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**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 25 October 2010  
**Subject:** Draft Economic Development Plan and Consultation  
**Report of:** Cllr Ken Matthews , Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development  
**Summary:** The report presents the Draft Economic Development Plan Consultation Document for consideration and provides an update on the consultation responses received on the plan.

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**Advising Officer:** Alan Fleming, Director of Sustainable Communities  
**Contact Officer:** Liz Wade, Assistant Director, Economic Growth, Skills & Regeneration, James Cushing Economic Policy Manager  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

The Economic Development Plan is included in the Councils' Policy Framework as a recommended/discretionary plan for full Council adoption. The Economic Development Plan directly delivers against the corporate Council priority of managing growth effectively in order to deliver 26,000 new homes and 27,000 new jobs by 2026, realising the Central Bedfordshire area vision of delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all.

### **Financial:**

The development of the Economic Development Plan and the costs of consultations have been met through the 2011/12 Economic Development, Skills and Regeneration budget. Future activities in delivering the plan will be through a mixture of direct support through the Council's existing budgets, and seeking to maximise private sector funding and leverage of external funding.

### **Legal:**

There are no statutory requirements for the Council to produce an Economic Development Plan. The Council will be able to demonstrate its leadership and open for business on the economic development and skills agendas under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 to promote or improve the economic well-being of its area.

### **Risk Management:**

Not applicable

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

Not applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In developing the Economic Development Plan the findings from the Local Economic Assessment on equalities considerations and target groups have been utilised to inform key priorities, likewise a full 13 week public consultation process has been implemented to maximise engagement with the development of the Plan.

The target groups identified within the LEA as requiring additional support to access the labour market and develop their skills are: 18-24 year olds and over 50s, disabled people and ethnic minorities. These groups are prioritised within the Into Work section of the plan and measures are proposed which will tailor welfare provision to the needs of these groups and tackle youth unemployment.

**Community Safety:**

Not applicable.

**Sustainability:**

Fundamentally matching employment with the needs of our growing resident population is directly addressing the longer term sustainability of Central Bedfordshire. The Economic Development Plan has been developed to align to the Council's Climate Change Strategy. The UK's legally binding target to reduce CO2 emissions by 80% by 2050 will mean that in the coming years carbon reduction will be at the heart of ensuring businesses thrive and grow. This will create opportunities for the development of new technologies, industries and services. We recognise that Central Bedfordshire is ideally located to benefit from and support the emerging low carbon economy, particularly given the area's strengths in relation to research and development from facilities such as Millbrook and Cranfield University. Central Bedfordshire Council's Climate Change Strategy is committed to supporting businesses to thrive in a future low carbon economy and ensure that Central Bedfordshire realises fully the benefits of being a more sustainable and greener place to live and work.

**Procurement:**

Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**The Committee is asked to:-**

- 1. Consider the Draft Economic Development Plan consultation document and consultation findings**

## The Economic Development Plan

1. The Economic Development Plan (EDP) addresses the delivery of creating 27,000 new jobs by 2026 across Central Bedfordshire. The EDP builds upon the published Local Economic Assessment (January 2011) and draws on a wide range of other economic related information and applied research from across the Council. The EDP development has also informed and been informed by the development of a range of other related corporate strategies that address the wider economic determinants such as transport, health, housing and education.
2. The analysis of this evidence base resulted in the proposed framework for the EDP which was approved by the Executive on 31 May 2011 for further public consultation. The EDP framework is based on four interconnected priority themes. The four themes are:
  1. **Supporting business** to grow and thrive
  2. Providing a range of **sites and premises**
  3. Getting our residents **into work**
  4. Increasing the supply of **our skilled people**
3. The EDP consultation document is set out in Appendix A, and expands on the four themes and highlights the outcomes being sought and illustrates the types of activity that are undertaken to deliver against these outcomes. The consultation sought views on this approach and the priorities under each theme.
4. The skills of our people is a major regeneration and economic driver of our local economy, directly affecting the employment prospects and business productivity. As part of the EDP, an All Age Skills Strategy (Skills for Growth) is being developed and is being consulted upon in parallel. This consultation closes on the 29<sup>th</sup> October. The All Age Skills Strategy seeks to ensure that the people are appropriately skilled to meet the growing local economy needs to be able to progress into employment.
5. Critically, underpinning the four themes, is the need for the whole Council to develop an enabling 'can do' culture that is focused on delivering the economic outcomes for the area. Only in this way can we deliver the step change in economic performance we strive to achieve and build a reputation that this is a Council and area that is open for business.
6. It is proposed to monitor the EDP using the following as core indicators;
  - Number of people in employment
  - Number of out of work benefit claimants
  - Economic activity rate
  - Number of people in apprenticeships

These are aligned to the key indicators with the Sustainable Community Strategy and will be underpinned by a wider basket of other measures relating to each priority theme as part of monitoring the local economy.

