

Business Rates Task and Finish Group – Update on Recommendations Sept 2017

Theme	Recommendation Detail	Action / planned activity	RAG
Future Business Rates strategies	<p>1. Brent Council must develop a strategy to attract and retain businesses that pay good wages to Brent residents. We must encourage further growth in our already successful businesses and attract incoming investment into the borough which will benefit from and harness a skilled multicultural workforce. The strategy should be a central function within the council, embedded in the council's income generation and civic enterprise strategies going forward as Brent will rely on this income to fund services to residents and business development for decades to come.</p>	<p>Brent is approaching inward investment and attraction of businesses in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with the West London Alliance boroughs to commission work to promote the West London sub-region nationally and internally to prospective investors and businesses. Seeking to maximise value of the 'West London' scale and brand. - Brent Business Board proposed and is now overseeing the commissioning of 'place marketing' activities, to promote areas of Brent to improve perceptions of the borough and highlight its key assets. The audience will primarily be prospective businesses, investors and visitors to the borough. It aims to highlight Brent as a place to live, work and invest. - A council officer is beginning work to attract businesses to Brent to vacant workspace. This will be targeted at 	<p>AMBER</p> <p>Brent is well positioned to market itself the region, nationally and internationally. This is being taken forward in partnership with other boroughs to create scale, and locally to involve the business community. The activity is at early stages of development.</p>

		higher skilled growth sectors, such as creative, digital and tech.	
	<p>2. Brent Council must be innovative, designing schemes like Local Enterprise Partnerships, Business Improvement Districts, and must also build on current policies such as the London Living Wage business rate reduction programme. The council should explore how existing powers such as, varying the business rate could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable Town centre development e.g. Business Improvement Districts in Willesden High Road, Ealing Road and Chamberlayne Road • Offer incentives to businesses to provide supported employment opportunities and increase public convenience provision • Encourage businesses to share knowledge and skills such as improving local supply chains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council established the Brent Business Board in late 2016 to bring together key business representatives, with the council, Higher Education and Further Education, to develop and inform strategies to support economic growth in Brent. For example, they will be consulted on the borough's Growth Strategy and Local Plan. - X2 Town Centre Managers have been recruited, with a third being recruited in September/ October. Business Improvement Districts are now being considered for the Wembley and Ealing Road area, and will be in due course for other parts of Brent (e.g. Willesden and Harlesden). - X3 Meet the Buyer events are being hosted in 2017/ 18, to enable Business to Business (B2B) activity, bringing large and small contractors together in some of Brent's most active sectors (e.g. construction and food manufacturing). They will be 	<p>AMBER</p> <p>Good progress has been made but activities are in early stages of delivery.</p> <p>The Business Board, Town Centre Management, Meet the Buyer and employment programmes are new to the borough, launching in 2016 or 2017.</p>

		<p>encouraged to utilise the Brent Contracts portal (also enables access to wider major infrastructure projects as part of the Compete 4 platform). Business coaching will be available to assist SMEs to engage with the events and portal, and to help them in how they present bids for work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supported employment programmes are being run at no cost to employers, although not with additional financial incentives. This includes apprenticeship support from Brent Works, supported employment placements for residents with mental health issues via the Mental Health Trailblazer (delivered by Twinings Enterprise), and for residents with learning difficulties or disabilities (delivered by The Royal Mencap Society on behalf of Brent Works). 	
	<p>3. Brent Council will need to establish arrangements to ensure that decision making on whether to increase or decrease the business rate tax is evidence-based. This decision should be made in consideration</p>	<p>Brent, like all Councils, is not allowed to increase its business rates. However, we are allowed to reduce business rates payable via discretionary discount schemes subject to certain terms and conditions, for example the London</p>	GREEN

