
Meeting: Executive
Date: 15 November 2011
Subject: Economic Development Plan
Report of: Cllr Ken Matthews, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report presents the Economic Development Plan for consideration and proposes that the Executive endorse the plan and support its presentation to full Council at the 24 November 2011 meeting as part of the Council Policy Framework.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, 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
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

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.

Specifically, the Economic Development plan directly supports the Corporate Priority of Managing growth effectively. However, the plan will also directly contribute to the educating protecting and providing opportunities for Children and Young People priority.

Financial:

1. 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:

2. 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:

3. Not Applicable.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. 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 Local Economic Assessment 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:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. 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:

8. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

9. The Draft Economic Development Plan Consultation Document and Consultation Results have been considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 October 2011. The Committee recommended that the Executive be informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report, commended it and endorsed the actions being taken.

RECOMMENDATION:**The Executive is asked to:**

1. **endorse the Economic Development Plan and recommend that full Council on 24 November 2011 adopt it as part of the Council Policy Framework.**

Reason for Recommendation: To put in place an up to date, targeted and shared corporate plan, in response to the need to achieve job growth (27,000 jobs by 2026) in Central Bedfordshire in realising our full economic potential.

Executive Summary

10. The Economic Development Plan seeks to affirm the Council's commitment to support sustainable Economic Growth in Central Bedfordshire and outlines nine key workstreams to put in place the conditions to enable private and voluntary and community sectors to invest and grow in Central Bedfordshire and support our residents to be able to benefit from new economic growth.

11. An extensive public consultation process has been undertaken, highlighting the support for an Economic Development Plan and the need to consider the interrelated nature of the four key themes (Supporting business to grow and thrive, Providing a range of sites and premises, Getting our residents into work, Increasing the supply of our skilled people).
12. Nine key workstreams have been identified to target activity to support sustainable economic growth and provide clarity and strategic direction to partners and across the Council as the basis for future partnership working.
13. The Plan will be monitored through the production of an Annual Local Economic Assessment, highlighting the performance of the Central Bedfordshire Economy. This will be closely aligned to other core Council monitoring activities, such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Annual Monitoring Report, in addition to monitoring of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The Economic Development Plan Background

14. The Economic Development Plan (EDP) is part of the whole Council's Policy Framework as a recommended and desired plan and seeks to address the delivery of creating 27,000 new jobs by 2026 across Central Bedfordshire. The EDP builds upon the published Local Economic Assessment (LEA) (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 wider economic determinants such as transport, health, housing and education.
15. A thirteen week planned consultation programme was launched on 30 June 2011 and closed on 30 September 2011. This process was aimed at identifying the priorities for interventions to support economic growth.
16. The draft EDP, builds on the existing economic development model, presented to the Executive in May 2011, focusing on interconnected priority themes:
 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**.
17. Crucially, 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 and building a reputation that this is a Council and area that is open for business. This can do culture is based on the Council supporting the private and third sectors to create new jobs and invest in the area. Council activity is focused on targeted interventions putting in place the optimal conditions to support growth, providing joined up high quality services to our residents and businesses and putting supporting sustainable business and jobs growth at the heart of the Council.

Consultation Response

18. The consultation has been publicised widely to raise awareness and encourage responses both online and through direct mailing and contact. In addition to a publicity campaign to promote the EDP, the online questionnaire was directly sent to over 400 stakeholders; including all Town and Parish Councils, local businesses and representative organisations. Additionally, a number of existing business networking events were attended to promote the EDP consultation and over 500 voluntary and community organisations were contacted. As part of the consultation process, officers undertook over 20 face to face or direct group presentations with key stakeholders.

19. In total 105 responses were received; 81 via the online questionnaire and the remaining 24 were in the form of letters/emails or detailed individual meetings. Overall the responses to the consultation have been very positive. 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”

93% of respondents agree or agree strongly with the need to prioritise jobs growth and create the conditions to stimulate economic growth. None of the respondents disagreed with the intention of the plan.

