

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF LITTLEHAMPTON REGENERATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON 10 JUNE 2020

PART A : REPORT

SUBJECT: Business Support and Enterprise in Arun

REPORT AUTHOR: Miriam Nicholls, Business Development Manager
DATE: 21st May 2020
EXTN: 37845
PORTFOLIO AREA: Economy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This report is to bring Members up to date with the services provided to local businesses and the progress being made with those services.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Members are requested to recommend to Full Council that:

a. The contents of the report are noted

1. BACKGROUND: A wide range of business support and enterprise services are delivered across the district. Some are delivered in partnership whilst others are direct delivery. Many are ongoing services which have been running for some time, others are new and there are some that are being developed.

A huge knowledge base of our local business community has been amassed and this is used to shape the services that are provided.

This report provides a summary of each of the initiatives that are currently running and will be updated on a regular basis.

2. CURRENT PROJECTS AND SERVICES

The Arun Business Partnership – this started as the Littlehampton Business Partnership, established to bring local businesses together and to encourage them to be aware of the range, depth and quality of their local business colleagues which, in turn, would mean that they could do business together. After four years of productive networking and learning, the Partnership expanded to include Bognor Regis. Each side of the Partnership met separately twice a year, with joint meetings being held every six months. In December 2006, Arundel officially joined the Partnership and the full Arun Business Partnership was born.

Through the Partnership, strategic links have been made with local education providers, companies and private/public sector organisations. From training events to information dissemination, contact building to contract signing, the Business Partnership helps companies grow by encouraging them to get to know each other and to work together.

In 2016 the decision was taken to establish The Arun Business Partnership as a Community Interest Company. This was to allow the Partnership to take advantage of opportunities that were not available to an unincorporated body such as the Partnership then was.

Networking Meetings - four meetings are held each year. They are deliberately informal as businesses tell us they prefer it that way. Venues are generally provided free of charge by local companies and frequently the hosting venue takes the opportunity to showcase their offer in some way. We currently have a list of venues wishing to host meetings. On average 60 businesses attend each meeting and feedback is excellent.

Businesses enjoy the relaxed style and new business people particularly enjoy the way in which the networking takes place as it provides them with an easy way to talk with others. We have, occasionally, attempted to introduce a different format but have been very clearly told by those attending that they prefer the way things are presently done.

Business of the Year Awards - the Business of the Year event is held each November. Companies are nominated for 19 Awards, each of which is sponsored by a local business or organisation. The Awards are presented at an evening event when around 250 local business people gather to celebrate the achievements of their colleagues.

The 2019 event was held at The Hilton Avisford Park Hotel, a new venue having held the Awards event at Butlins for many years. 250 local business people gathered together to celebrate just a fraction of the success of our local business community. The 2020 event is already booked, and sponsors will shortly be contacted to ascertain their support for this year. We already have a waiting list of businesses wishing to be involved as sponsors so may introduce extra opportunities to involve as many as possible.

Monthly E-Newsletter - the e-newsletter goes out to around 3,000 businesses at the beginning of each month. Information is gathered from a range of sources including businesses themselves. Items include everything from reports on visits to local companies to opportunities for grants and awards, special offers and business events being held locally. The aim of the newsletter is to keep companies up to date with what is happening and for them to publicise their news in order that everyone is aware of the range and quality of local companies and the opportunities that are available.

Web Site – www.arunbusinesspartnership.co.uk & Social Media - the Arun Business Partnership web site was refreshed in 2018 by a local company at a very small cost and works well, allowing us to promote our offer and point visitors to the site in the right direction. The Partnership also has a LinkedIn Group and a Facebook page which are regularly used to pass around information and for discussions.

Worklessness - the Council were the winning bidders in 2013 for a contract to work alongside the Department of Work & Employment in gaining work experience placements for 18-24 year olds. This work was carried out by the company that works alongside Arun to look after the Business Partnership, Connects Media. The DWP were delighted with our approach to the work and all our targets were exceeded.

Unfortunately, towards the end of our contract period, the DWP changed the way in which work was contracted and moved to a Framework system. Providers were required to upload details of their services and the DWP would contact them if a need was found for their 'offer'. Whilst The Council, due to the delivery method it employed, were able to be flexible with that delivery, this method of contracting could not be accommodated and no further contracts were undertaken.

