

Report to Cabinet

25 September 2024

By the Cabinet Member for Economic Development
and Property

DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt



**Horsham
District
Council**

Enterprising Horsham Economic Prospectus and Business Charter

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the publication of the Enterprising Horsham Economic Prospectus and Enterprising Horsham Business Charter for stakeholder consultation. The **Enterprising Horsham Economic Prospectus** (Appendix 1) is the primary and overarching document of the new Economic Development Framework (EDF) that will replace the existing Economic Development and Visitor Economy strategies as the Council's economic policy and focusses on delivering the economic elements of the Council Plan. The **Enterprising Horsham Business Charter** (Appendix 2) is a key document within the EDF that will help to shape and drive forward a one council approach to deliver the EDF in support of the local economy.

Recommendations:

That the Cabinet is recommended:

- i) To approve the publication of the Enterprising Horsham Economic Prospectus and Business Charter documents for stakeholder consultation; and
- ii) To delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property, to finalise the documents ready for consultation

Reasons for Recommendations:

To enable stakeholder engagement to help shape the Council's economic policy. This is a critical part of the process of developing policies that reflect and respond to the needs, demands and aspirations of the range of relevant local and strategic stakeholders.

Background Papers:

- Horsham Economic Development Strategy 2017 to 2027 – <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/business/economic-strategy>

- Horsham Visitor Economy Strategy 2018 to 2023 –
<https://www.horsham.gov.uk/business/visitor-economy-strategy>

Wards Affected: All Wards

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1. **Proposal:**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline an Economic Development Framework (EDF) approach for reviewing and refreshing the economic development vision and priorities for Horsham District as the basis to support delivery of the Council Plan. This report seeks approval to undertake consultations on two key documents within the EDF with internal and external stakeholders with a view that final versions of the documents will be reported to Cabinet for approval.
- 1.2 The main reason why local government develops and drives economic policies and programmes is to create employment as a central driver for improving the quality of life for local people; a fundamental principle of local government.
- 1.3 Employment achieves this through both improving the standard of living and providing a purpose and stimulation. In this context, the type of job will also be a factor in shaping an individual's quality of life and, therefore, this is also factored into economic development considerations.
- 1.4 In recent years, increased pressure on public finances has seen a further aspect of employment come into play. In this context employment is seen as an important element for supporting independence and healthy lifestyles and, as a result, reducing the demands on public services. This said, a worrying trend post COVID has seen more people of working age becoming economically inactive and not in a position to take up employment; a position that will drive a priority policy focus over the coming months and years for both local councils and Government alike.

2. **Council Policy Alignment:**

- 2.1 The EDF will replace two current strategies:
 - Horsham Economic Development Strategy 2017 to 2027
 - Horsham Visitor Economy Strategy 2018 to 2023
- 2.2 The EDF will help to deliver many of the Council Plan's priorities and all those listed as part of the **Building a Thriving Local Economy Theme**. Appendix 3 details a matrix analysis which assesses how each of the proposed Priority Actions within the EDF will deliver against the Council Plan's Themes.
- 2.3 The EDF will also seek to ensure alignment with other local and strategic policies including:
 - **The Local Plan** – Submitted July 2024. Anticipated adoption in May 2025 (including those policies relating to the South Downs National Park Authority).
 - **Climate Action Strategy** – This was published in January 2024 and will drive the Council's Net Zero ambitions including a proposal to develop a Climate Business Strategy.
 - **West Sussex Economic Plan** – This is currently being developed following the transfer of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions to the County Council. This work will help to inform investment over the coming years including those funds held and managed in the West Sussex Business Rates Pool.
- 2.4 The proposed EDF is a new approach to economic development policy and delivery based around a family of documents rather than a traditional single strategy. The

primary document is the Economic Prospectus (See Appendix 1) which provides a vision, 5 guiding principles and 12 priority actions along with an overview of the district's assets and opportunities. Other documents will be produced as and when required to drive forward the priority actions. A current example is the Business Charter which will help to shape and drive a one council approach, and which is also being considered as part of this report (See Appendix 2).

- 2.5 The need for this new EDF approach has been shaped by several drivers of change that, together, demand a combination of certainty (to support investment and business development) and flexibility (to adapt and grasp the challenges and opportunities resulting from changing economic circumstances). Appendix 4 outlines the drivers of change.
- 2.6 The certainty will be provided via a clear vision and direction of travel that will be set out in the overarching Economic Prospectus. The flexibility will be provided via the priority actions that will enable the detail required to achieve the vision to pivot and adjust to meet the emerging and changing needs, demands and aspirations of local people, businesses and places.
- 2.7 This approach will enable and drive delivery through better collaboration and co-operation, which will help to unlock access to a range of resources.
- 2.8 A proposed new brand "Enterprising Horsham – Creating sustainable prosperity across Horsham District" has been developed to raise awareness of the Economic Development (ED) service with local businesses, residents and potential investors and, as a result, provide the basis for greater joint working.

3. Next Steps

3.1 The next steps include:

- **October to November 24** - Undertaking consultation with stakeholders including, for example, local business networks, major employers, parish councils, neighbouring councils and education providers. This will involve utilising several channels including, for example, the Council's Business Newsletter, the Federation of Small Businesses network and the Council's social media. It is envisaged that this will take place over an 8-week period.
- **December 24 to February 25** - Review the feedback from the consultation and update the documents accordingly as the basis for reporting back to Cabinet for final document approval.
- **February to May 25** – Publish documents
- **September 24 to March 25** – Undertake a service review to restructure the ED team so it can deliver the new Enterprising Horsham service
- **April 25 onwards** – Put in place new Enterprising Horsham service

4. Consultation and Engagement:

4.1 A range of initial internal and external consultations have been undertaken to date to help shape the EDF approach and current versions of the Economic Prospectus and Business Charter.

