

**Bolsover District Council**

**Meeting of the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023**

**Business Engagement Strategy (BES) and Action Plan**

**Report of the Portfolio Holder for Growth**

<b>Classification</b>	This report is Public
<b>Report By</b>	Cllr John Ritchie Portfolio Holder for Growth
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**PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- To introduce Members to the draft Business Engagement Strategy (BES) and Action Plan.
- To update Members on the work done to date in formulating the strategy and action plan.
- To set out the next steps on adopting the formal strategy and securing resources to be able to deliver the action plan activities.

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**REPORT DETAILS**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Economic Development Team has long recognised the need to build stronger relationships with local businesses and support their growth. In March 2023, Council Members received a presentation on the draft Business Engagement Strategy (BES) developed by the Economic Development Team.
- 1.2 The Bolsover District Council Business Growth Strategy 2021 includes the strategic economic priority: Working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs, and skills.

- 1.3 The Business Engagement Strategy (BES) was drafted to support delivery of this priority. The aim of the strategy is to better understand our business community and their growth needs, in order to tailor our engagement and communications, to increase take up of business growth programmes and identify opportunities for growth.
- 1.4 The three main areas of focus for the BES include:
- Ensuring we have the **insight** and data we need to better understand businesses needs and target them for support
  - **Connecting** businesses to a clear business support offer, through branding, marketing, information sharing, key account management, and the use of a CRM system
  - Developing consistent, planned and proactive **communications** that increase uptake of business growth programmes
- 1.5 An action plan that supports the delivery of the BES has been developed under these three themes as headings. To support the drafting of the BES and action plan, there was a need for the Economic Development Team to gain a better understanding of how the district's businesses want to engage with the Council for business support.
- 1.6 In July 2022, £12,000 worth of consultancy support was awarded by the LGA as part of their Local Economic Growth Advisors Programme, which provided an analysis of businesses preferred engagement and communication strategies and recommends a series of practical steps to maximise the impact of the Council's business growth interventions over the next 2-3 years.
- 1.7 The Economic Development Team intend to use the recommendations to further develop and deliver the action plan.

## **2. Details of Proposal or Information**

- 2.1 In the action plan that accompanies the BES, there are three action plan themes: Insight, Connecting with Businesses, and Communications. Each is summarised in turn below:
- 2.2 **Insight**  
Most existing business engagement in the district is designed for networking and sharing of information. It does not collect and interpret business views in a systematic way that can provide a clear plan of economic development.
- 2.3 Historically, there has been a perceived apathy and lack of appetite from Bolsover businesses to engage with business support programmes. Without

fuller insight about our businesses, and a better understanding of how and when they want to engage with us, we risk failing to achieve our Council ambitions for growth.

- 2.4 To understand where we want to be, it is important to understand where we currently are. The BES identifies the need for regular data collection and analysis to help us to paint a picture, create a plan of action, and inform future funding bids for the district.
- 2.5 In early 2023, the team secured Transformation Funding to source a customer relationship management (CRM) system. This has allowed the team to start consolidating and segmenting existing business data with the aim of targeting support. Through the CRM, the team will better be able to track the successes from the action plan that positively impact local businesses and increase awareness of the Council's support for businesses.
- 2.6 The current ebulletin newsletter sent out to businesses is outdated and does not allow for monitoring of 'open rates' and 'click through' rates, which provide insight into businesses interests. The CRM system has an email newsletter function for more targeted communications and monitors the recipient's interactions with the newsletter, which can be further explored.
- 2.7 **Connecting with Businesses**  
The BES identifies the need for a simple and clear offer for businesses that businesses can easily connect with via our Council services.
- 2.8 The BES identifies the need to develop and promote the Business in Bolsover brand further, establishing it as a trusted Council service for business growth and support. The brand is being used on a range of media (such as the new InBusiness Magazine). However, more work is needed to get Business in Bolsover recognisable as a first point of contact for businesses.
- 2.11 Funding allocated to business support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has enabled the team to develop a programme of business networking and engagement events under the Business in Bolsover brand, through to March 2025. This will allow the team to better connect with businesses, gain further insight into business needs, drive engagement through the CRM, and further promote the Business in Bolsover brand.
- 2.12 As engagement with businesses increases, as a result of the actions, the CRM system will enable the team to implement a key account management strategy, to increase and monitor uptake of business growth programmes and grants.
- 2.13 **Communications**  
One of the key priorities identified in the Business Engagement Strategies is the need for consistent, planned, and proactive communications that promote the

Business in Bolsover brand and raise awareness of business growth programmes to increase uptake.

