

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 23 November 2021

**Reporting officer:** Keith Grimley, Senior Economic Development Officer

**Subject:** Economy Growth Strategy Consultation

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To report the activity undertaken to promote the draft Economic Growth Strategy and feedback received from businesses and residents.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Members of the Committee are invited to consider the feedback received and note the proposal to continue to engage with external stakeholders as action plans are developed.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 A draft Economic Growth Strategy was originally prepared in early 2020. With the uncertainty associated with Covid19, public consultation was placed on hold and has instead taken place between 21 September and 31 October 2021.
- 1.2 This report summarises the activity undertaken to promote the consultation and aims to provide an overview of the feedback received from businesses, residents and other stakeholders.

## **2. CONSULTATION ACTIVITY**

- 2.1 Our objective in consulting on the summary Economic Growth Strategy was to seek opinion from a broad range of community and business stakeholders; to make their input to the finalised strategy document but also to engage their longer-term interest in action planning for the seven key themes.
- 2.2 Consultation commenced with an 'in person' presentation from the Assistant Director of Communities, to 40 members of the Gravesham Business Network at the 21 September networking event and subsequently via a variety of different media channels listed in the table below.
- 2.3 Examples of communication materials produced for the promotional campaign, are included within Appendix 2. The draft strategy document is available as Appendix 3.

- 2.4 For speed and ease of response, a 10-question survey was hosted online via the Council's survey monkey account. Delegates attending the networking event were encouraged to feedback 'in person' and there was also the ability to respond by email, directly to the economic development team.
- 2.5 An offer was also made to present an overview of the strategy to any local stakeholder groups that requested one.

<b>Consultation / Feedback Route</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
'In person' Gravesham Business Network presentation	21 September event
Targeted post-event email to attendees of above	Two
Newsletter to all Gravesham Business Network members (446)	Three
Press release	One
LinkedIn (social media post) – 1,200 views	One
Twitter (social media post) – @GraveshamForBiz	Multiple (see Appendix 2)
Stakeholder email to 35 individuals (College, Property Agents, Workspace Providers, Faith Groups, EUFC, Greater North Kent Partnership, Business & Youth Services)	Two
Your Borough advert	One
Federation of Small Businesses weekly update email	One

### **3. CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

- 3.1 In total, twenty-six responses were received from a mixture of businesses, residents and a list of stakeholders who were directly contacted. This total includes four responses received by email.
- 3.2 Summary survey question responses and full individual responses are available as background papers.
- 3.3 Please note that as part of ongoing engagement activity, the online survey will remain live for another month, available via the Council's web site and social channels.
- 3.4 A summary of responses to the online survey is given in the following table.

Survey Question		
Q1 Do you run a business in Gravesham Borough?	27% Business	73% Resident
Q3 In your view, does the draft Strategy capture the primary influences on the local economy?(In preparing the strategy, it is accepted that any local strategy will be subject to wider sectoral & national economic influences)	28% Agreed	72% Disagreed  In analysing responses, individuals raised specific issues or concerns that do not contradict the key influences but add further examples from an individual point of view.
Q4 Do you recognise the economic challenges outlined on page 08 of the strategy?	90% Agreed	10% Disagreed
Q5 Please provide your feedback on the seven themes identified on pp. 13 and 14. In working towards action plans, the following themes will influence delivery of the Strategy. Are these the right themes? Do you suggest any alternatives?	60% – 85% Agreed there were the right themes (varying by theme)	15 - 40% Disagreed
Q6 With delivery of the Strategy in mind, do you have any suggestions for projects or other activity that could be undertaken in relation to each theme?	45% – 65% responded with suggestions.  (Place Branding and Land & Premises for Business Growth answered most)	Individual suggestions can be viewed in full as part of the background papers.
Q7 Looking beyond Covid19, what opportunities and challenges do you see within your business sector and for the local economy?	53% - 80% response rate, with the highest being 'challenges for the local economy'	
Q8 Together - how might we address the most important opportunities and challenges above?	50% response rate.	
Q10 Any other thoughts, feedback or suggestions?	45% response rate.	