20. A summary paper of the consultation findings is attached as Appendix B. It is clear that many respondents see all of the priorities as key requirements to support jobs growth due to the wider interconnected nature of the themes. However, responses highlight that Land & Premises is considered the most important priority (35%), followed by Supporting Business (33%), Skills (19%) and Into Work (13%).

The Economic Development Plan

21. The consultation highlighted the interconnected nature of the four themes and in particular the related impacts of the proposed areas of focus. As such, in order to focus our corporate and partnership activities to make the greatest impact in supporting jobs and business growth, nine work streams have been proposed:

1. Employer Engagement

A consistent and proactive approach to understanding employers' needs is fundamental to supporting new growth opportunities and addressing local business barriers.

2. Open 4 Business

A Council wide approach to doing business, delivering joined up services to business and enabling partnership working across Central Bedfordshire to achieve our economic potential.

3. Setting the Direction

Providing clear leadership and policy and putting in place the conditions to support economic growth, such as providing space for businesses to locate and grow.

4. Delivering the right infrastructure at the right time

Enabling the delivery of key infrastructure and new developments through working collaboratively with public and private sector partners to deliver the necessary infrastructure and high quality environment to create the highest quality of places to live, work and enjoy.

5. Maximising Investment in Central Bedfordshire

Attracting, securing and facilitating greater levels of public and private sector funding to be invested in Central Bedfordshire and maximising the use of existing assets to deliver economic growth.

6. Business Support and Sustainable Growth

Encouraging businesses to seek and access advice and support is essential to business success. The Council will work closely with those business advisers and intermediaries that our businesses choose, providing valued opportunities for business to business networking and strengthening local supply chains.

7. Improving Access to work and learning

Ensuring that our residents are able to access employment, learning and services and our businesses are able to reliably access their markets.

8. Meeting Employer Skill Needs

Working with existing and new employers to understand their skills needs now and in the future to help businesses grow and thrive, and sharing this with local education providers to deliver training and services to meet those needs.

9. Promoting Enterprise and Career Opportunities

Helping people to be more entrepreneurial in developing their careers is underpinned by providing high quality information, advice and guidance on the opportunities to develop skills, promoting local success and celebrating achievement of all our people and local businesses.

Implementing the Economic Development Plan

22. The EDP covers a broad range of long term activities supporting economic growth in delivering major infrastructure and Town Centre regeneration. These activities will continue, to ensure that the conditions for sustainable growth are in place. Likewise the development of robust policies and plans for the area will continue, focussed on the delivery of economic growth and evidence based business cases are supported to attract and secure investment into the area.

23. The recommended focus for 2012/13 delivery plan will be to prioritise delivery of a robust and proactive approach to employer engagement and to tackle youth employment.

Employer Engagement

In 2012/13 we will work towards implementing a new employer engagement framework for the Council, to guide and strengthen the corporate support and joint working with employers across Central Bedfordshire. This will include actively identifying at the earliest opportunity the business risks and opportunities to help tailor business services to meet local needs aimed at increasing productivity and stimulating employment growth.

A dedicated single point of contact for all business customers of the Council will be introduced, supported by additional staff training and information systems to make it easy to do business with us and improve business satisfaction levels.

Youth Unemployment

We will focus on securing and influencing the delivery of externally funded provision to ensure young people are better equipped for work and are able to access employment and training opportunities. Particular emphasis will be on encouraging the range and quality of vocational training to meet employers' needs by providing labour market intelligence on the current and future workforce needs. We will celebrate local enterprise success and promote available support to raise aspirations and awareness of opportunities available to them.

24. It is proposed to monitor the EDP using the following 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 measures relating to each priority theme as part of an annual review of the Local Economic Assessment to inform future years' delivery plans.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Economic Development Plan

Appendix B – Economic Development Plan Consultation Document Response paper

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

Draft Economic Development Plan Consultation Document