinion that we have conducted a review that will be fit for purpose.

One further point is this, at the Tangent and at Pleasley it was blindingly obvious that Natalie is respected and admired by all businesses and an important link between Business and Council.

So to finish I have to thank the Members of my Committee for their work and diligence and also to the Scrutiny Officer, Claire, the Governance Officer, Alison and also the Economic Development Team.

## 1. Introduction

Bolsover District Council has made Economic Growth its number one priority with a strategic priority of Supporting Enterprise: maintaining and growing the business base within the Growth Strategy.

The Growth Strategy was adopted in June 2014 and members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee were keen to scrutinise the Strategy. It was suggested that a review of business support would complement the strategic priority and was an area that Members would find interesting.

The location of Bolsover District which incorporates four motorway junctions of the M1 means that there is opportunity to attract businesses and for businesses to grow. 90% of businesses in Bolsover District are micro businesses (less than 9 employees).

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 **That resources be made available so that the business support pages of the Bolsover District Council website can be redesigned to offer a dedicated web presence for Business Support.**

Potentially, the website will be the first point of contact for potential businesses and developers and therefore the website should offer a dedicated business support presence which is accessed from the homepage with a small number of pages containing details and links to the following information;

- Sheffield City Region and D2N2
- Local Regeneration Framework
- Planning
- Environmental Health
- Business Bulletin/Newsletter
- Details of the dedicated business support telephone number – D2N2

The website should be set out in a way that is simple to navigate with links to information that users are seeking.

*A good example of business pages of a local authority website is Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.*

**2.2 That the e-bulletin provided by the Economic Development Team be re-launched with the Business Bolsover branding as a quarterly newsletter.**

When asking what more the Council could do to support businesses, the key theme coming from the suggestions was a regular update/newsletter which could be emailed to Businesses across Bolsover District. Information which businesses would like to see in a newsletter includes;

- Projects across the District
- Funding opportunities
- Procurement Opportunities
- Information on the LEPs
- Apprentice/work experience and recruitment opportunities
- Local events
- Council services
- Room hire opportunities in Council buildings i.e. Chamber Suite at The Arc (income generation for the Council) and Parish Council buildings

A number of Businesses also stated that they would like help and support with advertising. The Committee is aware that the Council adopted an Advertising and Sponsorship Policy in January 2014 and this would need to be considered.

The Estates Department should also be made aware that Businesses at The Tangent mentioned some specific information that they would like to see which included;

- An update on what is happening with the Sports Direct developments
- Information about new tenants (e.g. a welcome section in a newsletter)

**2.3 Should the £1.4 million for LEADER funding be approved, the Council will need to investigate a complimentary package of support for the excluded areas, predominantly Shirebrook and South Normanton.**

An extension on LEADER funding is expected to be approved for Bolsover and North East Derbyshire which invites small and medium sized businesses to apply for funding to start up or develop their business. This funding is only open to businesses in rural areas and therefore Shirebrook and South Normanton are excluded from LEADER funding.

Sheffield City Region and D2N2 continue to offer loans which can be applied for from businesses within the City Region.

Support to Businesses in completing funding/loan/grant applications is provided in-house by the Economic Development Team.

**2.4 That Executive supports the proposals for staffing in the Economic Development Team.**

The Committee were advised that a report was due to be considered by Executive in March which proposes changes to the staffing structure to include the deletion of the Tourism Officer post to be replaced by a third Senior Economic Development Officer. This would build capacity within the team which would then include;

Economic Growth and Development Manager  
3 x Senior Economic Development Officers  
Technical Projects Assistant

**2.5 All departments commit to completing details of enquiries on the Tracktivity system.**

All enquiries that relate to businesses should be monitored through the Tracktivity system which enables all departments involved to monitor enquiries that have come through another department and follow up with any relevant advice or support.

The system will only work effectively if people commit to keeping information up to date. It is therefore essential that all departments who deal with any enquiries relating to business support or a business start up log details on the tracktivity system so that this can be followed up and monitored.

