

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

The Economic Development Task Group met for the first time in this new Municipal Year on 25th July 2022, the meeting was conducted via Zoom. The new group comprises of seven Councillors: Cllr Hassan Akberali, Cllr Tahir Aziz, Cllr Gary Elson, Cllr John Morley, Cllr Stephen Oades, Cllr Dale Roberts and Cllr Kevin Davis.

The first item of business for the group was to elect the Chairman and Vice - Chairman for the remainder of the Municipal Year, Cllr Gary Elson was elected as Chairman with Cllr Stephen Oades elected as Vice-Chairman.

The group reviewed and discussed the minutes from the last meeting held on 23rd March 2022, there were no Matters Arising.

Chris Norrington introduced the Business Liaison team members to the Group, Riette Thomas then gave a presentation on the work of the team and its activities. Riette referred to the Economic Development priorities as set in Core Strategy 2022 to 2027:

A Borough of opportunity; Strong and Stable Economy and a Borough with an enabling infrastructure. Woking Works was created in 2017 as a directory of services and has been transformed since that time, now facilitating a link between the Business Liaison Team and a wide spectrum of local organisations with over 5000 businesses operating in the Borough.

The group were reminded of the activities undertaken under the Woking Works brand were: Providing business support and advice; Supporting start-ups; the Woking Jobs Board; the Woking Hospitality Alliance; Business Directory; Engagement; Property Enquiries and Inward Investment.

Riette Thomas has emphasised the import role of Councillors in sharing the Woking Works activities listed on Facebook through their social media channels. The annual TEDx event is due to be held in November, other events of note are the economic breakfast with the Bank of England, the Crest Awards and Woking Means Business.

The original Economic Development Strategy ended in March this year, the timescales for the next strategy have yet to be decided. Looking forward The Action Plan containing five Key Priorities and 89 actions was circulated to the Group. The five Key Priorities are:

1. Focus on Business
2. Build on our People and Skills advantages
3. Future proofing our Borough's town and village centres
4. Woking the place to be
5. Destination Woking

The group was advised that an investment plan for Destination Woking is to be received by the Corporate Leadership Team this September.

All 89 Actions were linked to the Woking For All Strategy and a quarterly summary was provided to Giorgio Framalitto alongside a twice yearly update for the Task Group on the actions and activities taken place during the period.

Both the Group Members and Officers recognise that some aspects of the Action Plan will need to be revisited given the rapidly changing Global Economy and the cost-of-living crisis that is having an effect on people living and working in the Borough. It is also recognised that it is important to identify those businesses that operate from home as well as Sole Traders and the Self Employed.

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Regular business drop-in sessions with local businesses were being held across the Borough, the most recent was in St Johns which had been well received with valuable exchanges of information helpful to all sides. The next planned sessions were due in West Byfleet and Knaphill. Further updates on these and others will be made in the next report.

There has been close working with Council Services such as Estates Management and Green Infrastructure; agencies such as the Department of Work and Pensions to reduce the level of claimant counts; and Surrey Chambers and the Woking Federation of Small Businesses.

The Group are keen to ensure that Woking continues to be promoted as a Town and Borough of destination and opportunity not only for employment but also for leisure and recreation and that we maximise the potential of the many unique and interesting activities, features, legends and heritage that we have to offer. This will appeal to visitors and in doing so help support our local economy.

The Celebrate Woking website had been set up 10 years ago and the excellent work of the team had been instrumental in our past successes, it has been reported that the site now receives around 10,000 visits per month.

We wish to thank the Business Liaison team and colleagues for all the invaluable work they do to ensure that Woking continues to have a balanced, positive and credible Economic Development Strategy.

Recommendations

- (i) The Task Group to receive a quarterly update on the Action Plan
- (ii) The Terms of Reference be reviewed to ensure they remain current and fit for purpose

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Councillor Gary Elson Email: Cllrgary.elson@woking.gov.uk
Contact Person:	Councillor Gary Elson Email: Cllrgary.elson@woking.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Dale Roberts Email: cllrdale.roberts@woking.gov.uk
Shadow Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ayesha Azad Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk
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