

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	29 November 2021	
		E 9999
TITLE:	Business and Skills Department	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: Corporate Panel Economic Strategy Background Note		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Panel members requested an update on the economic development function performed by the Business & Skills team which sits within the Sustainable Communities Directorate. 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).

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the work of the Business & Skills Team in delivering our economic development agenda and its attempts to promote inclusive economic growth throughout the district

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Business & Skills Team have a core function 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 The Business & Skills Team is relatively small, comprising eight core-funded posts (one is not yet recruited) and eight externally funded posts (the Future

Bright team and Employment and Skills Pod). 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 as well as residents. We would also gladly attend events in order to promote our services where deemed appropriate.

- 3.3 Business and Skills Team continue to undertake a large number of projects to support residents and businesses within the B&NES region especially through these difficult times. We have worked effectively, efficiently and had to react to change with a focus on priority needs such as covid grants, digital exclusion, retraining and identifying skills gaps, establishing funding routes that would allow us to stretch our service of support further and in collaboration with partners.
- 3.4 Our Invest in B&NES team focuses on business, innovation and inward investment services, worked restlessly providing 1:2:1 support to individual businesses and guiding them through grant application processes. They acted the first point of call and are continuing to offer aftercare to businesses along with signposting on to other support services.
- 3.5 The team's other two main brands focus on skills, comprising Achieve B&NES (skills and employability support to businesses and residents, ie; Employment and Skills Pod) and Future Bright (an in-work progression project funded externally).
- 3.6 The team also leads on a number of digital projects such as Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband, targeted recruitment and training through planning obligations (S106) and the economic development input into planning policy development and development management functions.
- 3.7 The Invest in Bath is being rebranded to Invest in B&NES to work alongside the support we offer outside of the city, as previously explained it 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.
- 3.8 The principle functions supporting businesses and residents have been;

Business Support Services and Grants

- Through the first 18 months of Universal Business Support programme, provide 473 local SMEs or start-ups with at least 3+ hours of dedicated support, support 43 new enterprises to start and create 72 new FTE jobs
- Provided COVID grants and support to many thousands of local businesses
- Secured funding for a further two years of our core business support service

(2) Skills and Employment

- Achieve in B&NES delivers projects, initiatives and events focussed on improving 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) started in June this year and have engaged with 70 residents to date
- 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. This year the team have supported 81 eligible residents, 16% of those increased wages, 45% helped and guided into training. On top of this they have supported an additional 114 who weren't eligible but offered a 1:2:1 coaching service and then sign posted to other local provision.
- We have also been able to get funding through DWP and WECA to support some small pilot projects and push for an extension on programmes supporting NEETs and Care Leavers

(3) Inward Investment

Working with local commercial agents, developers and businesses to bring forward, market and fill new commercial workspace.

- 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
- Promoting the area as a location of inward investment in collaboration with Invest in Bristol & Bath, offering tailored site searches, business support and finance, recruitment assistance as well as ongoing aftercare.

(4) Communications & Networks

- Name change to Invest in B&NES following previous Corporate Panel session on Invest in Bath service. Invest in B&NES newsletter now reaches circa 3,000 subscribers
- Achieve in B&NES sending out fortnightly newsletters and we have now built a network of around 300 including residents, providers and businesses in B&NES
- Working much closely with TechSPARK, local networks and The Initiative, a strategic group managed by Business West and the Bath Chamber of Commerce
- Help support Bath Unlimited, a promotional brand which is also recruiting companies outside of the city
- Surveying businesses in different areas of B&NES with aim to developing new networks, products and services in response to their needs

(5) Strategic Work

- Appendix 1 provides a thorough review of the main economic issues faced by B&NES and the approach we will be taking in developing a new Economic Strategy for the district

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 our women into work programme, based in Odd Down and supported lone parents, survivors of domestic abuse and returners to work.

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 new Bath & North East Somerset Economic Strategy will respond to the One Shared Vision and our climate and ecological emergencies. Industry accounts for approximately one third of all emissions in B&NES – this presents both challenges and opportunities for our local business base to adapt and respond to climate change. We are working with our sustainability team and local partners such as The Future Economy Network to rise to these challenges together.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 None

Contact person	Claire Lynch
Background papers	An accompanying Powerpoint presentation to be given
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	