- 4.2 Externally this has included the Federation of Small Business, The Sussex Chamber of Commerce, West Sussex County Council, the Horsham Business Improvement District and the Gatwick Diamond.
- 4.3 Feedback from the Policy Development Advisory Group (PDAG – All member invite) was supportive and highlighted the need to:
- Ensure the work was underpinned by sustainability and equality and that all parts of the economy are included.
 - Support skills development to ensure local people, and especially those that have been disadvantaged and excluded, for example asylum seekers and others who may find accessing work more challenging, are able to access employment opportunities.
 - Ensure consultations were not undertaken during holiday periods
 - Recognise that Horsham town centre is faring well and thriving post Covid and, therefore, a key driver for future prosperity
 - Analyse and understand the impact of the shift in travel to work areas and working patterns which is potentially supporting Horsham with more home working and migration to the area from London
 - Spotlight and utilise the areas fantastic location
 - Focus on business support and, in particular, the provision of workspace to meet current and future business needs
 - Improve communications with regards to the business support offer including utilising existing channels better (e.g. Horsham App, Business Rates communications)
 - Focus on ensuring digital infrastructure is delivered across the whole district
 - Increase the focus on business networking for stimulating local prosperity especially with regards to opportunities via public procurement and business to business trading; in this context better business networking (face to face and digital) will be key to help drive circular economy thinking and practice
- 4.4 Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was supportive and highlighted the need to:
- Increase engagement with local business groups and networks to help understand the views and needs of businesses
 - Provide more detail to explain what is meant by “Fair” within the vision reinforcing the need to ensure that Enterprising Horsham is inclusive
 - Develop more detail around sector focus and skill requirements as part of the delivery process
 - Ensure sufficient commercial land as part of the local plan process to meet current and future demand
 - Recognise that the climate emergency provides opportunities as well as challenges
 - Work closely with the County Council to make sure local priorities are reflected and taken forward as part of the emerging County Economic Strategy
- 4.5 The Monitoring Officer and the Director of Resources have been consulted to ensure financial and legal probity.

- 4.6 The staffing structure will be reviewed to reflect the refocus of priorities around the Council Plan.
- 4.7 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to undertake further, more detailed, consultation with a range of internal and external stakeholders. This will include engaging with businesses, residents and local and strategic partners via a number of channels including social media, newsletters, network meetings and one to one meetings.

5. Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected:

- 5.1 A framework approach has been used as compared to a one time one document traditional strategy in order to provide a blend of certainty and flexibility that is considered essential in the current economic climate. A framework approach will enable both early traction in the form of a vision and direction of travel and long term momentum via priority actions which can be developed and delivered as and when required.

**6 Resource Consequences:
Financial:**

- 6.1 It is envisaged that the EDF underpinned by a One Council approach (where all Council services co-ordinate to support the local economy via a new Business Charter) will enable a reduction in head count and therefore provide savings in the medium term. This is being considered via a separate review process.
- 6.2 It is proposed that the additional in year costs to assist the transition, development and acceleration of the new service offer, could be met from the £150k allocated as part of the Business Rates Pooled Funding. This could include initiatives such as developing an inward investment offer, building support networks with business infrastructure groups, exploring workspace development opportunities, supporting further the delivery of the Climate Action Strategy, and a potential business awards programme.
- 6.3 The new approach will enable external funding sources to be considered as part of delivery and there will also be scope to consider commercial opportunities that will help achieve the EDF aims whilst generating income to the Council.

7 Legal Considerations:

- 7.1 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 allows local authorities to do anything that individuals generally may do. Therefore, the Council is permitted to take steps to promote and support economic development within the Horsham District.
- 7.2 Section 144 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives local authorities the power to inter alia, encourage persons to visit their area for recreation or health purposes, or to hold conferences, trade fairs and exhibitions in their area.

8. Risk Assessment and Mitigation:

Risk	Mitigation
Lack of buy-in from stakeholders	Initial engagement undertaken and more comprehensive engagement exercise planned. This will

	involve utilising several channels including the Council's business newsletter and the networks of a number of business infrastructure groups
Unable to secure a One Council approach to align services behind the economy	A Business Charter is being developed to set out a commitment to businesses, detail and align the Council offer to businesses and outline plans for ongoing internal and external engagement
Lack of capacity and capability in team to drive delivery of EDF	This has been assessed as part of an independent review with the scope focused on aligning resources with the new emerging service offer detailed in the EDF

9. Procurement implications:

9.1 There are no procurement implications relating to this report.

10. Equalities, Human Rights & Public Sector Equality Duty Considerations:

10.1 This report is focused on seeking approval to undertake consultation which will be inclusive and will include ensuring the documents are available in all required formats and through a range of channels so that all stakeholders have an opportunity to comment and help shape the final documents.

10.2 A full equalities impact assessment of the final documents and the associated policy focus will be undertaken as part of seeking final approval from Cabinet in early 2025.

11. Environmental Implications:

11.1 A full environment impact of the final documents and associated policy focus will be undertaken as part of seeking final approval from Cabinet in early 2025. At this stage it is worth noting that the EDF includes a focus on aligning with the delivery of the Council's Climate Action Strategy and driving forward the sustainability work of the Council.

11.2 The consultation will include ensuring documents are produced in a digital format and, where hard copies are required, recycled and recyclable paper is used.

12. Other Considerations:

12.1 It will be necessary to consider GDPR when undertaking stakeholder consultation.

Appendix 1 – Enterprising Horsham Economic Prospectus – Consultation Draft

Appendix 2 – Enterprising Horsham Business Charter – Consultation Draft

Appendix 3 – Delivery against the Council Plan Themes – Matrix

Appendix 4 – Drivers of Change

