

Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee on Monday 13th March 2023

Draft Business Engagement Strategy

Report of the Director of Economic Development

Classification	This report is Public
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Contact Officer	As above

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To inform members of a recent LGA Economic Advisors Programme, working with Grant Thornton to review the Council's Engagement Strategy;
- To present to members the findings contained within the final report;
- To present to members an initial draft of the Business Engagement Strategy and action plan.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 The Economic Development Team has been driving forward business support programmes for pre-start businesses, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME), and large companies for many years, with some good success stories and evidence to support the continued need for such programmes.
- 1.2 The District's business base does benefit from a number of business support programmes currently available through the D2N2 Growth Hub, Derbyshire District Council's Business Start-Up Programme, The Chamber of Commerce, and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), as well as our own Economic Loan Fund, inward investment and day-to-day business support advice.
- 1.3 However, it is recognised that this support could go a lot further and have a considerable impact on the District's growth potential if more businesses knew about the support and programmes available and how to access the services of the Economic Development Team and its partners. It is well documented through previous schemes (especially at a County / regional

level) that there is a low take up of support from businesses within this district, but we are not sure of the reasons why Bolsover businesses are not making the most of these.

- 1.4 It could be that the support is not meeting business's needs, is too difficult to access, or that the offer is not being communicated effectively to businesses. Over 93% of our businesses have less than 20 employees and don't always explore what is available to support them or even what financial assistance is on offer as they perceive that they are too busy with the day-to-day running of their business to do anything else or don't want to be seen to be asking for help.
- 1.5 As part of the LGA's Economic Growth Advisors programme, Bolsover District Council secured consultancy support (equivalent to the value of £14,000) to commission expertise to advise and guide the Economic Development Team to better understand our business community as best we could. It would address some of the associated failures with previous engagement activities due to historically perceived apathy and lack of appetite from businesses to engage.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 Grant Thornton were appointed to understand, research, and report on the issues facing successful engagement with businesses. This included: analysing the background and identifying key stakeholders to engage through the project commission; conducting a business survey to target those 'hard-to-reach' businesses and not the 'low-hanging fruit' of easy to reach businesses; and then supporting this with desk-top research to identify where future support opportunities could best meet the needs of the business base within the District.
- 2.2 The main findings from the report include:
 - The high number of businesses surveyed are struggling with only a third showing growth. Some of the key problems being reported include economic conditions and recruiting skilled staff;
 - Less than one in six businesses surveyed felt that they were aware of the available support with not enough businesses knowing what support is available or how to access it;
 - Bolsover, when compared with comparable authorities, has a higher than average share of medium and large sized enterprises;
- 2.3 Driving engagement for the future can be achieved by reviewing 4 key areas of activity:
 - Data – refine the CRM data held, and building a better understanding of the business community;
 - Outreach and awareness – establishing a series of engagement campaigns to create interaction with new sections of the business community;
 - Engagement and conversion – building on the outreach and campaigns with targeted follow up activities. It is important to note that this doesn't have to be Bolsover specific, but can showcase what is available to businesses on a regional / national scale;

- and, Retention – fostering a continuing business community through networking and ongoing communication.
- 2.4 With regards to the marketing and promotion of the business offering, Grant Thornton’s report recommends establishing a clear brand identity across the different marketing platforms, supported by a clear compelling proposition – “why does a business want to engage in and take up the offer of support?”
 - 2.5 Any marketing and engagement will need to be across a variety of platforms to engage with all size of companies, from start-up / pre-start / sole trader right through to large companies, which should include social media (inc. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn), printed media (e.g. InTouch, InBusiness), visual media (inc. TikTok, Bolsover TV) and email.
 - 2.6 When communicating with businesses via email and social media, content management will be important and it should be impactful for the recipient. The tone, calls to action, imagery, and mix of media choice will all be important to ensure we maintain ongoing engagement, and this should be reflected in the strategy and action plan.
 - 2.7 In order to promote a comprehensive and informed campaign of support available, the Business Engagement Strategy and Action Plan has been drafted, with the intended purpose of supporting growth across all sectors. The focus for engagement is on creating high value, skilled jobs and industries, and providing access to the skills our local workforce and businesses need to succeed.
 - 2.8 In order to deliver the strategy and action plan, the allocation of sufficient resources would need to be mapped out against the actions to ensure there was sufficient financial and personnel resource committed to the long term delivery.
 - 2.9 Appendix 1 is the draft business engagement strategy and action plan, which was drafted in 2022. Following the award of UK Shared Prosperity Funding to commission and deliver new support initiatives, as well as completion of the Grant Thornton report (received Feb 2022), we will now refresh this draft to reflect these areas and move to formally adopt the strategy later this year.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The formal adoption of the business engagement strategy will set a baseline for activities and create an environment in which engagement is likely to flourish.
- 3.2 The strategy will set out a clear direction and set of interventions the Economic Development Team can work to, and be accountable for, and will drive forward the continued investment and importance of business engagement to drive forward the Council’s ambition of growth.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 There is an option for not adopting the strategy. However, adopting this strategy will set out a 3-year plan for business engagement to drive forward the Council's ambitions for economic growth and show the Council's commitment to supporting its business base.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee note the findings and recommendations of the Grant Thornton Business Engagement Strategy Review report.
2. That the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee support the formal adoption of a Business Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.

Approved by Councillor Liz Smyth
Portfolio Holder for Growth / Economic Development

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details:

Financial impact on the General Fund will need to be considered and presented as part of any future report to Council, and members should consider any increase in revenue budgets will have a detrimental impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: None

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment:

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details:

The business support packages available to businesses include investment in the decarbonisation of their business activities through capital investment or changes to their working practices. It is important we are able to engage with as wide a range of businesses as possible to maximise the support and investment in reducing the carbon output of businesses in their processes.

Staffing: Yes No

Details: None

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p>	No

<p>District Wards Significantly Affected</p>	All wards
<p>Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	Details:

<p>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.</p>
<p>Our Business Growth Strategy, <i>Vision Bolsover</i>, sets out a plan for sustainable growth across the district. The strategy puts forward the Council’s key ambition: “To become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and environmental driver for Bolsover District.”</p> <p><i>Vision Bolsover</i> clearly sets out priorities and objectives for economic growth and highlights the importance of focussing resources on developing the right conditions for businesses to grow.</p> <p><u>Our Economic Priorities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs and skills • Unlocking Development Potential: unlocking the capacity of major employment sites • Enabling Housing Growth: increasing the supply, quality and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population and support economic growth • Making the best use of our assets • Ensuring financial sustainability and increasing revenue streams • Promoting the District and working with partners to increase tourism

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
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Appendix No	Title
1	Grant Thornton's Business Engagement Strategy Review
2	Draft Business Engagement Strategy and Action Plan

Background Papers

(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).