

# AGENDA ITEM 13

## RURAL, ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014

### REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

#### MBC BUSINESS SURVEY 2013

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Committee in relation to the evaluation outcomes of the Business Survey undertaken by Melton Borough Council in August 2013.

#### 2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- a) Note the evaluation report and proposed next steps;
- b) It is recommended that Members note the data gathered and approve the findings from the Business Survey in order to support further projects in relation to Economic Development in the Borough. (Appendix A)

#### 3.0 KEY ISSUES: INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Business Survey was developed to build a picture of and understand Melton Borough's business community. The survey provided an opportunity to request data on a wide variety of business related topics.
- 3.2. The aim of the survey was to seek quantifiable data, as well as gather perceptions in relation to matters such as Melton Borough as a business location, key business support areas, growth aspirations, recruitment and skills challenges and technological issues facing local businesses.
- 3.3. In order to simplify business regulation and improve business experiences of planning services, it was also considered beneficial to request information in relation to respondent's recent experiences of planning services. More importantly, we intended to request feedback in terms of what we can do to ensure we provide a good planning service to local businesses.

#### KEY ISSUES: METHODOLOGY

- 3.4 The survey was distributed to every business address within Melton Borough, which featured on the NNDR1 Business Rate database and also a number of businesses operating from home.
- 3.5 A link on MBC's website was also created in order to facilitate businesses to complete the survey online.
- 3.6 A total of 63 respondents completed the survey and although not a high number it does provide some useful information.
- 3.7 The survey results were imputed into SNAP. The quantitative responses have been examined using the SNAP Analysis tool, whilst the qualitative responses have been analysed manually.

## KEY ISSUES: FINDINGS

- 3.8 The following statistics highlight some of the findings of the evaluation report, paying particular attention to those responses of note.
- 3.9 Respondents were asked how long their business had been established in Melton Borough. It is of note that nearly 40% stated that they had been trading locally for more than 21 years.
- 3.10 The overwhelming majority of respondents operate independent businesses (84.1%), whilst the remainder were made up of national (4.8%), international (4.8%) and regional businesses (3.2%). A further 3.2% stated they operate another type of business and interestingly, no respondents stated that they were part of a small independent chain.
- 3.11 In terms of Melton Borough as a business location, 66.1% of respondents believe it has stayed the same in the last 5 year, 24.2% believe it is a worse place to do business and 9.7% believe it is a better place to do business.
- 3.12 A total of 45 businesses (72.1%) stated that they have intentions to grow, whilst the remaining 18 respondents (27.9%) stated that they did not have any growth aspirations.
- 3.13 Respondents were asked if they are more or less confident about their business today compared to a year ago. Approximately two-thirds of business owners are more confident and the remaining 36.8% are less confident.
- 3.14 In terms of financial assistance, a large number of businesses indicated that they would find funding towards new business premises, new equipment and marketing as very beneficial in supporting business sustainability and growth.
- 3.15 In terms of broadband connections, 52.6% of business owners rate their connection as good or very good. A total of 37.3% rated it as reasonable, whilst 8.5% rated it as bad. There was only one instance where broadband is not currently available (1.7%).
- 3.16 The large majority of respondents (63.4%) indicated that a local skills shortage was the main barrier to recruiting staff.
- 3.17 In terms of skills barriers, not surprisingly poor experience (71.1%) was cited as the main skills barrier, whilst poor quality CV's also featured quite highly (31.6%).
- 3.18 Sixty per cent of businesses indicated that they would consider taking on a work experience placement, 51.7% an apprentice, 46.6% a student intern and 33.3% would consider taking on a volunteer.
- 3.19 In relation to planning, 55.6% of respondents considered their customer service experience to be good or very good. A total of 36.1% considered it to be average, whilst 8.4% felt that the service they received was poor or very poor.
- 3.20 When dealing with planning departments, respondents indicated that no lengthy delays, advice that is clear, reliable and comprehensive and a constructive approach to problem solving were key to delivering a good service. The Applications and Advice Manager (Regulatory Services) is taking a leading role within the 'Better Business for All' project being promoted by the LLEP to develop ways of providing better quality, clearer, more accessible and consistent planning advice to businesses.

### Next Steps

- 3.21 Alongside the Economic Development Strategy, these findings will provide a basis to consider how Melton Borough Council can ensure it provides a business support service that meets the requirements of the local business community. The conclusions of the report will help to shape how we, with support from our partners, deliver targeted outcomes in the future to ensure we stimulate economic activity and support business growth. They will also feed into the knowledge and evidence base that informs the

formulation of the new Melton Local Plan in order that development related issues can be addressed.

In addition officers will also look to benchmarks some of this information with national and regional trends, to identify potential opportunities and challenges.

#### **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are strong linkages to the Councils Economic Development Strategy, Entrepreneurship and Skills Agenda and in supporting the Melton Mowbray Town Centre.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 No direct implications related to the recommendations have been identified.

#### **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 No legal implications/powers have been identified.

#### **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 No community safety issues have been identified.

#### **8.0 EQUALITIES**

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed for this project.

#### **9.0 RISKS**

9.1 This report is for noting, as projects progress they will be subject to their own risk analysis.

#### **10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE**

10.1 No impact on climate change.

#### **11.0 CONSULTATION**

11.1 The development of the Business Survey incorporated consultation with other MBC Officers, as well as with some local businesses who volunteered to feedback their opinions in relation to the questions featured within the survey.

#### **12.0 WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All wards are affected.

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Appendices: A- Business Survey Report

Background papers: None

X drive/Committees/REEA/2013.14/050314/HR- Business Survey Report