



Cabinet
24 July 2017

**Report from the Director of
Performance, Policy and Partnerships**

For Action

**Covering Report for Scrutiny Task Group on Small and
Medium-Sized Enterprises in Brent**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This task group was carried out for the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to ensure Brent Council is doing all it can to guarantee that SMEs in the borough get the maximum support to grow and flourish.
- 1.2 The purpose of the task group was to analyse the current support offered to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Brent, establish any areas for improvements and make relevant recommendations.
- 1.3 The review was aligned with borough priorities, such as the council's 2016/17 Outcome Based Reviews on Employment Support and Welfare Reform, and Regeneration (physical, social and environmental). The council's Borough Plan 2015-19 Better Lives highlights supporting local enterprise, generating jobs for local people and helping people into work.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet is recommended to
- consider the contents of the task group's report
 - approve the four recommendations made by the task group and support the development of an action plan across the council and partner organisations to take these forward.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Brent's economy. They drive growth, open new markets, create jobs and provide our community with essential services and goods. They act as seedbeds for innovation, encouraging competition and bringing fresh ideas that challenge existing assumptions. This encourages competition and incentivises others to adapt. In short, SMEs are good for our local economy and community and as such, should be encouraged to flourish.
- 3.2 Whilst there is much good to be said about Brent's SME sector, it faces many challenges. Historically high rents and business rates have put pressure on Brent's SMEs, whilst the opening of large shopping centres such as Westfield have increased the competition that they face. In addition to this, many larger multinationals and chain businesses are taking the

place of SMEs in Brent, and this is particularly evident on Wembley High Road. For these reasons, the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee decided to establish this task group to ensure that we are doing all we can to support our local SMEs.

3.3 It is essential that Brent, as a local authority, does all it can to ensure that SMEs in the borough get the maximum support to grow and flourish. An effective SME strategy is at the heart of creating a vibrant and dynamic local economy that will make Brent a better place to live and work.

3.4 The task group has made four individual recommendations:

1. The council should develop an infrastructure, investment and business support programme to create the best possible environment in which SMEs can grow and thrive, including:
 - (a) Working locally and sub-regionally with the Park Royal Business Group, West London Alliance and West London Business to contribute to campaigns for investment in business infrastructure, and
 - (b) Working sub-regionally, as a member borough of the West London Alliance and in partnership with West London Business, to support inward investment and promotion of the West London brand and the key Brent opportunities within this wider context.
2. The council should develop a skills programme to ensure that Brent has the best possible skills platform so that SMEs have access to appropriately skilled, locally-based staff, including:
 - (a) Exploring the development of a Brent Works enterprise course to harness entrepreneurial skills in the borough
 - (b) Deepening its partnership approach to skills development, exploring the partnership programme developed by Reading Borough Council as an example of best practice, and
 - (c) Exploring work with an organisation to match young people to work placements, and delivering these in partnership with both Brent Works and Brent Start.
3. The council should appoint a dedicated business champion to advocate for SMEs in Brent.

Business incubation services are necessary to provide valuable services to start-ups such as:

- Help with business basics;
 - Networking activities;
 - Marketing assistance;
 - High-speed internet access;
 - Help with accounting; and
 - Advisory boards and mentors.
4. The council should invest in business incubation and support services to help start-up businesses 'get off the ground' and flourish, including exploring an online platform for businesses to access information relevant to setting up, locating or expanding their business in the borough.

- 3.5 Following agreement by Cabinet, officers will be requested to develop an action plan for implementation of these recommendations, and the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee will review progress in its 2017-18 work programme.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of the recommendations listed above is currently unknown and will be scrutinised further as the action plan is developed. The action plan, including any relevant financial implications, will then be reported back to the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee when it receives and update on the task group recommendations.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Progressing some aspects of the recommendations of the scrutiny task group may involve entering into contracts with other bodies in respect of which the council's Contract Standing Orders will apply. Other specific legal considerations may arise as any detailed proposals are developed.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 Appointment of a dedicated business champion.

Background Papers

Task Group Scoping Document

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