

APPENDIX E

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE 1 SEPTEMBER 2009

Title:

**SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND SKILLS:
COMMITTING TO THE FSB SMALL BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT ACCORD; THE
LOCAL EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP; AND THE SKILLS PLEDGE**

**[Portfolio Holders: Cllrs Richard Gates, Robert Knowles, Ms Denise Le Gal]
[Wards Affected:N/A]**

Summary and purpose:

This report proposes Waverley confirming its commitment to local businesses and skills by signing up to the principle contained in the Federation of Small Business's (FSB) Small Business Engagement Accord; signing up to a Local Employment Partnership with Jobcentre Plus, and making the Skills Pledge. All three build on Waverley's existing practice and approach to supporting businesses and individuals during the recession.

- 1 The Small Business Engagement Accord is a voluntary code of practice for local authorities in the South East which seeks to encourage a more productive dialogue with local businesses. The Accord brings together various aspects of consultation best practice already produced, as well as specific proposals from the FSB designed to improve the level of participation by businesses in local democracy.

The Accord represents a commitment by local authorities to taking a proactive approach to engaging with businesses so that they are given the fullest opportunity to participate in the decision making process, and to understand the reasons behind the final decisions taken.
 - 2 The Local Employment Partnership is an agreement with Jobcentre Plus to undertake specific measures that will help support benefit claimants into work.
 - 3 The Skills Pledge commits an organisation to supporting employees to gain skills that meet business needs and support future employability and to raising their employees skills and competencies to improve organisational performance through investing in economically valuable training and development.
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How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The Small Business Engagement Accord, the Local Employment Partnership and the Skills Pledge all fit with all the principles set out in the Council's Corporate Priorities. In particular meeting the objectives of the Accord will ensure that local businesses are fully engaged in the elements that make up the Corporate Priorities and will be better able to help Waverley deliver them.

Waverley already follows the principles in the Accord and the Skills Pledge and signing up to them and the Local Employment Partnership will both underpin the value of engaging the business community in key aspects of Waverley's priorities and demonstrate leadership to others.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

The engagement Accord underpins how all businesses, irrespective of their size, location or ownership should be able to play an effective part in helping shape outcomes for the local community. By being fully engaged with the activities of the council, businesses will be better placed to make an effective contribution to social inclusion, equality and diversity issues through their own Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

The Local Employment Partnership specifically supports residents who are out of work and through mentoring or work trials, where appropriate, provides better opportunities to ensure that benefit claimants are not inadvertently excluded.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Background

1. All three pledges will have a positive impact for Waverley, by committing to support its businesses, residents and employees.
2. The FSB is encouraging the involvement of local authorities in an initiative which sees them signing up to 14 Accord Principles which promote the importance of listening to the views of small businesses.
3. The Federation of Small Businesses is one of the UK's leading business organisation with over 215,000 members. It exists to protect and promote the interests of the self-employed, and all those who run their own business. Two branches cover Waverley, one covering the Guildford and Godalming area and another covering Farnham area

4. The Local Employment Partnership is an agreement between a local employer and Jobcentre Plus. The purpose of the agreement is to help long-term benefit claimants back into employment. An organisation or business will agree with Jobcentre Plus specific measures they will take to help support benefit claimants back into work.
5. The Skills Pledge is backed by the Learning and Skills Council and is a voluntary public commitment made by an organisation to invest in the skills of its workforce. It is a promise that through training an employer will work to boost the productivity and efficiency of their organisation and realise the potential of their employees by developing their basic skills and helping them work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (the equivalent of five good GCSEs).

The Small Business Engagement Accord

6. The principles set out in the Accord (which is set out in full at Annexe 1) are principles already followed by Waverley. The Accord is a useful reminder of the importance of giving enough time for businesses to respond but also making consultation processes meaningful and understandable.
7. Waverley already has a Member Business Champion (Cllr Robert Knowles) and a business champion on the Waverley Strategic Partnership (Ken Kent representing the Waverley Business Forum).
8. Waverley has always taken engagement with the Business community very seriously. In addition to the Annual Business rates Consultation meeting held in January each year, Waverley works closely with the four Chambers of Trade and Commerce in the Borough on a range of projects and issues of concern. This year a second main consultation meeting was held in July to report back on issues raised in the January meeting.
9. Waverley is both a member of and supports the work programme of the Waverley Business Forum which brings together both businesses and business support organisations including the FSB. The Waverley Business Forum acts as the voice of business in Waverley and organises briefing sessions on relevant issues and engages with a range of businesses in the Borough. Its purpose is to improve business to business and business to council relationships.
10. In 2009, Waverley has demonstrated its commitment to engagement with the business community by undertaking a review of its procurement activity. A local business raised the need for the review in January and it has been pursued with a view to making opportunities more open and transparent for local business. The review group included representatives of Waverley Business Forum, The Federation of Small Businesses, Surrey Chambers of Commerce and Business Link Surrey. The suggestions made by the group have been taken on board, were reported to the Executive in July and are now in the process of being implemented.

