

Delivering the Goods

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013



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Introduction

It has been another very busy year for the Shared Service, particularly as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) begin to further bed down and receive actual resources from Central Government and we continue to shape and position the Business and Economic Partnership (BEP) to provide a genuine role of adding value to the local economic development agenda.

Our theme in the previous year for the Shared Economic Development Service was very much one about 'setting the course', particularly in terms of adopting an Economic Strategy for the area and continuing to ensure that the LEPs take account of the economic needs of Tamworth and Lichfield District.

This year, both locally through the BEP and regionally through the Southern Staffordshire Partnership (SSP) and LEPs, we have begun to see much more in the way of specific delivery of projects and initiatives, and the strategic influence of resources controlled by others.

This agenda of delivery and strategic influence within the shared service has concentrated on three specific themes over the year:

- 1. Business support**, encompassing how we respond to business enquiries, the various business support schemes we have delivered or contributed to and our work through Think Local 4 Business.
- 2. Business engagement**, covering the support of the BEP, the emerging BEP communications strategy and tools, the Business Networks Forum and the business events we have staged.
- 3. Shared strategic thinking**, which includes our contributions to and influence of the SSP, LEPs, our joint work on how we market Tamworth and Lichfield as a place for business and contributions to the place agenda such as town teams and planning/development management.

This Annual Report will provide more detail around each of the above 3 themes and the associated work streams. The resources that we have at our disposal to support these themes is also outlined.

These 3 themes have continued to shape the work of the Shared Service as we have moved into 2013/14. In particular, we are seeing a more focussed role for the BEP emerging around the delivery of the revised Economic Strategy and the final section will outline the priorities and direction of travel.

1. Business Support

Business Enquiries

The service has continued to respond to business-related enquiries. There has been a greater diversity of enquiries, though the main focus has still been property and access to finance. Business support generally has seen an increased focus as has support towards subsidising National Non Domestic Rates. Although increases in enquiries have not been fully analysed, business support programmes such as Tamworth4Business and the Business Development Programme have definitely generated more interest.

Business Support Schemes

This year has seen great changes in the local provision of Business Support, on a local, regional and national basis. On the local front Tamworth Borough Council started running the Tamworth4Business service, a mini “business link” that offers start up support, workshops and strategic reviews for businesses based in Tamworth. This led to the Business and Economic Partnership influencing the Lichfield Strategic Partnership to set aside funding of circa £23,000 to run a similar service in Lichfield District but without as much emphasis on the start up support. This was tendered for, procured and then started in April 2013.

In addition to these services the shared service has taken part in two European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes.

Business Development Programme, which started in Sept 2012, is a business grant and mentoring programme offered across the GBSLEP area. It offers grants of between £10,000 and £15,000 for 45% of a total eligible project to SMEs to fund relocation, building improvements and some marketing activities in order to stimulate jobs and ultimately economic growth.

The mentoring part of the fund Great 200 Leaders is subsidised coaching for 200 local SME business leaders. Both parts of this project run until March 2015. The project is managed and administered by Birmingham City Council with the shared service providing match funding in terms of staff hours. The shared service receives grant back of 50% of the total staff hours spent on the project.

Enterprise Start-up programme which started in Jan 2013 is a coaching and mentoring service across Southern Staffordshire, managed and administered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. This service offers workshops, coaching and support to anyone thinking of starting a business or has recently started a business. This project runs until 2015 and is not match funded by shared service staff hours.

The shared service also supports and promotes any other business support that is offered locally.



Think Local 4 Business

Last Summer, following a review of TL4B and the adoption of a new Business Plan, it was decided to incorporate the initiative into a separate company limited by shares, with the district councils as Founder Shareholders. Tamworth Borough Council took a seat on the Board representing the interests of both districts, alongside East Staffordshire Borough Council and Stafford Borough Council and members of the private sector, one of whom took on the role of Project Director (Peter Farmer). All the assets of the initiative (the residual funds, the website, branding and business data) were transferred to the new company's ownership and it was hoped that the company would be able, through revenue raising such as advertising and sponsorship, to become financially self-sustaining within 2 years. Initially, the company was able to hugely increase the profile of TL4B through effective public relations and marketing, with company registrations rising from a base of 400 to nearly 1,200. However, it soon became apparent that there were major technical flaws with the website which would require significant investment to remedy, preferably through a site reconstruction. By the end of 2012/13, the Board was actively considering its options, with a view to a final decision on the future direction of TL4B being made by Summer 2013.