Other West Sussex District and Borough Councils were subject to the same situation and, via this Council and Horsham District Council, a bid was submitted to the Strategic Infrastructure Fund to continue the work that had been started. This bid was successful and a new project, Journey to Work, was started. A West Sussex Co-Ordinator was recruited and it is part of his role to find funding to allow the project to continue long term.

This Council has, once again, employed the same delivery team and targets are being exceeded. Most work is on a one to one basis and currently over 100 clients are being assisted. Many clients, the majority of whom have been out of work for an extended period have been found paid work, voluntary work or training.

Learning Events – In 2018 a bid was submitted, to the Strategic Infrastructure Fund, from all West Sussex District and Borough Councils to provide a fund for training retailers. This bid was successful, and during 2019 a programme of training took place. Topics included

- HR Essentials
- Resilience to run your business
- Marketing
- Networking
- Smartphone photography
- GDPR
- Selling on the phone
- Pricing your product or service
- Business Planning
- First Aid

Whilst the training is aimed primarily at retailers to improve both their knowledge, their business and the customer experience, other businesses are encouraged to join the training events where it is appropriate, and space is available. There is still a small amount of funding remaining and more events are being arranged for this coming year.

Grants – two types of grant have been offered over the past year. The first, the LEAP Grant (Local Enterprise and Apprenticeship Platform) followed the successful round of grant funding that was available for the same purpose in the previous two years. £72,000 was granted with match funding in excess of £150,000. The successful Bid that was made last year was for 2 years and a new round of grant funding commenced in April. Grants totalling just under £40,000 with match funding of £159,000 have been recommended. Another round of applications will be considered at the end of June.

The second grant pot of £50,000 has been available for Shop Front Improvements. That has now been exhausted with 37 retail units Arun-wide being upgraded with grant support. A further bid, again in conjunction with all other West Sussex Economic Development Teams, has been submitted and the outcome is awaited.

Business Visits – the Business Development Manager undertakes a programme of visits to companies of all sizes across the district. This allows businesses to identify a link within the Council to whom they can take any issues and for the Council to gather information about our local businesses and to know what the issues are within that community. Businesses tell us that they greatly appreciate this service and it certainly helps them to know who to approach within the Council.

Weekly Networking – at the request of businesses a weekly networking group was established some 3 years ago. Business Networking Bognor Regis (BNBR) meets each Thursday morning. It is a group of invited businesses and only one of each type of business is allowed. In the time it has been established BNBR has generated over £1.8M worth of business amongst its 26 members.

Following the success of this group 2 more have been established. The Littlehampton Business Circle meets each Wednesday morning. The Group has 20 regular members and has established a pattern of regular referrals and support for each other amongst those members.

Again, at the request of businesses a group was also established in Chichester. The Group started well and it has now been decided that it will run aside from the Arun Business Partnership.

Partnership Working – the Business Development Manager attends a range of regular meetings with partners and colleagues to make sure that the Council is aware of all opportunities for funding and support for our local business community and these are maximised. A large amount of work is carried out in Partnership with colleagues across West Sussex.

The University of Chichester is due to launch a new ‘Hot House’ support package for businesses across the LEP area and Arun’s Business Support Manager will be the local authority officer representative on the Project Steering Board.

General Help and Support – over the past 12 months almost 300 businesses have benefitted from a range of support provided by the Business Development Manager.

During the Covid Crisis – the Business Development Manager has been a key point of contact for businesses about a range of issues but primarily grants. During the first 6 weeks of lockdown over 800 enquires were taken and advice given. During this same time the newsletter was also very well employed in passing out critical information to businesses. 7 newsletters were sent, and many more

businesses signed up for this service. This method is still being used but at a slower rate.

Discretionary Grant Scheme – the Economic Development Team are leading on the delivery of the Discretionary Grant Scheme announced by Government on 6th May. At time of writing a scheme to cover all West Sussex Local Authorities is being written and beneath that a local scheme, to take account of local economic conditions, is also being produced. Members will be updated at the meeting.

3. PROPOSAL(S):

None, this report is for information only

4. OPTIONS:

None, this report is for information only

5. CONSULTATION:

None, this report is for information only

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		X
Relevant District Ward Councillors		X
Other groups/persons (please specify)		X
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal		X
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		X
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		X
Sustainability		X
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

Not applicable

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None