### **3. Scope of the review**

The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Business Support. The objective of the review was to ensure that Bolsover District Council provided effective and efficient support to new and existing Businesses to support the priorities within the Growth Strategy.

The aims of the review were;

- To identify existing support available to businesses directly and indirectly within the District.

- To identify any gaps in service provision across the District either by location, size or sector.
- To identify the Local Enterprise Partnerships, Sheffield City Region (SCR) and Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire (D2N2) intentions with regards to the Growth Hubs.
- To assess whether the Growth Hub plans meet the needs of Bolsover Businesses.
- To consider the effectiveness of the Council's website and potentially social media as the main conduits of communication to businesses.
- To identify whether best use is being made of corporate resources such as Firmstep.

The key issues identified are as follows;

- Is the Council clear on the support offer required by businesses and are the appropriate resources available to deliver this directly or indirectly?
- Is the Council making best use of technological resources to provide support?
- Are there comprehensive monitoring and data sharing practices in place to assess the impact of business support interventions?
- How will HS2 impact our business sites?

**The Committee comprised the following Members,**

Councillor Keith Bowman (Chair)	Councillor Steve Fritchley (Vice Chair)
Councillor Andrew Anderson	Councillor Clare Munks
Councillor Graham Parkin	Councillor Deborah Watson
Councillor George Webster	Councillor Jennifer Wilson

Support to the Committee was provided by the Scrutiny Officer and the Governance Officer.

**4. Method of review**

The Committee met on ten occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and to carry out interviews and evidence gathering.

The Committee sought evidence by way of verbal evidence and questioning with key officers and interviews with businesses at The Tangent and Pleasley Vale Business Centres.

## **Equality and Diversity**

Within the process of the review, the committee has taken into account the impact of equalities.

No adverse impacts have been identified.

## **5. Key findings**

### **Existing support available to businesses**

The Economic Growth Team provides reactive and proactive support to businesses by way of site and premises information and funding advice and support. Further support is delivered jointly through partnership working, in particular funding for businesses.

When contacting the Council on the main telephone number 01246 242424 there are now Business Options and option 2 is for a Customer Service Advisor or for Business Support. Calls coming through the Contact Centre are tracked through Firmstep so that calls can be logged and enquiries followed up.

Specialist business advisors are provided through the D2N2 Growth Hub through a direct telephone number which has recently been launched along with the Growth Hub website.

Historically support for Businesses has been available through Business Link. Business Support is now provided by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through Growth Hubs. When questioned, most businesses had not heard of the LEPs. It is a key role of the Economic Development Team to signpost businesses where appropriate to the LEPs for available support.

When questioning businesses, Members asked if they were a member of the Chamber of Trade, Federation of Small Businesses or any other business support organisation. The purpose of this question was to identify if Businesses were paying to be a member of an organisation then there would be business support provided by that organisation. There is a danger that the Council could be putting resources into advice and support that businesses are already accessing elsewhere for which they are paying membership fees. It was concluded however that for those businesses spoken to as part of this review, membership to these organisations was continued for other benefits e.g. insurance.

Most Chambers have an officer that specialises in Export which is provided by the UK Trade and Investment. Officers advised that they tend to link into the Chamber a lot and that works very well for the Council.

The Economic Growth Team is of the opinion that Business support is currently well provided for from the Council and its Partners.

If there was capacity within the team, then it is envisaged that additional projects that support the Growth Strategy would include;

- Funding support: targeted support for key employers with quality business accommodation specific to growing sectors
- Working with land and premises owners to identify a viable scheme and grant/loan funding to unlock development

Of course the Council can only help those businesses that want to be helped. The Authority is developing a programme of key account management which will start with a target of 50 businesses. This will be a corporate plan target within the 2015-19 Corporate Plan.

The Council has also agreed to the creation of a Business Executive Advisory Group (BEG) which will support the Council's Growth Strategy of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's).

