

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP UPDATE – 3 NOVEMBER 2022

Executive Summary

The Economic Development Task Group met for the second time in the municipal year.

Chris Norrington, Business Liaison Manager, provided an update on the last two quarters of the Action Plan, April – June and July - September. The Business Liaison team had continued to engage businesses across the Borough including drop-in sessions for businesses to seek advice.

The Action Plan updates explained what progress had been made on each of the five priorities:

- Priority 1 – Focus on business. The Business Liaison team had continued to engage businesses across the Borough including drop-in sessions for businesses to seek advice. The Council, in partnership with the Surrey Chambers of Commerce, has launched an International Trade Forum to support exporting businesses in the Borough.
- Priority 2 – Build on our people and skills advantages. Working in partnership with DWP, the Council had continued to promote funded courses for people to enter the hospitality industry.
- Priority 3 – Future Proofing our borough's town and villages. A public consultation had been held on the Masterplan.
- Priority 4 – Woking, the place to be. A project manager to promote digital inclusion had been employed, working alongside Health & Wellbeing.
- Priority 5 – Destination Woking. This continued to be developed alongside the Council's strategies for the Borough.

Both quarters had seen suppressed footfall, attributed to many businesses adopting a hybrid working model following the pandemic lockdowns. However, Italia Conti had opened in September and Woking had hosted Surrey Dance 21, both of which had contributed to some increased footfall.

A pilot parking incentive scheme, that would allow retailers to provide parking discounts to their customers, will be introduced in the spring of 2023 as it is currently undergoing financial and systems testing. The Group also discussed the current parking strategy.

Angela Baillie, Commercialisation Officer, provided Members with an update on the health of the Estate over the previous six months. Economic headwinds had made an impact on certain sectors of the market.

The My Town Shops website had been rebranded as Online High Street and had expanded its deliveries to the boroughs surrounding Woking.

Italia Conti had been engaged by the Council to seek the views of students on what priorities they had for the town.

The Council hosted, a breakfast briefing as part of the Woking Means Business Exhibition, held at the Leisure Centre. The Leader of the Council, Ann-Marie Barker, the CEO, Julie Fisher and Strategic Director for Place, Giorgio Framalico updated businesses on Victoria Place, the Masterplan, other developments, health & wellbeing and the environment and future financial challenges the Council has. Florence Hubert, from the Bank of England was the guest speaker, providing businesses with an update on the effects of inflation and further increases in interest rates. Around 100 people representing many sectors attended the event.

Recommendations

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.

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