

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – 9 FEBRUARY 2016

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION AND ACTION PLAN 2016/17 – 2019/20

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To agree the Economic Development Vision for East Herts.

RECOMMENDATION FOR JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: The Executive be advised that the Joint Meeting of Scrutiny Committees supports:

(A)	The approval of the Economic Development Vision and Action Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20.
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1.0 Background

1.1 The context for economic development within East Hertfordshire, like many other areas nationally, has changed in recent years. Key developments include:

- The announcement by the Chancellor in the Autumn Budget Statement that councils will retain business rates as their main source of funding by the end of the current Parliament. This requires a closer working relationship between local authorities and the business community;
- Stable economic recovery nationally however slower growth figures for East Hertfordshire in recent years and the need to remain competitive;
- A new Council elected in May 2015 who are likely to endorse “supporting economic growth” a key priority in the emerging Corporate Strategic Plan.

1.2 With that in mind the current economic development strategy is no longer fit for purpose and a new “vision” has been drafted (see **Essential Reference Paper ‘B’**).

2.0 Report

2.1 Work on analysing economic trends, identifying the challenges facing businesses together with a pragmatic assessment of East Herts District Council’s capability to influence the local economy began shortly after the election in May 2015. The key stages of development have been as follows:

- Production of an evidence base June – August (see **Essential Reference Paper ‘C’**);
- Consultations with local businesses:
 - o Hertford: 12th June
 - o Ware: 14th September
 - o Bishop’s Stortford: 13th October;
- Consultations with key partner organisations such as the Federation of Small Business, The Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership (on-going);
- Member engagement session 20th October;
- Executive awayday discussion 23rd November;
- Corporate Management Team discussion 15th December;
- Informal consultation with Councillors via Portfolio Holder (December/ January).

2.2 Through this process we have arrived at six evidence based themes with a number of actions and deliverables over the next four years. The vision also contains a commentary on areas that the council will not be investing in (such as skills and employment initiatives).

2.3 Once agreed for recommendation it will be shared with key partners and stakeholders but we are not proposing a formal consultation period. The process for formal approval is as follows:

2.4 Delivery: The vision will drive the Council’s economic development agenda for the next four years. The key actions are contained within the strategy document itself however a more detailed iteration will emerge (eg. specific timescales, targets etc) through the finance and business planning process. Headlines from this will also be shared at Joint Scrutiny on 9th February under a separate agenda item. A separate ‘action plan’ document is therefore not required.

2.5 The main deliverables for year one (2016/17) are as follows:

- Commissioning a gap/ needs analysis for Bishop's Stortford and the wider district on demand for employment/ commercial space and sectoral opportunities;
- Develop a joint investment programme to support the visitor economy in conjunction with Visit Herts;
- Create business pages on the internet and build the platform for business self-service business accounts;
- Raise awareness on ensuring super-fast broadband provision for businesses and residents across the district;
- Test appetite for town centre businesses to form a Business Improvement District (BID);
- Operational management of the Rural Development Programme
- Administration and regulation of farmer's markets and contract management for WENTA;
- On-going liaison with key partners such as the LEP to understand opportunities around the 'growth hub' and growth corridors.

2.6 There are no assumptions at this stage about how the actions will be delivered (eg. it could be through the current structure, through a new structure, through a third party or shared service). Moreover, many of the actions will be led through different service areas (eg. Revenues and Benefits, Planning Policy, Customer Services & Information) and the overall successful implementation of the strategy will rest on collective efforts of different services and partners beyond the economic development function.

2.7 The key skills and requirements that needed to deliver this vision are as follows:

- Information and analysis skills on macroeconomics/ local socio-economic context and business case construction;
- Collaborative working skills with key partners (e.g. the LEP and LSCC);
- Liaison and networking skills with the business community (local employers and umbrella organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Business);
- Project management skills (e.g. working with planning policy and business rates' teams);
- Commissioning and contract management skills (eg. with WENTA and Visit Herts).

2.8 The current restructure of management arrangements, when completed, is likely to lead to an overall review of the resources required to realise the new vision and key skill requirements set out above.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Contact Member: Councillor Gary Jones, Executive Member for Economic Development.

Contact Officer: Benjamin Wood – Head of Business Development, Extn: 1699. benjamin.wood@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author: Benjamin Wood – Head of Business Development, Extn: 1699. benjamin.wood@eastherts.gov.uk