

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Michael Wassell Leader / Mark Kiddle-Morris Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Strategic Planning

To: Cabinet 24th March 2015

Author: Mark Stanton (Shared Economic Development Manager)

Subject: Breckland Open for Business Report

Purpose: Following an analysis of the local economic profile and consultation with partners and local businesses, this report requests that Cabinet adopts the '*Open for Business*' agenda to support the delivery of the Council's business and economic growth priorities.

Recommendations:

- 1) Cabinet supports the Council's Open for Business commitment and the focus of the four work packages set out in 2.4 below to underpin the Council's economic development activities supporting business and economic growth in the District.
- 2) In recognising the importance of providing opportunities for local business across our District, Cabinet supports the '*Meet the Breckland Buyer Event*', as set out in section 2.4.4.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council recognises the important contribution successful and growing businesses make to our District and embraces its role in supporting the continued success and growth of our local economy and business base. Pre-requisite to meeting our business and economic growth priorities as set out in our corporate plan is a clear understanding of local need to enable us to focus our limited resources on the most effective and important areas that make the greatest differences for our businesses. To achieve this, an analysis of our district economic profile and business base was commissioned and a number of priority actions were identified as a result of that exercise.

The analysis and identified priorities were presented to Executive Members at their Strategy Board in November 2014. The emerging priority areas for action were subsequently presented to a cross section of Breckland businesses, local business support organisations, representatives of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and local authority partners at an '*Open for Business*' consultation event held at Snetterton race circuit. The purpose of the event was to consult with businesses on the four main work package propositions recommended as a result of the analysis undertaken, to ensure they meet local business needs and expectations. The event was also key in helping the Council to identify and understand any barriers to growth that businesses may be facing. Business and partner feedback from that event has now been reflected in the proposed work packages and key areas of focus outlined in this report.

2.0 SUMMARY OF OPEN FOR BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND PROPOSITIONS

2.1 Breckland District

- Breckland is one of the seven districts of Norfolk with a population of around 131,000 - forecast to grow to 143,000 by 2021

- Although, largely rural in character, the district, with the sparsest population density in Norfolk, benefits from 5 market towns where roughly half population lives
- A case can be made for Breckland as the premier economic gateway to Norfolk – lying on the A11 and mainline railway to London.
- Overall, the district has a complex economic geography. Four of the market towns (two each) are positioned along two different transport corridors - A11 and A47. There are problematic connections between the A11 and A47, and large rural hinterlands between and around them.

2.2 Breckland Economic Performance – Headline Findings

2.2.1 The profile of Breckland in economic growth terms presents a number of challenges illustrated by the economic performance indicators below:

- The area has significant strengths offering low unemployment, a high quality of life and is a popular visitor destination, and for these reasons Breckland tends towards a high level of out-commuting. Over 23,000 residents commute outwards to work, compared to 12,000 local jobs are taken by in-commuters
- Breckland strengths lie in agriculture, food and drink, comprising 15.8% of all registered businesses - which is three times national averages and 50% above Norfolk and LEP averages. Manufacturing stands at 16.8% of employment - again close to double national and 50% more than county/LEP averages.
- Resident and workplace earnings are lower than national average and limited higher level skills attainment means that Breckland's overall level of 'competitiveness' is more challenging than national and Local Enterprise Partnership area comparative averages.
- There are few global and national-scale businesses that can anchor growth. We benefit from a number of innovative emerging businesses who will benefit from a higher profile with the LEP and other partners.
- Within the district there is no university or major FE College to address business skills priorities, and support business-academia research and development - although there are a small number of important private training providers.

2.3 Open for Business Propositions

The conclusion of the analysis and subsequent stakeholder consultation recognises the Councils limited resources and the importance of focusing on a small number of key areas of the most value to local businesses. Taking into account the challenges illustrated above the following areas emerged as priorities for focusing resources and are supported by local businesses and stakeholders and being important.