## Consultation Process

7. A thirteen week planned programme of listening and engaging key stakeholders and partners was launched on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011 and closed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011.
8. The consultation has been publicised widely to raise awareness and encourage responses both online and through direct mailing and contact. The online questionnaire was sent to over 400 stakeholders; including all Town and Parish Councils, local businesses and people who have previously expressed an interest in economic development. A press and social media publicity campaign was also undertaken to further promote the EDP locally, gaining coverage in a number of local newspapers, websites and business publications.
9. The consultation was also publicised to many local businesses via the Chamber of Commerce's email newsletter and to almost 500 Voluntary and Community Sector organisations via South Bedfordshire Voluntary and Community Action. Within the Council, the consultation was publicised in the weekly Members' Information Bulletin and staff newsletter Be Inspired. In addition to this a working group of officers representing all Directorates has been engaged in developing the plan and aligning to existing corporate plans and priorities.
10. During the thirteen week consultation period, officers carried out a programme of presentations and face-to-face discussion to promote awareness of the consultation and further engage with local businesses and key partners through in-depth dialogue. Workshops were also held to jointly discuss and promote the All Age Skills Strategy and Economic Development Plan. The organisations engaged in this way include:
  - Barnfield College
  - Bedford College
  - Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce
  - Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
  - Business Beacon
  - Central Bedfordshire College
  - Central Bedfordshire Council Conservative Group (n.b. other groups were offered the opportunity to meet)
  - Central Bedfordshire Council Directorate Teams
  - Central Bedfordshire Equalities Forum
  - Central Bedfordshire Youth Parliament
  - Commercial Agents Forum
  - Cranfield University
  - East of England IDB
  - Federation of Small Businesses
  - Health Improvement Partnership
  - Intraining (Work Programme sub-contractor)
  - Jobcentre Plus
  - Local Strategic Partnership Environment & Economy sub-group
  - South Bedfordshire Voluntary and Community Action
  - Strategic Enterprise Group
  - University of Bedfordshire

- Women in Business Network

## Consultation Responses

11. In total there were 105 responses; 81 of these came via the online questionnaire and the remaining 24 were in the form of letters/emails or detailed individual meetings. Almost a third of respondents were Central Bedfordshire residents (30%), and a similar amount were Central Bedfordshire businesses (28%). The remaining group was made up of public sector organisations, educational bodies, Town and Parish Councils, voluntary organisations and community groups. The Headline Consultation Results are set out at Appendix B.
12. Overall the responses to the consultation have been very positive and both businesses and partners have welcomed the time taken to engage with them and listen to their views on driving economic growth. Some of the comments we have received include:
 

*“Great to see a local authority being so proactive and doing something positive”*

*“Thank you for taking the trouble to do this”*

*“The EDP is a thorough document and covers all aspects needed to drive the economy forward”*
13. 93% of respondents agree or agree strongly with the need to prioritise jobs growth and create the conditions to stimulate economic growth. 7% had no view on the matter and none of the respondents disagreed with the intention of the plan.
14. Land & Premises is considered the most important priority (35%), however it is clear from verbatim comments that many respondents see all of the priorities as key requirements to support jobs growth due to the wider interconnected nature of the themes and, in some cases, proposed areas of focus and activities. Supporting Business is seen as the second most important priority (33%), followed by Skills (19%) and Into Work (13%).
15. Within each of the four priority themes, the areas of focus considered most important by the respondents are:

### Supporting Business

- Start ups and entrepreneurial activity
- Business Support

### Land and Premises

- Regenerating town centres
- Delivery of key infrastructure

### Into Work

- Promoting Enterprise
- Targeting youth unemployment

### Skills

- Promoting Apprenticeships and vocational learning

- Meeting the skills needs of employers

## **Next Steps**

16. The final draft of the EDP will be informed by these results for consideration by Executive and full Council in December. Associated with the EDP an annual implementation plan will be developed and monitored as part of the mainstream service and business planning process.

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Economic Development Plan Consultation Document

Appendix B – Headline Consultation Results

## **Background papers:** (open to public inspection)

Local Economic Assessment

All Age Skills Strategy Consultation Document

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands. Also available online at:

Local Economic Assessment

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/business/regeneration-economic-growth/local-economic-assessment.aspx>

All Age Skills Strategy

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/business/regeneration-economic-growth/all-age-skills-strategy.aspx>