### **Growth Hubs and background to the Local Enterprise Partnerships**

There are 39 LEPs nationally. Bolsover District Council sits on two LEPs, Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire (D2N2) and Sheffield City Region (SCR). The LEPs produce a Strategic Economic Plan and attract funds from Central Government to deliver the Plan. LEPs are not legal bodies.

The Government has realised that there is no power behind a LEP and Local Authority involvement is required to give a LEP legitimacy. Sheffield City Regions decisions are all taken by the Combined Authority which holds governance and decision making is undertaken by those Local Authorities involved.

The fact that Bolsover sits on the LEPs and Combined Authority means that we're involved in decision making and governance and means that the LEPs are held to account.

Officers are very engaged with the process and are working with the LEPs to identify major employment and housing sites and also working to ensure that the Authority receives the funding that it needs to unlock key business sites, e.g. Coalite.

Sitting on two LEPs brings advantages and disadvantages. There are more opportunities for Bolsover District Council but there is also a danger that the authority could fall between the two and miss out on opportunities. Therefore we need to ensure that as an overlap area, Growth Hubs are a positive thing. Protocols are being developed to set out how overlap areas will be involved and the working relationships to ensure that they don't miss out or benefit any more than any other partner.

The Government's ambition for the roll-out of Growth Hubs across the LEPs was signaled in the 2010 Local Growth White Paper.

Businesses get advice and information from many different sources which is not necessarily consistent or of the same quality or standard.

The Growth Hubs seek to provide advisors on key areas e.g. skills, export, start up and access to finance. These will be called Centres of Excellence and will provide consistent advice to Businesses. A Single Assessment Framework is being developed by D2N2 for funding.

Through work with Sheffield City Region, We're now seeing benefits from e.g.

- 140 employers engaged enquiring about apprentices – with 30 appointed
- Up-skilling programmes
- Talent match programme – with 15 engaged and 2 in employment
- Ambition programme is about to start.

*(All figures provided on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014 by CEO)*

### **What do our Businesses require?**

Although the Committee were advised by the Economic Growth Team that they produced a regular e-bulletin, the businesses interviewed made no mention of this bulletin and most of them stated that a newsletter would be useful to keep them informed of events, funding opportunities, etc.

Most of the businesses involved in this review praised the one to one support that they receive from the Business Estates Manager and consider this to be an area where the Council excels in providing business support. When asking businesses how they find out about activities and new opportunities most responded, "Through Natalie or Matt" (Business Estates Manager and Commercial Property and Development Manager).

The way that the scrutiny committee interviews had been carried out on a one to one basis was stated as an example of the best way to communicate and consult with businesses.

## **Website**

Two thirds of the businesses interviewed had not used the Council's website. Of those businesses that did use or have used the website in the past, comments included;

- It is easy enough to use
- Business pages are good – you can usually track down the information you need
- There is a lot of work going on that isn't detailed on the website
- Some information is difficult to find

The Economic Development Team advised that the Corporate Website, formally 'Business Bolsover' provided support information, advisory services, details of available sites and premises and access to funding.

It is essential that the presentation of the website is right. Most people accessing the website for business support for the first time will form their opinion of us as an authority based on our website.

An issue with the way that Bolsover District Council presents the website is that local stories e.g. Community Safety issues scroll along the homepage which may be off putting to a business who is visiting the website to look for premises within the District where a story is highlighting problems within the area. It is therefore suggested within the recommendations that a link from the homepage takes visitors to the business webpages where content of this nature will not be placed alongside the pages promoting business and growth across the District.

## **Use of technological resources to provide support**

The new Customer Information System, Firmstep has been used to develop a script for Contact Centre staff to use when answering telephone calls relating to business enquiries. This script ensures that the right information and contact information are provided at that first point of contact.

The Authority owns a piece of software called Tracktivity which is used by the Economic Growth Team to keep a record of business premises. An issue was identified in that the Team did not know if a department had dealt with an enquiry from a business or potential business e.g. Planning, Licensing, Environmental Health, etc and therefore could not follow up the enquiry.