2.4 Key Areas of Focus

- 2.4.1 To enhance our partnership working with our public and private sector partners and continue to build on our relationship and involvement with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP).
- 2.4.2 To attract funding and inward investment into the District and work with partners to deliver our key strategic economic growth projects and supporting the growth of our key industry sectors, alongside market towns and their hinterlands.

2.4.3 To adopt a contemporary and inclusive *'Place Based'* approach to growth through multi agency development partnerships. (to date preliminary consultation meetings have been held with stakeholders in and around the areas of Attleborough and Thetford and initial feedback received on their local economic development priorities and interest in a wider place based partnership arrangement).

2.4.4 To support local businesses ensuring the opportunity to trade with the council and the wider public sector is promoted and business engaged and supported in a transparent and pro active way. To support this, the Council will organise and support a *'Meet the Breckland Buyer Event'* to give local businesses the opportunity to understand how the Council procures its goods and services and engage in workshops to understand the necessary tendering processes. This will better inform local businesses of the range of contract opportunities available at the Council. It also demonstrates how the Council can help local businesses grow and prosper in a very direct and pragmatic way by improving their awareness and ability to win business for our goods and services contracts.

2.5 Key areas for Action

2.5.1 The areas of focus set out above will be supported by 4 key areas for specific action over the next 12 months.

Key Area 1 Doing the Basics Well

There are key functions which the council must deliver well to support business and economic growth. These include planning, regulation and development management; property, asset and resources management, business relationship management, signposting and brokerage to national and LEP support products and services, place marketing to raise profile and promote reputation.

The economic growth focus of ambitious district councils recognises the importance of the major interfaces with business. Therefore, getting the planning and development management systems working well and ensuring economic development services get very close to growing businesses is critical. The Council's major asset holdings mean our property services are also an important point of contact for businesses. The focus of this key area for action over the next eighteen months will be:

- Continuing to improve our service delivery in planning to ensure a proactive, high quality planning and development management service.
- Prioritising our approach to inward investment handling, including production of high quality bids and funding submissions and portfolio of investment ready proposition for third party funders.
- Investing in skilled programme and project management arrangements with respect to physical investment.
- Designing and delivering a comprehensive business account management programme - a key business account management programme with relationships established at the highest level
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- Ensuring an effective signposting and brokerage service to LEP and national business support programmes.

The recently approved budget alongside new ways of working and a refocus of some of our services will secure delivery within our existing budgets.

Key Area 2 - Focus on a small number of key projects

Promoting and delivery managing a small number of transformational initiatives, Breckland Council will demonstrate an open for business ethos by championing and assuring delivery of a small number of economic game changers - along the A11 corridor; and in the area's key sectors.

We need to be realistic in where our focus should be and how much we can take on and achieve given our limited resources. There are some key and immediate tasks for Breckland either leading or working with and through others to deliver with respect to physical investment:

- key project support, examples include Thetford Enterprise Park, Sustainable Urban Extension at Attleborough and Thetford and delivery of Riverside/ Town Centre improvements.
- Working with the County Council on the delivery and financial contribution to roll out Broadband.
- Agree with partners (South Norfolk District Council, County Council, LEP) planning and management arrangements for the A11 and A47 growth corridors.
- Work with partners to address Breckland's knowledge economy and skills opportunities especially in Agriculture/Land-based, Manufacturing, and Low Carbon/Green industries
- Continuing to administer the Grants for Growth programme.
- Supporting local communities who choose to develop neighbourhood plans

Key Area 3 - Refreshing Partnership Working

The Open for Business commitment will respond to the demand of local businesses and partners (including NALEP) for a strong, clear leadership and positive sustainable growth-oriented voice for the district.

Breckland Council is the major role player in this endeavour – acting in its community leadership role, but also as an enabler and facilitator of partners. Breckland Council's offer over the coming period will include:

- convening and supporting a high level Economic/Business Leadership team taking ownership of a Breckland economic narrative, strategies and plans for growth.
- securing a high-level and informed Breckland participation in NALEP. The early focus should be on A11 Corridor,
- supporting place-based development working closely with stakeholder on a number of market town and village initiatives, and thereafter developing action plans to address opportunities.

