

28 July 2011

Creating Business and a Skilled Workforce

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr A Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Executive Summary:

1.1 Scrutiny Panel members have expressed a wish to focus their work on a smaller number of key work streams during 2011/12, with the aim of maximising their ability to generate key findings and recommendations.

1.2 To progress this wish, the members of scrutiny panel met together with advisors on the evening of the 6th July, and examined possible areas of focus that could be recommended for adoption by the panel, under the following instruction;

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting and explained that their purpose was to consider and agree the brief for the two proposed investigations on; 'creating successful adaptable businesses' and 'creating a flexible and skilled workforce' as agreed by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel on the 13 June 2011.

1.3 Wide ranging discussions looked at the issues facing our economy and the people of the borough, with issues including; how we could begin to halt the decline of our economy, and promote growth that would benefit both our employers and local people.

It was agreed that the numbers of jobs sustained and created throughout the borough are crucial factors if we are to halt the decline of our economy.

1.4 The following two key areas of focus were proposed by members for consideration for adoption at the next Scrutiny Panel meeting, they are for Walsall;

a. How do you start a business?

b. How do you sustain a business?

1.5 It was also felt that the initial proposed work stream of: 'creating a flexible and skilled workforce', would be captured as an essential theme running through the above two proposed work streams, as this is key to both starting and sustaining successful businesses.

1.6 The working group considered and further proposed the areas of work, focus and processes which could be adopted, attached as; Attachment 1.

Reason for scrutiny:

The borough of Walsall needs to create an additional 2000 successful and trading enterprises (trading businesses) if we are to reach the national average, and with just over 7500 currently in existence, this represents a 26% increase in overall numbers.

The creation of new enterprises is crucial if we are to generate business rate income, create jobs for local people and halt the decline in our economy.

The reasons for scrutiny are to enable panel members to examine the current position, understand what the issues and potential solutions may be.

Once considered, to further explore those which could help local people to start their own businesses, and for those businesses in existence to survive and prosper, making appropriate recommendations to officers and Cabinet Members.

Attachment A sets out the initial key areas of focus.

Recommendations:

That:

- 1. Scrutiny Panel members adopt the following two areas of focus for their 2011/12 programme, that in support of a successful Walsall economy:**
 - a. How do you successfully start a business?**
 - b. How do you successfully sustain a business?**
- 2. the two previously agreed working group amend the focus of their activities against these two work streams, as set out in Attachment A, reporting back on progress.**

Background papers:

Local Economic Assessment (Summary) available on request.

Attachment A – Detailing the potential work stream activities, as agreed by the working group on the 6th July 2011.

Resource and legal considerations:

None

Citizen impact:

None

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

None

Equality Implications:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

No

Consultation:

None

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Attachment A - Potential work stream activities, as agreed by the working group on the 6th July 2011

Purpose:

In support of a successful Walsall economy;

- 1. How do you successfully start a business?**
- 2. How do you successfully sustain a business?**

Principles

- **Important to have a clear focus**
 - Concentrate on one area at a time.

Work streams

- Create the conditions for successful and sustainable business
 - Need to understand business failures and successes
 - Is there a lack of business management skills?
 - Is paperwork/regulation a barrier?
 - Is the right business support available?
 - Are the right skills available in the workforce?
- Need to create the right conditions for new business to grow and succeed:
 - Is the right support available?
 - Would managed work space be useful?
 - How do businesses access information?

For both areas there is a need to identify current good and successful practices and to explore how to continue them moving forward in a time of change and cuts in traditional business support funding and activities?

It was also considered important to look at how we could begin to create the conditions to revive a flagging economy, with a suggestion of focussing on potential growth areas, with the first area of focus being:

- The opportunities provided through the; Green Build and Low Carbon economy, looking at potential sector and its growth opportunities, and the potential for a green build Expo in Walsall.
- It was also noted that; the role and future potential for Social Enterprise and the Voluntary & Community Sectors in the development of our economy should be considered throughout this work.

How

- Focus on particular sectors of employment/industry. Apply the analysis and learn general lessons.
 - Start up
 - Sustainability
 - Opportunities
 - Threats
 - Workforce
 - Experiences
 - One business sector, eg: manufacturing/retail/low carbon

- Consider key facts from business survey
 - Use start up and failure data
 - What is the experience of business support services?
- Compare experiences of successful and failed businesses- case studies
- Map / follow the customer journey's
- Follow the journey of groups/individuals and compare perspectives:
 - Someone/a group starting a business and follow progress (breathing space cohort...?).
 - A group of young people searching for work.
- How do partners work together?
 - Do partners compete rather than collaborate?
- Engage with:
 - Businesses directly (face-to-face)
 - Events:
 - Meet the Buyer
 - The Big Event
 - Walsall Loan Fund
 - Trade Walsall Forums
 - Networking forums:
 - WOW
 - B to B
 - Social Media
 - Linked In
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - Representative Groups
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Council contacts (LEA survey)
 - Focus groups
 - Visit businesses directly
- Use existing data for background and profile building
 - LEA Survey results
 - Use diagrams and graphs as well as narrative approaches
- Commission research from local universities/academics?
 - Wolverhampton University
 - Professor Ian Noakes
- Focus on particular sectors of employment
 - Youth employment
 - Others to be determined

- Consider key facts from business survey
 - Use start up and failure data
 - What is the experience of business support services?
- Compare experiences of successful and failed businesses- case studies
- Can public sector resources be used to support employment / training/ disadvantage and disability?

END