## 4. INITIAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The number of respondents was not high but did demonstrate strong engagement from those who did respond (100% survey completion rate and full responses to all questions by a majority of respondents).
- 4.2 Overall, responses were broadly positive and feedback was in support of the seven themes identified in the strategy. It is proposed that detailed suggestions and critique from respondents be taken into account in the development of detailed actions.
- 4.3 It is intended that the results of the consultation will also be communicated externally in an easy, visual format to those who responded and more widely, to encourage involvement in action planning, where engagement is crucial.
- 4.4 Business Feedback
  - 4.4.1 A number of respondents in the service sector emphasised the impact of increased Working from Home and the new business opportunities associated with a more 'locally focussed' economy.
  - 4.4.2 A request for direct assistance and town planning flexibilities in local employment centres within Gravesend and the wider Borough.
  - 4.4.3 The experiential and visitor economy was highlighted as an opportunity for the town and wider Borough to attract spend into the local economy.
  - 4.4.4 Limited local availability of medium-sized and larger business units for growing businesses (with sufficient associated parking) is a barrier.
  - 4.4.5 There is a need for affordable rental premises for start-up businesses.
  - 4.4.6 Concern about the loss of brownfield sites to housing, reducing the availability of land and premises for businesses and also a perceived risk of dormitory status for urban areas, with fewer local employment or enterprise opportunities.
  - 4.4.7 Recruitment challenges and a desire for skills development, including through Apprenticeships. Also one mention of the lack of local higher education opportunities.
  - 4.4.8 A desire to embrace and encourage new investment from larger employers and London Resort in particular.
  - 4.4.9 A suggestion of greater availability of 'in person' support from council services, including business networking (this was a new business, unaware of Gravesham Business Network prior to getting in touch).
- 4.5 Resident Feedback
  - 4.5.1 Residents also cited skills training and educational opportunities including Apprenticeships, as a priority. Health and wellbeing and food production were mentioned as new focuses for the local economy. Greater emphasis was suggested in relation to creating more green spaces and promoting opportunities for walking and cycling, as well as the associated climate response and congestion.

- 4.5.2 Multiple responses were received in relation to improving the overall quality of the town centre, with suggestions including conversion of the former Debenhams store into flexible workspace, as well as more leisure uses, open space and a focus on the riverside.
- 4.5.3 Finally, there were concerns about the local economic impact, if larger employers are lost and hence an emphasis upon securing new investment.
- 4.6 There was a general theme of working together to create an environment in which local enterprises can adapt to take advantage of fast-changing customer expectations. This would require a flexible approach from all and closer partnership working between the Council, business and the wider community.

#### **4.7 Other Feedback**

- 4.7.1 A Facebook post anchored by an image showing town centre and riverside residential developments (as well as the proposed London Resort and a plan view of the proposed Nuralite Business Park) drew a number of comments from residents concerned about local infrastructure and capacity of the local health service. However, housing delivery is not an objective or theme of the strategy itself and those individuals who clicked through to the online survey, were then able to respond to the strategy themes instead.
- 4.7.2 Feedback received by email, offered suggestions for updating references to the Greater North Kent Partnership and associated initiatives, as well as an emphasis upon health and wellbeing for a productive workforce and in two cases, additional comments in support of separate survey responses.

### **5. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 5.1 Full and summary consultation responses are available to view.

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	There is no statutory duty to prepare a strategy for the economic development of the Borough.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	The financial implications of specific actions taken as part of this economic growth strategy will be considered by the council and, if approved, taken forward within the council's budgetary process.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	None
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/a</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. N/a</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. Yes because it promotes ongoing involvement in service planning through open engagement of a wide range of community stakeholders from different business and other backgrounds.</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	The corporate plan is referenced in the consultation document and the aims fit within the themes of People, Place and Progress.
<b>Climate Change</b>	The Council's climate change commitment is cross-referenced in the strategy as a priority theme. Working to influence businesses to adopt steps to achieve net zero carbon is a key action for the council.
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No direct impacts.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	Continued 'day to day' use of the digital and web site team's expertise to communicate action planning at a later date, post adoption of the strategy.

**Safeguarding  
children and  
vulnerable adults**

No direct impacts.