Key Area 4 - Whole Council Approach

Whole council participation in delivering our growth priorities is critical. We have a clear and well resourced budget and corporate plan directed at economic growth priorities. A Whole Council approach operates across traditional departmental boundaries. Examples of effectiveness in this area are wide ranging from enabling swift and easy access to services for businesses regardless of the initial point of contact to the innovative and

creative use of Breckland Council's own asset base including land, property, and financial investment instruments.

3.0 OPTIONS

3.1 **Option 1** – Cabinet does not adopt the '*Open for Business*' approach as set in this report.

3.2 **Option 2** – Cabinet adopt the '*Open for Business*' approach as set in this report and endorse the '*Meet the Buyer Event*'.

4.0 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Option 2 - The Council has a pivotal role within the District's growth agenda to fulfil its commitment to "*Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth*".

4.1 This report gives Cabinet the opportunity to adopt the '*Open for Business*' propositions and continue on a growth focussed approach to economic development. If adopted this approach will sustain and help to deliver the Councils Corporate Business Plan approved by Council at their meeting in February 2015.

4.2 The Council has the opportunity to refresh its approach to economic and business growth to maximise potential, this in a context where the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) has major resources to commit to local and national economic growth priorities. The Council is ideally placed to lead and implement the four major proposition work packages that form the '*Open for Business*' agenda and approach.

5.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

5.1 Tangible economic benefits will come from the activities and projects that the '*Open for Business*' approach delivers and will be measured by the Council's team and Corporate Plans performance management systems and project evaluation reports.

5.2 Overall the District should see measurable growth in jobs, housing, inward investment, business turnover figures, infrastructure development, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Value Added (GVA).

5.3 '*The Meet the Breckland Buyer*' event will assist and facilitate the opportunity for local businesses to bid for the Council's goods and services contracts and improve their ability to secure new business from Breckland Council and other local authorities. It also demonstrates how the Council can help local businesses grow and prosper in very direct and pragmatic way by improving their awareness and ability to win business for our goods and services tenders.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues

6.1.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no adverse implications.

6.2 Constitution & Legal

6.2.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications. By formally adopting the '*Open for Business*' approach set out within this report and its appendices the Council is not changing the existing Council constitution.

6.3 **Contracts**

6.3.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no adverse implications.

6.4 **Corporate Priorities**

6.4.1 Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth

6.5 **Crime and Disorder**

6.5.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no adverse implications.

6.6 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

6.6.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no adverse implications.

6.7 **Financial**

6.7.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no direct financial implications. Critical activities within service team plans will deliver the Council's corporate priorities and be funded through service budgets or through external funding sources. *'The Meet the Breckland Buyer Event'* can be funded within existing budgets.

6.8 **Health & Wellbeing**

6.8.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

6.9 **Risk Management**

6.9.1 No risks directly as a result of this report. Risk management will be dealt with at both a Corporate and project level.

6.10 **Staffing**

6.10.1 If the approach is adopted there are likely to be staffing implications. This is being dealt with through the wider corporate transformation process.

6.11 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

6.11.1 When the Council is implementing its strategic economic development plans it is important that, through the planning process, it consults with those communities that projects will impact on. It will also be important to ensure that public and private sector delivery partners are consulted and understand our priorities. Cross sections of businesses and business leaders have been consulted and validated our strategic economic plans. This was required as it is their growth that will provide the jobs and increase local GDP/GVA. By undertaking the above the Council will be delivering strategic economic development in the spirit of a *'Placed Based Growth'*, a people –centred agenda

6.12 **Other**

6.12.1 It is in the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

7.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

7.1 All Breckland Wards

8.0 ACRONYMS

8.1 Explained within the report.

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Director / Officer who will be attending the Meeting

Name and Post: Mark Stanton

Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to both Mandatory and Discretionary Services

Appendices attached to this report: