

**Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee - Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

**Report of the Lead Officer for the Directorate of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee**

**Support to Local Businesses - Summary of Recommendations**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To outline a suite of recommendations for Members of the DUE Scrutiny Committee to consider for implementation in 2014/15.

**Background**

2. In line with the Scrutiny Scoping Documents agreed by Members on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2013, the Scrutiny Committee and relevant Working Group has been guided by the overarching objective of scrutinising the **effectiveness** and **local economic impact** of the following three areas, namely:-
  - Area 1 – *Dudley Business Loan Fund* – scrutinised at the Scrutiny Committee Working Group held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2013 following a presentation by Black Country Reinvestment Society (BCRS);
  - Area 2 – *Business to Business* scrutinised at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013 and led by the recommendations and considerations presented by the Council's TORCh Group (Action Learning Set 6); and
  - Area 3 – *Dudley Business First (DBF) initiative* – scrutinised by the DUE Scrutiny Committee Working Group held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and informed by performance information relating to the Dudley Business First offer, recent achievements and website performance.
3. Table 1 below outlines the recommendations to be considered by Scrutiny Committee following the scrutiny process undertaken between August 2013 and January 2014.

**Table 1: Recommendations**

<b>Area 1: Dudley Business Loan Fund</b>	
Recommendation 1	<p>To undertake an evaluation of the local economic impact of the Fund on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the following outputs and outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs created and safeguarded and cost per job</li> <li>• New businesses created and safeguarded</li> <li>• New businesses surviving more than 12 months</li> <li>• Number of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) businesses supported</li> <li>• Number of women-led businesses supported</li> <li>• Private sector leverage</li> <li>• Sales figures (£) safeguarded and new sales created</li> <li>• Satisfaction with BCRS in administering the Fund</li> <li>• New contracts secured</li> </ul>
Recommendation 2	<p>To defer the decision on extending the Loan Fund until the following actions are completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Complete Recommendation 1 (full evaluation);</li> <li>(ii) Benchmark performance of the Loan Fund delivered by BCRS and similar organisations in other local authority areas; and</li> <li>(iii) Identify and appraise external funding opportunities to extend the Loan Fund (European and local) and, where appropriate, collaborate with other Black Country local authorities in delivering a Black Country Loan Fund</li> </ul>
Recommendation 3	<p>To report to Cabinet in 2014/15 outlining the performance of the Loan Fund against the agreed targets detailed in the report presented to Cabinet in March 2012</p>
Recommendation 4	<p>To continue to monitor the performance of the Dudley Business Loan Fund on a monthly basis (financial / performance outputs and bad debt) in line with the formal contract signed with BCRS in August 2012.</p>
<b>Area 2: Business to Business</b>	
Recommendation 1	<p>To implement and promote (internally and externally) the use of a Dudley Borough Business Directory for internal and external use to be accessed via the Dudley Business First and Council websites.</p>
Recommendation 2	<p>To make better use of social media, such as LinkedIn, to better promote the Dudley Business First service and opportunities for grant funding directly to local businesses.</p>
Recommendation 3	<p>To work closely with Corporate Resources in the review of the Council's Procurement Strategy to ensure, promotion and usage of the Business Directory.</p>
Recommendation 4	<p>To further enhance the Black Country Bullet project (a virtual car that currently showcases 500+ automotive supplier companies) by including a Request for Quotation facility similar to the Sell 2 Wales model. Furthermore, assess the feasibility of replicating this project</p>

	<p>across other priority sectors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced manufacturing (including advanced engineering, logistics, food and drink);</li> <li>• Building technologies / construction;</li> <li>• Transport technologies (including aerospace); and</li> <li>• Environment technologies</li> </ul>
Recommendation 5	To better promote awareness of the Council's Forward Procurement Strategy to local businesses via Dudley Business First.
<b>Area 3: Dudley Business First Initiative</b>	
Recommendation 1	To prepare a Marketing and Communications Plan in order to raise awareness of the Dudley Business First service core offer (in particular, provision of business funding advice and undertaking land and property searches).
Recommendation 2	<p>To raise awareness of funding opportunities, via the Dudley Business First website, specifically for businesses or business start-ups who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) seeking grant funding or loans <b>below</b> the £10,000 threshold;</li> <li>(ii) within the non-manufacturing sector (in particular, health and retail sectors); and</li> <li>(iii) dependents of veterans, reservists and serving Armed Forces personnel.</li> </ul>
Recommendation 3	To increase the search engine optimisation (SEO) of Dudley Business First to ensure this is one of the top 5 websites when people are searching for business support in Dudley Borough. Furthermore, to ensure there are direct links from the Council's 'Business' pages (inc. Business Rates) to the Dudley Business First website.
Recommendation 4	To ensure marketing material for local or Black Country-wide funding events clearly states the eligibility criteria to ensure the appropriate audience is targeted and engaged.
Recommendation 5	<p>To build on the existing engagement with regional universities (Aston, Birmingham and Wolverhampton) to ensure local businesses, via the Dudley Business First website, are aware of the opportunities offered by universities in relation to the following three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Consultancy, licensing and intellectual property;</li> <li>(ii) Research and Development (R&amp;D); and</li> <li>(iii) Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)</li> </ul>
Recommendation 6	To promote the Dudley Business Investment Zone to potential tenants and develop a 'soft landing offer' which can complement business rate relief.

## **Finance**

4. The costs associated with implementing the recommendations above will be delivered with existing budgetary allocations for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

## **Law**

5. Scrutiny Committees are established in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the requirements of the Council's Constitution, which was adopted under the Local Government Act 2000, subsequent legislation and associated Regulations and Guidance.

The Council's revised scrutiny arrangements are set out in Article 6 of the Constitution (Scrutiny Committees) and the associated Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Protocols.

## **Equality Impact**

6. Provision exists within the recommended scrutiny arrangements for overview and scrutiny to be undertaken on the Council's policies on equality and diversity.

## **Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that:-

- Scrutiny Committee request the Cabinet Member for Regeneration approve the recommendations, outlined in Table 1, for implementation in 2014/15.



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## **List of Background Papers**

- Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee Working Group, Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2013
- Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee Working Group, Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013
- Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013
- Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee Working Group, Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014