11. Waverley uses Making Waves and other media opportunities to raise awareness of its activities for local businesses and is currently developing a new online business directory that will be launched in September to help further with keeping in touch with local businesses. It will also help business-to-business contact and in keeping trade local.
12. In recent years, projects undertaken by Waverley in supporting local businesses have been recognised externally for both their quality and impact. This resulted in Waverley being a Beacon Council nationally for its work in *Supporting the Rural Economy*. Along with its partners Waverley has in successive years won Action for Market Towns Awards for a number of projects including the Haslemere Christmas Market (Best Business project in the south east) , the Haslemere Rewards Scheme (best National Project), The Cranleigh Enhancement project (Best environmental project in the South East) and the Wireless Godalming Project (Best Business and Economy Project in the South East). None of this projects could have been successful without full engagement with the business community.

The Local Employment Partnership

13. Local Employment Partnerships are agreements between a local employer and Jobcentre Plus. Their purpose is to help give every opportunity to those who are unemployed and on long-term benefits to get back into employment. The agreement can cover a number of measures that an employer will support in working with Jobcentre Plus to help target the needs of those seeking employment opportunities in their area. The type of measures agreed with other employer have included:
 - Offering 2-4 week work trials to a given number (determined by the employer) of local benefit claimants
 - Working with Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skill Council on the design of pre-employment training to ensure it is relevant to employers' needs and agree when hiring to guarantee interviews or jobs to local benefit claimants who complete this training;
 - Encouraging their employees to volunteer to provide one-to-one mentoring for long-term benefit claimants to help prepare them for work;
 - reviewing application process to ensure that local benefit claimant are not inadvertently excluded by, for example, requirement for qualification or overly complicated procedure.
14. It is proposed that the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Human Resource and the Local Economy agree the appropriate measures for a Waverley Local Employment Partnership after discussion with Jobcentre Plus.

The Skills Pledge

15. Waverley is already committed to improving the skills level of all staff to help address business priorities. For example, the commitment that all staff will

achieve the Certificate in Equalities and Diversity will help both business needs and raise skill levels. The Skills Pledge (see Annexe 2) is an opportunity to demonstrate to staff, business partners and the public the importance Waverley places on investing in the skills of its employees. The purpose of the Skills Pledge is to ensure that all staff are skilled, competent and able to make a full contribution to the success of Waverley and its priorities.

16. The commitment is made when the Chief Executive, or other senior leader on behalf of an organisation, signs the Skills Pledge Certificate. The certificate confirms that Waverley shall:
 - Actively encourage and support our employees to gain the skills and qualifications that will meet the needs of its business and will support their future employability
 - Further support our employees to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and work towards their first full Level 2 qualification (where appropriate)
 - Demonstrably raise our employees' skills and competencies to improve our organisational performance through investing in economically valuable training and development.

Conclusion

17. The FSB Small Business Engagement Accord is to be welcomed for setting out some simple principles that local authorities should follow in ensuring that businesses should be given a voice and encouraged to play an effective part in shaping and delivering key issues affecting their local areas. Waverley is pleased to demonstrate its commitment to these principles which it has already embedded in its work with local businesses by becoming a signatory to the Accord.
18. The Local Employment Partnership is particularly important as this time with rising levels of unemployment and the need to support local residents affected by the recession. It will be a useful addition to the Don't Lose Your Home or Business Initiative.
19. The Skills Pledge underpins the emphasis that Waverley already places on developing the skills of its employee to ensure that they can reach their full potential.
20. Signing these agreements does not create a contractual commitment nor are they legally binding. They are voluntary commitments to working in partnership to deliver real and lasting benefits for local businesses, residents or employees. However they do demonstrate leadership by Waverley on an important issue for its businesses, residents and employees, and Waverley can extend this leadership by encouraging other local organisations and businesses to make similar pledges.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive:

- 1) welcome the Federation of Small Businesses Engagement Accord; supports the principles set out within the accord and authorises the Leader and Portfolio Holder for the Local Economy to sign the Accord on behalf of Waverley;
- 2) agree to sign up to a Local Employment Partnership with Jobcentre Plus to support the needs of residents who are unemployed and authorises the Chief Executive with the agreement of the Portfolio Holders for Human Resources and the Local Economy to finalise the details appropriate for Waverley;
- 3) agree to sign the Skills Pledge as a commitment to raise the skills and competencies of Waverley's employees; and
- 4) agree that Waverley should raise awareness of these pledges to encourage other organisations and local businesses to make similar commitments to enhance opportunities for local businesses, residents and employees.

Background Papers (HEDP)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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