
Report by Chief Executive

Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023 – Action Plan Update

13 February 2014

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates the Board on progress against the actions set out in the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023 which was agreed in June 2013.
- 1.2 The Economic Strategy sets out the vision, strategic aims and objectives that will provide the focus for our efforts to ensure sustainable economic growth for the Scottish Borders. The associated Action Plan sets out in detail how the Community Planning Partnership will deliver the outcomes identified in the Economic Strategy.
- 1.3 Good progress has been made in delivering the actions set out in the Action Plan (Appendix 1), but some areas of activity require additional partner focus, or in some instances, additional resources.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 I recommend that the Community Planning Partnership :-
 - (a) Note the positive progress made in relation to the Economic Strategy Action Plan; and
 - (b) Discusses and agrees how to realign partner's resources to deliver these priorities.

3 ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2023 - BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Economic Strategy was prepared in order to set direction for the activity of the Community Planning Partners. It was agreed by Community Planning Partners at the Strategic Board in June 2013. The Strategy consists of three documents, an Economic Profile, an Economic Strategy document and an Action Plan. This report provides an update on progress in relation to the actions set out in the Action Plan.
- 3.2 The Strategy sets out the vision, strategic aims and objectives that will provide the focus for our efforts to ensure sustainable economic growth for the Scottish Borders. The agreed vision is:
- "By 2023 the Scottish Borders will be amongst the best performing and most productive rural economies in Scotland. By supporting existing businesses and encouraging higher value economic activity, our quality of life will increase. The Borders will become a location of choice for growing businesses and for people to live and work."
- 3.3 The four strategic aims are derived from the analysis in the Economic Profile and reflect the particular opportunities and challenges that the economy of the Scottish Borders faces. The four strategic aims are:
- 1. Creating the conditions for businesses to compete** - reflecting our entrepreneurial strength and the need to create the conditions for businesses to grow, and/ or to attract entrepreneurial people;
 - 2. Building on our assets** - attracting and retaining people and growing businesses will be helped by what the Scottish Borders as a place has to offer and by our ability to maximise our assets;
 - 3. Developing the workforce of the future** - fundamental to future prosperity and competitiveness is the supply of, and demand for, a skilled workforce. As there are fewer jobs available here than residents in work, people are travelling outside the area for work and this means economic performance is lower;
 - 4. Providing leadership** - essential for successful economic development to be achieved, leadership will also help deliver other policy and organisational priorities too – around education, health, and the public good.

4 ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE

- 4.1 The Action Plan acknowledged the need to demonstrate ambition and aspiration whilst at the same time recognising the resource constraints in the public sector, now and in the future. The Action Plan addresses this by setting out those actions which had resources and were part of planned activity by CPP partners (covered by a 'tint') and those actions which were part of a 'Project Pipeline' where resources had still to be identified (no tint). Since the Strategy was published in June 2013, good progress has been made on the 'resourced' actions and many of the 'Project Pipeline' actions have also been positively progressed.
- 4.2 Officers have used a simple Red/Amber/Green marking on the attached Action Plan Update (Appendix 1) to highlight the status of the action. The categorisation is subjective, but Red equates to no progress, or concerns about the level of resources still required; Amber equates to some

progress, but not as anticipated; and Green equates to 'on track'.

- 4.3 Overall, there is a positive sense of progress against the resourced actions with progress being made against all of these actions. Examples of good progress include the commencement of the Superfast Broadband project which will roll-out over the next four years. The activity of partners and communities around Homecoming 2014 is also very positive. In relation to peoples and skills the fall in the 18-24 unemployment rate is also positive progress for the area.
- 4.4 There are some areas of concern in relation to the resourced actions. The first of these relates to the Borders Railway Economic Opportunities Realisation Programme where a significant range of actions need to be delivered. Although positive progress has been made in identifying resources for some of those projects, additional staff and financial resources are still required. More focus and effort is also required on youth employment and the employability agenda, particularly to bring more focus onto the priority localities of Burnfoot and Langlee. Finally, the work in Eyemouth on a vision and Whole Town Framework is taking longer than anticipated and it is important that this is finalised quickly after the Community Open Sessions in February and March.
- 4.5 Turning to the 'Project Pipeline' actions, partners have delivered good progress in view of the resources available for this work. Some of the key projects in this category do require additional resources, for instance Borders Business Park and Inward Investment activity, and Council officers are currently working with Scottish Enterprise to develop a programme of strategic economic development interventions for the South of Scotland that will hopefully draw additional resources in for these projects. It is also clear that more coordination and additional resources will be required to take forward activity around employability and youth employment.

5 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council, and its Community Planning Partners, will need to continue the dialogue around which of the actions identified in the Project Pipeline will be highest priority and where they will be able to justify targeting resources towards them. It should be noted that limitations on future public spending may place constraints on the delivery of the Action Plan. In view of this it is expected that the Action Plan will be reviewed and updated in June 2014 to allow it to reflect shifting priorities and resources.

Author(s)

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