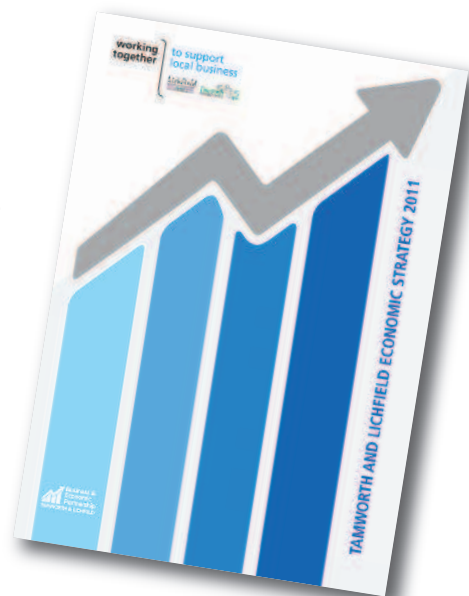


2. Business Engagement

BEP Board & Strategy

Following the revised Board structure adopted last year to reflect a LEP like balance of public-private sector representation, along with the adoption of the Economic Strategy and Board Champions for each of the themes of the strategy, the BEP this year has attempted to identify where it can add value to a complex array of partnerships and activities. The BEP has sought to identify this added value role on 3 specific fronts

1. **Direct delivery** of activities
2. **Strategic influence** of other partnerships and activities
3. A cross cutting theme of acting as a **communications conduit** for the business community to engage with and understand the often complex local economic development agenda.



The early part of the year saw the appointment of a new BEP Chair, with Peter Farmer standing down after 3 years as Chair due to his need to concentrate his efforts on his new role as TL4B Project Director. Deb Baker, who has actively contributed to the BEP and the former Lichfield Economic Forum, along with many other economic development initiatives over a period spanning more than a decade, has taken on the role and ably steered the BEP through this new phase of activity.

The need for the BEP to become more focussed on this role of 'adding value', rather than merely reflecting what is already being delivered elsewhere or adding to the complexity of the agenda, has led to a full review of the Economic Strategy with a clearer articulation of the role of the BEP. This largely reflects an acknowledgement that the initial strategy adopted last year was too broad in its scope. At the time of writing, a revised structure of the Strategy has been agreed and the content is being drafted. It is anticipated that the revised strategy will be published in early Autumn 2013.

In terms of where the BEP has added value across the 3 aspects highlighted above, the rest of the report provides specific examples. Particular highlights include the delivery of the new Tamworth 4 Business and Lichfield 4 Business support services, as well as the input into the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP's Strategy for Growth. In terms of the cross-cutting role as a communications conduit, alongside its usual role of producing the Business Brief newsletter and its engagement work through the Business Networks Forum, the BEP is also in the process of developing a new web portal and has become very active on social media.

Business Networks Forum

The Business Networks Forum has continued to develop well in the last year, still led by two local business people, Karen Nicholls from Roar Marketing and Tracy Pound from Maximity. The focus this year has been twofold: retaining Ambassadors from networking groups thus ensuring as many of the local groups as possible are represented and concentrating on specific themes and inviting people from the networking groups along who have an interest in that theme. The BNF continues to run successfully with minimal Council intervention.



Business Events

Extending the success of the first Pop-up show held in March 2012, a further show was held on September 26th at Drayton Manor. The second show had 33 exhibitors and generated a profit of £712.50, though attendance was not as strong as the previous show.

The biggest event of the year was the ThinkLocal4Business Show held at the newly opened FA Centre at St Georges Park in East Staffordshire. Over 700 people attended, with a variety of seminars and nearly 60 stands, making it one of the most successful shows of recent years.



