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To: Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee 24th June 2011

Subject: Programme of Sector Consultations & Follow-up

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This item reports on the sector consultation programme, how contribution from business is being captured, follow-up managed, and the emerging programme of actions shaped.

1. Introduction

1.1 The sector consultations are being co-hosted by KCC, the Kent Economic Board (KEB) and, where appropriate, trade or industry organisations.

Three of the programmed events have taken place. 300 businesses have participated in the 3 events thus far – it is expected that a minimum of 800 businesses will attend the consultations during the course of the year.

The full programme of consultations is as follows:-

19 th Jan	Food Production, Horticulture & Agriculture
29 th Mar	Construction & Development
23 rd May	Low Carbon Energy Production
19 th Sept	Health & Social Care
Sept	Tourism - date tbc
Oct	Digital & Creative -date tbc
Nov	High Growth, Technology & Research Based Business-date tbc
Jan 2012	Manufacturing & Engineering

This item reports on how outcomes are captured and relationships developed with the participating businesses – and summarises the follow-up action to date. Copies of the detailed individual event reports can be accessed from the KEB website www.keb.org.uk.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 There are three policy drivers for the sector consultations. **Bold Steps for Kent**, has the stated aim of building “strong relationships with key business sectors in the Kent Economy”. **The Regeneration Framework** commits to “Building a new relationship with Kent business” – and to working towards providing an environment in which businesses are able to grow and flourish, ensuring that they have access to skills and the scope to expand their role as creators of jobs and wealth. Finally, “**Backing Kent Business**” also stated the intention to develop a new relationship with business – “an honest and practical relationship which delivers further support to increase business opportunities and growth”.

3. Guiding Principles

- 3.1 The following principles have been central to developing the sector programme:-

To maximise business participation

To reach as many businesses as possible the invitation lists for the events are drawn from sector networks, including trade organisations, sector consortium (where relevant), the networks of BAB members including the business representative organisations of FSB, the Kent Invicta Chamber and the IoD. Pre-publicity is undertaken with items in the local and trade press.

Delegates are asked if they want to participate in follow-up action – 25% have responded positively. All have received follow-up contact – their areas of specific interests logged so that they are engaged in the issues they have particular interest and/or expertise in. A number have already been involved in actions: addressing the water constraint problem, skills needs and planning concerns.

To start a dialogue and capture market intelligence

The events capture business views about what they believe will drive investment, tackle skills needs and shape business development to secure growth. The workshop debates are recorded via table facilitators and scribes, the plenary discussions and the feedback and follow-up questionnaires are analysed and shared via the event reports with all attendees.

The need to improve communication with, and within, the sector has been common to all meetings. In response an on-line newsletter has been developed that will be regularly emailed to all the participants, providing updates on actions, follow-up events and campaigns.

To work with business to identify and deliver specific actions

The workshop debates, follow-up questions and task and finish groups are focussed on working up practical actions to encourage business growth.

The presenters are asked to highlight:-

- The critical constraints and barriers to growth
- Any policy changes that would be key to unlocking growth
- What nature of resources could be applied to drive sector growth

The workshop discussions then focus on creative and innovative solutions and create an agenda of actions to take away from each event.

4. Challenges emerging from the 3 sector consultations to date

4.1 Key points from the consultations to date

Food Production, Horticulture and Agriculture

- Encourage more young people to consider careers in this sector, and to broaden the skills offer to accommodate:- diversification, increased application of technology and the need for engineering skills.
- Recognise the growing importance of horticulture as a sector in the context of global pressures – ie food security, impacts of volatile commodity and currency prices.
- Increase Kent's food production capacity and build R&D strength for the sector – exploit the niche market potential of horticulture and top fruit production.
- Promote entrepreneurial and investment opportunities arising from the changing market dynamics arising from globalisation of food supply and demand.
- Address delays, inconsistencies and planning policies which fail to address the industries current and future growth needs – with regard to glasshouses, storage, processing facilities, accommodation for key workers, winter storage reservoirs, and crop covers (polytunnels).
- Promote both the industry and its products to increase local purchasing, the sector's investment potential, and research.

Construction and Development

- Create procurement and pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) which are fit for purpose and not burdening small and medium sized businesses with unreasonable upfront costs.
- Smooth methods of predicting, mitigating and managing environmental and ecological issues – in order to reduce unforeseen delays to development, improve efficiency, return on investment etc.
- Develop protocols to improve and speed up communication between developers, councils and local communities to prevent issues from becoming major blocks.
- Encourage the development of new sources of affordable finance (Lloyds TSB model) broadening access to Venture Capital – and/or introducing innovative partnering and pay-back regimes to help bring forward development.
- Introduce more flexibility in section 106 contributions.
- Champion, lobby and pursue major infrastructure schemes – these have a major multiplier effect in the local economy.

Low Carbon Energy

- Develop supply chain definition and analysis to encourage “open innovation” with and by large corporates.
- Focus support for business growth and development on sub-sectors where Kent has authentic strength in asset provision – offshore wind, bio-mass and deriving value from the waste stream. Regarding bio-mass encourage collaboration with the agricultural sector and farmer’s interest in managing woodland.
- Develop strengths in skills provision for this sector using the Swale Skills Centre as an exemplar of best practice.
- Encourage student awareness of the occupational opportunities the sector offers so that HE courses offered/available have sufficient demand to be viable.
- Take opportunities to flex the planning regime to encourage take-up of micro-generation.

5. Follow-up actions

5.1 Communications

Detailed event reports shared with all participants – available with all the event presentations at www.keb.org.uk

A monthly bulletin briefing is being developed to share with all sector consultation delegates to keep them up to date with the activities, task & finish groups and follow-up events being planned.

Water scarcity and management

Work underway with the Environment Agency and industry representatives to quantify water/irrigation requirements – assess solutions including crop development, optimum irrigation systems, fine tuning of extraction licences. Event planned for the autumn to raise awareness and champion solutions.

Skills

Convene an FE and HE Group to respond to specific skills requests for NVQ4+ and access to research capacity.

Supply Chain Development

Networking events to encourage “open innovation” and supply chain development commissioned from the Kent & Medway Innovation and Growth Team with events planned for Envirotech & Renewables in August, Sustainable Construction in November and Food Technologies in February 2012.

Planning

Affordable housing challenge from the Rural Consultation acted on through the development of the Kent Rural Housing Protocol – launched June 2011 – which also contributes to the “Supported People” agenda.

Follow-up meeting held with Developers and House Builders to address concerns. Dialogue meeting planned with Kent Planning Officers Group (KPOG) to improve mutual understanding and examine solutions.

Profile Raising

Securing high profile for the size and importance of the rural sector.

Procurement

Input to KCC’s Procurement Transformation Programme and sharpen business support services to help SME’s to engage with public sector procurement processes.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are asked to note progress on the sector consultations and agree to receive a further report detailing the programme of actions developed at the end of the consultation programme.

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Background Documents:

None