	with the wider strategy and will require debate in Cabinet and at Full Council.	Living Wage discount and Revaluation support. Before any scheme is introduced a full appraisal will be carried out and then approved by Cabinet. There are also a number of reliefs that are mandatory and determined by the Government. Whether Councils will be given any flexibility to vary these under the proposed business rates retention scheme is still unknown.	
Skills and Enterprise	4. Brent Council must support its businesses throughout the borough with the cultural shift that will be needed to implement this change. The council should have a role in supporting the businesses in that shift by encouraging the employment of local workers wherever possible and (developing skills and apprenticeships for Brent's workforce.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brent Works is offering support to employers at no cost, to encourage the creation of apprenticeships and recruitment of local residents, as well as promoting The London Living Wage (LLW) discretionary rate relief scheme. Outcome targets for 2017/18 are to support a minimum of 100 residents into employment and further 50 into apprenticeships. - The Growth Strategy, which is in development, will consider skills to meet future labour market demand. This will be consulted on with the Business Board (including the United Colleges Group and University of Westminster). 	<p>AMBER</p> <p>Work is underway to develop skills in Brent fit for the current and future economic opportunities. The work is progressing well but at relatively early stages of implementation.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new Construction Employment and Skills Board has been live since early 2017, in partnership with Quintain and their lead construction contractors. Apprenticeship and local employment targets are agreed and now being delivered for developments associated with the new Wembley Park masterplan. It includes over 65 apprenticeships for Brent residents. 	
	<p>5. As a result of successfully growing the business rates base, Brent Council should be given greater powers for employment such as working more closely with Job Centre Plus so that the Council can ensure that skills and employment are aligned with the Council's wider economic growth objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposals were put forward in the 2016 Comprehensive Spending Review by the Greater London Authority and London Councils for the devolution of skills and employment funding. <p>Two decisions were made by government in the November 2016 Budget, including.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Devolution of the Adult Education Budget to London from The Department for Education (current aim is for the 2019/20 academic year). The proposal from West London Boroughs is for the Economic 	<p>AMBER</p> <p>Commitments to devolving funding to London have already been made by government for key skills and employment programmes (although this doesn't include all investment by government in London,</p>

		<p>Prosperity Board to create a West London Skills Commissioning Board to oversee this for the 7 West London boroughs.</p> <p>2. Devolution of the Work Programme, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. A new 'Work and Health Programme' is now being commissioned by the West London Alliance to deliver a new service from April 2018 (Brent is involved in the evaluation of prospective service providers).</p>	which prevents full coordination).
	<p>6. Given the extremely low interest rates at present, Brent Council should, individually and in partnership with neighbouring boroughs and the Mayor of London create businesses cases for borrowing money to improve infrastructure. Mixed housing and business units for example will support economic growth in the borough.</p>	<p>There has been a relatively large amount of growth in housing units within Brent in recent years, which the Councils has supported by working with key partners. In addition Brent is currently in negotiations with other London Boroughs, the Mayor of London and the Government in a pan-London business rates pilot pool for 2018/19. Under the current proposals, this will create an investment fund that will be used to promote economic growth across all of London, which will include improving</p>	GREEN

		infrastructure. Proposals are at a relatively early stage and further updates will be provided to scrutiny when the position becomes clearer.	
Preparation for 100% Devolution of Business Rates	<p>To reduce the possibility of any negative impacts of business rates devolution on Brent, the council should be making preparations to ensure that we have a healthy local economy and that we are in the best position to implement the change with minimal disruption to services.</p> <p>7. Brent Council must do more to show that the borough is open for business. All of the borough has a responsibility to do this, so officers, Councillors and partners must work together to look at what is unique to the borough such as, Wembley Stadium and the fact that Brent is one of the most diverse places in the UK and actively promote these to attract new business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brent Business Board 'place marketing' campaign (being commissioned to specialist agency). To align with local developer activity and the Love Where You Live and Love Where you Work campaigns. - West London Alliance inward investment work, promoting the West London boroughs to investors and businesses (being commissioned to an specialist agency). - Additional activities being provided, such as 'Meet the Buyer' events and business support. - Park Royal Business Group and the council running a 'Meet the 	<p>AMBER</p> <p>A significant amount of work is underway to enable partnership working with the Brent business community and to show that Brent is open for business.</p>