3. Shared Strategic Thinking

Southern Staffordshire Partnership

Tamworth Borough Council and Lichfield District Council have represented themselves separately on the SSP, both at the Executive and Delivery Board groups. However, there has continued to be close collaboration between the districts on our policies and thinking through the SSP. In particular, the Shared Service has led on the development of the concept of 'Economic Gardening', which essentially means building up more sustainable local economic resilience through the active encouragement of indigenous enterprise and business growth, rather than an over reliance on inward investment. We are also collaborating closely on the development of the Enterprise Belt and its prospectus, which it is hoped will strategically influence both LEPs to encourage further investment in this important area.



Local Enterprise Partnerships

Although both councils have continued to be separately represented on the LEPs, with Lichfield members of both Greater Birmingham and Solihull (GBS) and Stoke and Staffordshire (S&S) and Tamworth members of just GBS, close collaboration on policy, approach and engagement has continued. Particular highlights include:

- Direct influence of the GBSLEP Strategy for Growth to reflect the economic priorities of Tamworth and Lichfield, with facilitation of responses by the BEP Board and Business Networks Forum. No other area of the GBSLEP provided such a comprehensive and integrated response mechanism, allowing our businesses to more fully comprehend the LEP and influence its strategy.
- Direct input into the Staffordshire Economic Consortium Growth Strategy, ensuring that Tamworth and Lichfield's economic priorities are adequately reflected within. This document is now acting as the base for the development of the S&S LEP's overall Growth Strategy.
- Delivery of the ERDF Business Development Programme, providing grants to businesses looking to grow, either creating new jobs or safeguarding existing jobs, as well as a business leadership programme.
- Delivery of the ERDF Enterprise Startup Programme.
- Input into the development of the GBSLEP Business Support Portal and S&SLEP Business Helpline to ensure that the support offer to Tamworth and Lichfield businesses is appropriately represented through both resources.
- Input into the GBSLEP Tourism Group and the development of proposals for more joint working across the LEP on the visitor economy and strategic marketing.
- Input into major strategic areas, such as the Place agenda (planning, transport, investment sites, connectivity etc) and skills (GBSLEP Employment and Skills Board).



Town Centres and Tourism

Town Centres: officers from the Shared Service have continued to provide representation to both Town Teams since the Portas Pilot applications, neither of which were successful, although Lichfield did secure High Street Innovation Fund status and both have formally adopted Town Team status. The Shared Service has provided input and support in terms of progressing how the High Street Innovation funding is spent, both through the Lichfield and Burntwood forums.

Tourism: Both councils have continued to be separately represented on both the Stoke and Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership and the GBSLEP Visitor Economy Group, but have maintained close liaison. In terms of the latter, both councils have been instrumental in progressing towards potential arrangements for closer working on the promotion of the visitor economy and strategic marketing of the GBSLEP through Marketing Birmingham.



Strategic Planning and Development Management

The shared service has continued to input into the development and submission of both councils Local Plans, assisted in late 2012 by the addition of a Planning Policy Economic Development Officer at Lichfield District Council. We have continued to support planning policy and development management activity by responding to consultations and supporting inward investment queries.

4. Resources

The Shared Service continues to be delivered through efficient management of tight resources. In terms of human resources these include:

- Economic Development and Enterprise Manager – Tamworth Borough Council)
- Senior Economic Development Officer – Tamworth Borough Council
- Planning Policy Officer (50% Economic Development) – Lichfield District Council

These resources are also managed through the more senior management at both Councils, including the Head of Planning and Regeneration at Tamworth Borough Council and the Development Executive at Lichfield District Council, along with more senior officers above as and when appropriate.

In terms of financial resources, both councils pool economic development budgets to fund activities delivered by the BEP and those activities that the councils deliver on a joint basis. In 2012/13 this amounted to £26,000.

In addition, some income generation opportunities have been pursued, these being the selling of advertising space in the Business Brief newsletter (around £1,000) and the selling of stand space at the Pop Up Shows (around £4,500). These have either fully or part-funded these particular activities and in the case of the latter, turned in a profit that the Shared Service has been able to reinvest in other activities.

In addition, as part of the ERDF Business Development Programme, officer time devoted to the project by the Shared Service has been accounted for as a match funding contribution, which will generate ERDF grant payments as claims are submitted. Our first claim is about to be submitted and for the period of September 2013 (the start of the programme) to end March 2013, this will amount to just over £4,000. These funds will also be used to contribute to additional activities through the BEP and Shared Service in 2013/14.