This has now been changed so that all departments can log enquiries from or relating to businesses on the system so that the Economic Growth Team can follow these up. This of course relies on the relevant departments to update the system when they receive an enquiry.

## **Plan for future business growth and support**

It is important that the Authority clearly defines its offer for business growth, support and inward investment and this will be confirmed in the Economic Development and Housing Strategy. The Strategy includes an Action Plan which complements the Growth Strategy

The Tangent was envisaged as phase 1 of a wider scheme of business centre development and there is scope for new build office accommodation in each town centre and selective development of workshop space specific to higher value growth sectors such as creative and digital industries would support business growth and contribute to longer term income generation for the Authority.

Transport was raised as a barrier to some businesses, in particular for people getting to the Tangent from the train station. One Business at The Tangent advised that he collected a member of staff from the train station and dropped them off at the end of each day because of the lack of other options. Some discussion took place throughout the review with regards to a Glapwell by-pass and these issues can be considered further by the Combined Authority who will have a remit for Transport.

## **HS2**

The Impact of HS2 on Bolsover District was considered and the Committee identified the following issues;

- The highly significant heritage assets of Hardwick Hall, Bolsover Castle and Sutton Scarsdale Hall may be affected by the proposed route. If not dealt with sensitively, HS2 could negatively impact on the setting and visitor experience of these historic buildings and constrain their economic potential.
- The East Midlands Outlet (McArthur Glen) at Junction 28 of the M1 is an important source of local employment and proposals for expansion of the centre may be affected by the proposed route of HS2.
- The proposed route goes straight through a number of established company premises at Saw Pitt Lane Industrial Estate at Tibshelf and these businesses will need to be relocated. It is important to ensure that businesses are not displaced from the local area and alternative sites/premises can be provided.
- The development of HS2 will place Bolsover on the spine of infrastructure and transport links will need to be considered – how will people get to Bolsover from Toton or Meadowhall? The Robin Hood line serves Bolsover very well and it is suggested that the tram infrastructure may be extended although this is a project for the distant future.

HS2 Ltd is urged to minimise the impact on businesses in the District, the existing rail corridor provides the connection between the rail network and the planned rail freight terminal at Markham Vale North (Seymour) as well as the route which

serves the former Coalite Site. The latter is subject to development proposals along with the existing facility at Oxcroft along the Bolsover and Oxcroft branch lines.

## **6. Conclusions**

The Committee have put together five recommendations which will hopefully assist the Council in enhancing the support it currently offers to businesses within our District.

The key issue arising from the review is that the website is not functioning as it should. Too many businesses said that they didn't use it and we should be promoting our website as the first point of contact for information and access to advice and support.

The Growth Strategy was created as recognition that growth needs to be encouraged in the District, especially during the recent economic climate, and that the local authority has a key part to play in that.

With the projected Annual Jobs forecast for Bolsover set to grow by 0.6% it is important that the Authority commits support and resource to supporting and growing our businesses.

It is hoped that the recommendations set out in this review report will help the Economic Development Team to support as many businesses as possible and bring about some positive changes to the way we present our offer of business support to our businesses.

**Stakeholders**

Wes Lumley	Chief Executive Officer
Councillor Alan Tomlinson	Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Allison Westray-Chapman	Assistant Director of Economic Growth
Sonia Coleman	Economic Development and Investment Manager
Theresa Garrod	Senior Economic Development Officer
Helen Jenkins	Technical Projects Assistant
Natalie Etches	Business Estates Manager
Chris Doy	Development Control Manager

**Businesses located at The Tangent**

Andy Fairbanks

CHASTE

Creative5

Digident

J&P Filtration Systems

Lombardia

Pisces Training UK Ltd

Risk and Safety Management Ltd

**Businesses located at Pleasley Vale**

2WL

Ansini

Napit

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- HS2 Update Winter 2014-15, Local Government information Unit.
- Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce – Membership benefits
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