

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 16th November 2015

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People and Economy

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Growing Economic Prosperity in Halton Update

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update PPB Members on business support activities that have been undertaken to support the growth of Halton's economy. At the request of the Chair, it is hoped that a short presentation will be provided by a business that has benefitted from the Council's support.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

I) Members note the progress being made on business support activities in Halton.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Members will recall that a business support model or 'business attractiveness model' for Halton was presented to this PPB in March 2015. It was felt appropriate to provide an update on the activities that the Council has been developing since March. In summary the purpose of the model is to shape and inform the level and type of support that we provide to businesses in Halton.

3.2 Although the model applies a basic principle that priority should be given to those businesses that will make the greatest contribution to growing and sustaining Halton's economy, the Council aims to provide a comprehensive business support service known as a "soft landing and retention service" to all the borough's existing businesses, as well as new businesses looking to relocate to the borough. Often, however, the level of support that the Council can provide is either predicated by funding criteria and or is determined by Government policy. A recent example of this being the establishment of a Business Support Growth Hub, (presented to the last PPB in September), where Government has been prescriptive in how support to businesses should be channelled through this mechanism.

There are a number of activities that have contributed to the growth of Halton's economy. During the last 12 months, the Council's Business Improvement and Growth Team has also undertaken 'customer surveys' to better understand the needs of our businesses. These surveys have also informed the list of activities set out below.

It is worth noting that economic indicators recently published point to a number of positive developments in regard to the number of jobs being created in the borough and the proportion of private sector jobs being created. Appendix 1 illustrates this.

Inward Investment

Members will be aware of the work of the team in attracting Inward Investment to the borough through the recent Scrutiny Topic Group on Inward Investment. Therefore, this report does not expand on this aspect of supporting business

Sector Focus

In reflecting the principles of the business attractiveness model described above, the Business Improvement and Growth team has applied a sectoral focus to some of the businesses it supports. The Advanced Engineering Manufacturing (AEM) and Pharmaceutical sectors are good examples of this. In this respect, the Council has an ability to take a strategic view and has facilitated an AEM cluster network group for the exchange of ideas between businesses. Businesses quickly see the mutual benefits of collaboration.

Members have seen examples of this sector focus through recent study visits to individual businesses, which also picked up on the borough's other key sectors including Science and Innovation and Logistics and Distribution.

Relationship Management & Account Manager Approach

The Leader and Chief Executive have emphasised to the team of the need to maintain positive and strong relationships with the borough's businesses, likening this to an account manager role. This sees the Business Improvement and Growth Team acting as the one stop contact point for any enquiries businesses have in respect of accessing Council services and professional expertise. This concept has been extended to provide a greater engagement with Halton's **Key Companies** i.e. large employers in the borough.

Evolutive Database

A frustration for businesses can be the fact that they are often contacted by a wide range of organisations either seeking support

from the business or offering support to the business. The Evolutive database will further improve the communication with businesses, but more importantly across internal and external partners to ensure that the support to businesses is consistently managed. This is a useful tool in providing good relationship management as described above.

Externally funded business support programmes

Members have received reports at previous meetings regarding externally funded support programmes that are managed by the Council's Business Improvement and Growth Team. These include the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) grants to business programme and the European Regional Development Fund Business Support Programme. Through these schemes, businesses have benefitted from capital investment or tailored mentoring and diagnostic support aimed at helping the business to grow. The role of the team has been vital in guiding businesses through the finer detail of Government contracts and the complexities of State Aid and funding body criteria.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Although the Council has transferred the day to day running of the BIDs programme to the Chamber of Commerce, the Council continues to play a strategic oversight role in guiding and inputting into the BIDs' Business Plan. The team has also been working to secure a retail BID for Runcorn.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council has allocated time to the effective monitoring and evaluation of the programmes described above. The Council has acquired a positive reputation for the effective management of these programmes. As a result, the Council is in a good position to work with partners to ensure that Halton businesses benefit from successor programmes such as RGF 7 and ERDF 2014-2020 schemes. Furthermore, the Council has procedures and structures in place to manage and deliver the future Business Growth Hub Brokerage and Support service.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Whilst there are no financial implications arising from the report, it is worth acknowledging the relationship between a strong and vibrant business base and the potential for sustained or increased business rates income for the Council. The Business Improvement and Growth Team plays an important role in creating a business friendly borough aimed at attracting and retaining businesses in the borough.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 The report has positive implications for all of the Council's priorities for the reasons set out in section 4. However, the report is most relevant to the Employment Learning and Skills and Urban Renewal priorities. The activities described in this report are aimed at increasing employment opportunities for our residents. At the same time some incentives are provided to businesses to improve the environment in which they operate.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There are no risks identified.

8.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.