5. The Way Forward

The economic development agenda has always been complex and diverse, operating through an array of partnerships and organisations across a varying spectrum of spatial areas. Since the Coalition Government came into power on a ticket of localism, sweeping away most of the previous regional structures, this has arguably become even more the case. It has therefore proved a real challenge for areas like Tamworth and Lichfield to establish a clear role and remit for its limited economic development resources where it can add value, and in particular without spreading these resources too thinly and/or adding to the complexity and existing duplication. In addition, there is the backdrop of public sector funding cuts, with councils bearing the brunt of these, placing an ever tighter squeeze on resources that the councils have to invest into the economic development agenda.

That said, over the past 12 months, 3 clear themes for the Shared Service have emerged across which it is felt the service's activities can add real value, namely **business support, business engagement and shared strategic thinking**. In tandem, the BEP is currently developing a much more clearly focussed role through narrowing down its Economic Strategy to focus purely on areas where it can also genuinely make a difference, through either **direct delivery** of activities, **strategic influence** or acting as the main **communications conduit** for the business community.

With the above context in mind, the Shared Service and BEP has identified some clear early priorities across the above 3 themes, namely:

Business Support:

- Develop sustainable services to follow the Tamworth 4 Business and Lichfield 4 Business services so that we can continue to provide locally available face to face business support from 2014 onwards.
- Continue to deliver the ERDF Business Development and Enterprise programmes and influence the LEPs to provide similar EU funded services post 2014.
- Continue to support LEP wide initiatives to better coordinate information on business support and access to finance, but also provide a local coordination and access point through the BEP.
- To actively support any business enquiries received into the service around start-up, business growth and development, including enquiries for inward investment and indigenous business growth.
- To ensure that council services interfacing with businesses are more accessible, joined up and coordinated.

Business Engagement:

- To continue to support the BEP Board to finalise the revised and refocused Economic Strategy and ensure that the BEP role is more clearly defined.
- To develop a clear BEP communications and engagement strategy and develop appropriate tools and mechanisms, including building on existing resources such as Business eBrief and the Business Networks Forum, but also to develop new ones where appropriate, such as the BEP portal and social media resources.
- To continue to deliver a programme of quality business events, such as the Think Local 4 Business Show, popup shows and other themed business events.
- To continue to foster good working relationships with the main business representative organisations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses.
- To deliver a programme of Strategic Business Engagement to fully engage with the largest and strategically most important businesses across both districts. Opportunities for BEP Board succession planning will also be explored through this route.

Shared Strategic Thinking:

- To develop a comprehensive Business Place Marketing Strategy, setting out how to best promote Tamworth and Lichfield as places for business, how it will interface and work with other place marketing partnerships and initiatives and the resources and tools required to implement it.
- To continue to support and work with the Southern Staffordshire Partnership on the development of an Enterprise Belt prospectus.
- To continue to support and influence the LEPs in order to ensure that Tamworth and Lichfield's economic priorities are suitably reflected and that opportunities to leverage in funding and investment are pursued.

Looking ahead, the Shared Service needs to be mindful of its role playing into the local growth agenda and the direct role that this will have in terms of general income generation for the councils through localised business rates, new homes bonus and general income generation through increased economic activity. Complementing this, the Shared Service and BEP will also continue to identify and pursue direct income generation opportunities through the service's own activities (e.g. ERDF match funding, advertising, sponsorship etc.) in order to either part fund existing activities or help fund new ones.

In addition to this, the Shared Service will be looking at a range of performance measures and indicators that it can monitor and use to determine the impact of the service on the local economy. Some of these will indicate a direct impact, such as where specific funding schemes or programmes deliver measurable impacts, for example Business Development grants generating specific jobs or advice and guidance directly supporting an inward investment or business growth opportunity. However, some will remain more generic in nature indicating a direction of travel for the local economy where a range of factors, including shared service interventions, will have contributed to the result.

6. Further Information

I trust that this report will provide sufficient information to allow members and officers from both districts to be aware of the progress of the Shared Service over the previous financial year but if anyone has any further information requirements, please do get in touch.



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