- 2.14 In February 2023, a key success was the publication of the new InBusiness magazine. This was distributed to approx. 3,000 businesses across the district with details of business growth programmes, business networking and skills events, and business success stories to promote the opportunities to businesses, under the Business in Bolsover brand.
- 2.15 Progression would be to develop an online 'digital book' version of the InBusiness magazine, which will allow the Economic Development team to track viewing activity through Google analytics, for important insight into the type of news and events businesses are engaging with.
- 2.16 Funding allocated to business support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has enabled the team to engage a provider to manage the coordination and organisation of the Business in Bolsover social media accounts and online media. This is successfully supporting the events programme and increasing engagement with businesses and attendance at events.
- 2.17 The BES identifies a need to develop a formal communications plan that allows for consistent, planned, and proactive communications that deliver on the priorities in the BES. This will be informed by the recommendations in the LGA report and from insight gained as work progresses.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 Of the 11 actions in the action plan, 3 quick wins were identified and have been completed. This includes the introduction of the CRM system, which has allowed the team to better track and record business engagement and the amount of time spent on each business; publication of the InBusiness magazine; and delivery of a business survey. Of the remaining 9 actions, work has started on 6 and is ongoing.
- 3.2 The 3 outstanding actions relate to the communications plan and further developing the Business in Bolsover brand and a clear business offer. These will be progressed over the next year, as the team is better resourced and has the insight to create the necessary outputs and deliver strong outcomes for our local businesses, community, and Council.
- 3.3 We are recommending that Members note the contents of the BES and action plan, and that Members endorse the BES and action plan, adopting it as a formal Council strategy.
- 3.4 There is a financial resource required to deliver the activities as set out in the action plan, which will include conducting business engagement activities,

undertaking surveys, publication of the InBusiness magazine, additional printing and distribution costs and future request for additional budget to be able to deliver these activities will be requested through a future Council report when the strategy is formally adopted.

#### **4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 4.1 One alternative would be to not adopt the BES and instead use it as an informal working document. However, the Council's ambitions are centred around growth. To not have a formal strategy to engage businesses of all sizes could be detrimental to the team being able to support businesses to engage with the support available, to encourage and facilitate this growth and business sustainability (economic and environmental).

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#### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

1. That Scrutiny Members endorse the strategy and action plan, and recommend them for submission to Executive for formal adoption.
2. That Scrutiny Members support a future report be taken to Council seeking additional revenue budget to be able to deliver the activities as set out in the strategy action plan.

Approved by Councillor John Ritchie Portfolio Holder for Growth

#### **IMPLICATIONS:**

**Finance and Risk:**            Yes             No

**Details:**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report but note paragraph 3.4 and the intention for a future report to be taken to Council requesting resources once the strategy is formally adopted. This would be an extra cost to the general fund unless external income is secured to cover the cost.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

**Legal (including Data Protection):**            Yes             No

**Details:**

There are no legal implications arising as a result of this report.

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:** Business support programmes and engagement with businesses will support them to produce and operate more effectively and efficiently, ultimately contributing to the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral.

**Staffing:** Yes  No

**Details:**

There are no staffing implications as a result of this report, as delivery will be done within the existing resource of the Economic Development Team.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

**DECISION INFORMATION**

<b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b> 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:  <b>Revenue - £75,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Capital - £150,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
<b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b> (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No

<b>District Wards Significantly Affected</b>	District wide
<b>Consultation:</b> <b>Leader / Deputy Leader</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Executive</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>SLT</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Relevant Service Manager</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Members</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	Details: None

**Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.**

This report and the BES directly contribute to the council's ambition for economic growth and working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs, and skills.

<b>DOCUMENT INFORMATION</b>	
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<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	BES and Action Plan
2	InBusiness magazine edition 1

<b>Background Papers</b>
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<i>(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).</i>
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