

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	29 March 2021	
		E 9999
TITLE:	Invest in Bath Service Overview	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: List of key current business & skills initiatives being delivered or promoted by the Business & Skills Team		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Panel members requested an update on the Invest in Bath service, which provides a single point of entry to a wide range of support for local businesses and residents. The service is operated through the Council's Business and Skills team forming part of the Cabinet Member for Housing Planning and Regeneration's portfolio. The report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the team to support local businesses and residents throughout Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES).
- 1.2 The Service is accessed through the Invest in Bath website - www.investinbath.co.uk

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the work of the Business & Skills Team in delivering the Invest in Bath brand that promotes inclusive economic growth throughout the district
- 2.2 Support the team's work in engaging both businesses and residents in your wards in order to increase take-up of the initiatives available

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Invest in Bath is a service delivered by the council's Business & Skills Team, whose core function is to deliver sustainable inclusive growth to the district's economy. We aim to enable both residents and business to meet their full economic potential, increasing productivity, incomes, business rates and improving health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 3.2 Invest in Bath is the team's business, innovation and inward investment service, whilst the team's other two main brands comprise Achieve B&NES (skills and employability support to businesses and residents) and Future Bright (an in-work progression project funded externally). The team also leads on a number of digital projects such as Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband, targeted recruitment and training through planning obligations and the economic development input into planning policy development and development management functions.
- 3.3 The Invest in Bath brand itself was developed in parallel to Invest Bristol & Bath, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA)'s inward investment service. The brand is outward-looking and aims to harness Bath's global reach to promote Bath & North East Somerset as an outstanding location to do business in. Our services are primarily focussed on businesses and people of B&NES as a whole, regardless of their location within the district.

3.4 The principle functions supporting businesses have been;

(1) The COVID Grant schemes

In the past 12 months the team has:

- Delivered 14000 Government COVID grants to 3800 B&NES businesses, totalling over £65m
- Responded to over 5,000 individual enquiries and requests for support from local businesses and residents

(2) Universal Business support Service

- In the first 11 months, delivered 57 free webinars, 374 free one-to-one advice sessions and 3+ hours of dedicated support to 292 local SMEs or start-ups.
- Ran targeted sessions to help businesses adapt to COVID, including business resilience, sustainability, HR, remote working, growing online presence and financial modules
- Secured funding for a further two years of the service

(3) Employment and Skills advice and services

- Achieve B&NES delivers projects, initiatives and events focussed on improvement the employability and long-term employment outcomes for target resident groups

- The Employment and Skills Pod, a newly launched community service to support residents seeking work and training (based in Peasedown St John)
- Future Bright, a free service offering coaching and assisting to residents in receipt of in-work benefits to enable them to progress with their skills, income and career path. The service has worked helped 629 residents complete action plans, 222 undertake training courses, and 316 access client-responsive budgets. Future Bright widened its scope to support people affected by redundancy in light of COVID; most recently the team has been assisting employees of Williamson-Dickie based in Westfield.

(4) Sites and Premises Assistance

- Promoting the area as a location for inward investment in collaboration with Invest Bristol & Bath, offering tailored site searches, business support/finance, recruitment assistance and ongoing aftercare.
- Working with local commercial agents, developers and businesses to bring forward, market and fill new commercial workspace. An example of this recent filling the Chocolate Factory office redevelopment in Keynsham (circa 8,000 sqm) which helped establish a market for office space in that location and provided new HQ offices for Independent Vet Care and Pukka Herbs.
- Providing strategic input into planning in order to secure sufficient employment space to meet our growth needs in the district and protect our existing stock

(5) Communications & Networks

- The Business & Skills team has actively promoted and referred businesses to additional business support and finance initiatives through our ongoing business engagement programme.
- Our Invest in Bath newsletter is sent out monthly to subscribers across Bath & North East Somerset. Our subscriber base has grown by over 300% to more than 3,000 in the past year. The team's social media presence is growing, particularly on Twitter with 1,350 followers, and we work with the council's core communications Team to promote our activities via the corporate Facebook account
- We manage the investinbath.co.uk website which includes dedicated sections on our inward investment offer, sites & premises, business support and business news. It also includes dedicated sections for each of the key locations in our district, including Keynsham, Midsomer Norton, Radstock, the Chew Valley and City of Bath.
- In the last calendar year the Invest in Bath website has received 24,000 separate sessions from 17,000 unique users. Locational data for users is highly limited, however it is noted that the website's user base is broad, including local, regional, national and international visitors
- The team is active in engaging with stakeholders, such as the local chambers of commerce, sector and business networking groups, who assist us by disseminating news of our support initiative to their networks. Our team is active in attending business networking events and offers individual business meetings in order to help understand their current challenges and ambitions.

3.5 The Business & Skills Team is relatively small, comprising nine core-funded posts (one of which is currently vacant) and six externally funded posts (the Future Bright Team). Approximately 8,500 businesses are located in Bath & North East Somerset, hence the team will welcome support from our councillors in promoting the initiatives that are available to our business community. We would also gladly attend events in order to promote our services where deemed appropriate.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 There are no statutory considerations associated with this report.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 There are no resource implications associated with this report.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 A full equalities impact assessment of the service has not been carried out with respect to this report. The team's ethos is to promote sustainable inclusive growth and improve the lives of residents and business owners that access our services. Our individual programmes have dedicated equalities targets and several of our key initiatives target equalities groups, such as lone parents, residents on in-work benefits. We ensure our services are accessible for all, for example by offering sign language assistance where needed on our Universal Business Support programme.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 There are key elements to the Business & Skills Team's work that goes towards addressing the climate emergency. Our Universal Business Support programme includes webinars dedicated to sustainable business practice, and we are actively supporting partners such as the University of Bath's Sustainable Technologies Business Acceleration Hub, and the WECA's Green Business Grants programme.

8.2 The most recent Invest in Bath newsletter was a dedicated 'green business' edition, and the team recently contributed to the council's Green Skills and Greening Your Business webinars. One of the key outputs of our work is to increase employment in the district, one outcome of which is likely to be lowering out-commuting and its associated environmental impacts.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 None

Contact person	Rob Dawson, Enterprise Officer. 01225 394378
Background papers	An accompanying powerpoint presentation to be given during the report will be made available to panel members in advance of the meeting
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	