		<p>Borough' event in November to encourage partnership working.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct targeting of businesses to attract to Brent's vacant workspace / new workspace opportunities. - The Digital Board has agreed investment in a 'Business Portal' online to bring together business information, advice and marketing in a coherent and accessible form, to help promote Brent as a destination for prospective businesses and to support existing businesses to succeed. 	
	<p>8. Brent Council must consider the impact the devolution of business rates will have on policy development and financial planning. It is vital senior officers and Councillors keep abreast of the latest developments and continue to feed into consultations ensuring that Brent's interests are heard. Regular bi-annual updates should be brought to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny committee. In addition given the significance of this policy change we would urge a Full Council debate on this matter.</p>	<p>The Government's policy intentions with regard to 100% retention of business rates remain unclear following the General Election. Consequently, any decisions or policy proposals cannot progress until a Local Government Finance Bill sets out the detailed proposals. However, all London Boroughs and the Mayor of London are currently negotiating a pilot pool for 2018/19. Regular updates have been provided to Cabinet with regards to how proposals have developed, more recently in the July Cabinet and also planned for</p>	GREEN

		the September Cabinet. Another report is planned for Cabinet in February 2018 following the outcome of negotiations with other London Boroughs, the Mayor of London and the Government. Scrutiny have been invited to review and comment on the current proposals ahead of these key meetings.	
Growth in income – Working in Partnership	<p>To ensure we make the most of the opportunities that devolution of business rates can provide to grow income, the task group proposes working in partnership where possible with London and sub-regional councils.</p> <p>9. Brent Council must build on the West London Alliance and the work of the Economic Prosperity Board, as sub-regional alliances' with neighbouring boroughs of similar economic profile will be essential in developing a business strategy. The work of these boards should be expanded with input from backbenchers, and regular reporting back to Scrutiny Committee and Full Council.</p>	<p>- The Leader of Brent council is currently chair of the West London Economic Prosperity Board. In order to ensure that the full membership of the Council is able to engage with the work being undertaken, the Director of the West London Alliance was invited to give a presentation to Full Council in November 2016, this was followed by questions from elected members.</p> <p>The presentation outlined the collaborative work being undertaken in partnership with neighbouring boroughs across West London to</p>	<p>GREEN</p> <p>Brent is at the table to influence local major developments and is submitting proposals for additional capital infrastructure investment to unlock housing and economic growth in the borough.</p>

		<p>deliver the West London Vision for Growth and participating boroughs aspirations for greater economic prosperity across the region. Members recognised the central role played by the West London Alliance in improving the collaborative approach of those boroughs represented in addressing the key challenges identified alongside the opportunities presented to share best practice and improve ways of working, which the Economic Prosperity Board continues to lead on.</p> <p>- Meetings of the West London Economic Prosperity Board are open for the public and other interested parties to attend (including elected members from any participating borough) and ask questions/make representations.”</p>	
	<p>10. Brent Council must continue to work with the Mayor of London to lobby for opportunities for Brent that may emerge</p>	<p>- Brent continues to work proactively to maximise benefits from the ‘game changing’ schemes in the area. Brent’s Leader of the Council sits on</p>	GREEN

	from Mayoral initiatives such as Old Oak Common.	<p>the Old Oak Common and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) Board and officers are contributing to the Local Plan and encouraging synergy to ensure benefits for Park Royal, Harlesden Town Centre and the prospective Willesden Junction development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Brent is also applying for funding to unlock major capital infrastructure schemes, to build housing, improve transport infrastructure, and public realm in the borough. Brent has been successful in securing funding for infrastructure from government and the GLA, including the High Street Fund, Local Implementation Plan (transport and public realm) and Regeneration Fund. Proposals are being considered for upcoming rounds of capital funding from government and GLA.	
--	--	---	--