

This is an open report

Report to: Confident Places Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting(s): Wednesday, 30 November 2022

Subject: Deal for Business

Report of: Claire Burnham, Assistant Director, Skills and Enterprise

Contact Officer: Tricia Evans, Service Manager 01942 489178

Cabinet Portfolio Holder and area: Councillor Molyneux, Executive Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

Summary:

The report provides an update to Members of the Confident Places Scrutiny Committee on the refreshed Deal for Business which was launched in December 2021. It provides information on the collaborative approach taken with the Business Consortium, the key learning points and seeks member input and feedback on how we can potentially expand the reach of the scheme and explore areas for potential improvement.

Link to Corporate Priorities:

Our People: Together we feel happy, safe, included and look out for each other:

- Communities that care for each other

Our Place: Together we are proud of our towns and look after our environment:

- Vibrant town centres for all

Our Future: Together we will build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive:

- Economic growth that benefits everyone

Wards Affected: All

Recommendation(s): That Confident Places Scrutiny Committee comments on The Deal for Business, how the initiative could be potentially expanded and any potential areas for improvement.

Implications:

What are the financial implications?

There are no financial implications to this initiative. The work carried out this year has not incurred cost and has been conducted within normal officer duties.

Is budget release necessary (Capital Expenditure Only)? No

What are the legal implications? There are no legal implications

What are the staffing implications? There are no staffing implications. Work related to the Deal for Business is carried out within normal officer duties.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason). If not required, then a relevance check needs to be completed.

A full Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment is not required as vulnerable groups are not negatively impacted. However, in raising awareness of the Deal for Business officers work with a range of stakeholders, partners, social enterprises and community groups to ensure that all businesses or self employed individuals are aware of the initiative and the benefits.

What are the property implications in terms of reduction, addition or change to the council's asset base or its occupation? There are no property implications

What are the Corporate Parenting Implications?

There are potential employment or self-employment opportunities for care leavers through the Deal for Business. All businesses are encouraged to recruit locally and to consider the widest possible potential labour force with relevant support put in place for both the employer and individual.

Risks:

Despite the initial success of the initiative there are risks associated with businesses currently involved disengaging by perceiving little or no added value or due to the increasing challenges currently facing businesses. This will be monitored through regular engagement and officers will seek to encourage businesses to remain as participants to ensure they receive all relevant guidance and support to sustain and grow their business. There are also risks associated with being unable to recruit further businesses to register for the initiative therefore limiting the impact to stimulate economic growth that benefits everyone. Work will be ongoing to raise awareness of the Deal for Business through events, business engagement and social media/PR to increase participating businesses.

Sustainability/Environmental implications:

The purpose of the Deal for Business is to support the Deal 2030 objectives to stimulate inclusive economic growth that benefits all and to meet the ambitions of the Climate Change strategy. This is achieved through encouraging local supply chain networks between businesses in the borough, recruiting locally and asking businesses to consider how they are impacting on the climate and what support they need to reduce this impact.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?

No

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

An alternative option is to cease encouraging businesses to register for the Deal for Business. However, this would negatively impact on the achievements to date and limit the council's ability to stimulate inclusive economic growth and associated employment opportunities particularly at this challenging time for businesses and residents.

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

There are no background papers for this report.

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| Directorate Sign-off: | Clare Burnham |
| Date: | 21/11/22 |

Please list any appendices:

| Appendix number or letter | Description |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
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1 Background:

- 1.1 In early 2021, a Business Consortium was established to focus on the borough's long-term recovery and achieving inclusive economic growth, post COVID-19. The consortium explores how all components of the local economy can adapt and build resilience through the principles of Community Wealth Building and working collaboratively across private, public and VCSE sectors.
- 1.2 One area that was quickly identified for collaboration was the existing Deal for Business. Originally created in 2015 and refreshed in 2018, the Deal for Business aimed to secure commitment from local businesses to invest in their business and stimulate the local economy through the Your Part/Our Part principles. However, working with the Business Consortium the main observations from the business community were that businesses did not perceive the added value of The Deal for Business and the tangible benefits of participating were not clear. A motion was put forward to work collaboratively to refresh The Deal for Business and this was re-launched in December 2021.
- 1.3 This report sets out further details on the context, rationale and performance to date of the refreshed Deal for Business as we approach the first anniversary of the re-launch.

2. Context

- 2.1 Our ten-year strategy for the borough, The Deal 2030, sets out the ambition for economic growth that benefits everyone including creating a thriving economy which attracts business and increases local entrepreneurs.
- 2.2 Additionally, through the economic vision (We are Wigan), consideration is given to how the council can create a supportive environment for existing businesses and encourage entrepreneurs to drive growth and significantly improve performance against key economic indicators.
- 2.3 Our Community Wealth Building aspirations build on both of these strategies by applying principles that stimulate inclusive economic growth.
- 2.4 Wigan Council has worked collaboratively with the Business Consortium to co-design the refresh of the Deal for Business so that it reflects and meets business needs, is accessible to all businesses in the borough and provides clear value and benefits.
- 2.5 To address this, the collaborative group has co-designed the refreshed Deal for Business to be a structured approach which:
 - enables businesses of all sizes to reflect where they need to focus/improve
 - signposts to practical support and assistance
 - provides an ongoing point of engagement

- connects the business to their local community
- recognises achievement through a tiering structure
- enables promotion of the business
- encourages sustainable, inclusive local economic growth

2.6 To support this, the Your Part/Our Part of the previous Deal for Business was reviewed and now includes more detail to ensure businesses understand the commitment both from themselves and the council and therefore the benefits to being part of The Deal. The language used is clear, simple and does not use public sector speak.

3. New process

3.1 At the core of the new Deal for Business is a membership structure which reflects the commitment and achievement of the business to inclusive economic growth. The Business Consortium felt this was a tangible benefit to the new process and one that would encourage businesses that have not previously engaged with the council to participate. The membership levels are bronze, silver and gold.

3.2 On initial signing, a company achieves bronze membership. The business is then asked to complete an online self-assessment form designed to explore achievements or commitments to a range of key local issues including:

- Recruitment (local residents, apprentices, long term unemployed, people with disabilities)
- Training
- Supporting the local supply chain
- Sustainability
- Giving back to their local community
- Supporting other local businesses
- Participation in other local schemes and initiatives

3.3 The responses are scored and weighted to determine if the business remains as a bronze member or achieves silver or gold. The scoring matrix has been designed to consider size and age of business so that micro businesses and SMEs are not restricted from achieving silver or gold status.

3.4 The responses to the self-assessment form also provides the ability to gain a greater understanding of our business base, enables the council to identify opportunities for businesses and any support that can be developed to help with challenges that they may face. This will inform the council in terms of policy and initiative development and engagement with current and future partners for delivery.

3.5 The new process allows for a yearly review with the business to track progress. Although engagement with the business will be ongoing, the yearly review enables recognition of progress, renewal of the existing membership or award of the next membership level, if achieved.

- 3.6 A strong message from the Business Consortium was the use of the Deal for Business to promote not only the initiative but also local businesses by raising their profile and encourage collaboration. A number of mechanisms have been developed in conjunction with the Business Consortium to achieve this including an online directory and social media/video content.

4. Performance

- 4.1 1,100 businesses signed the original Deal for Business. However, the level of engagement was varied and on review some businesses were no longer trading. Since the re-launch in December 2021, 300 businesses have signed the new Deal for Business with 170 of these being completely new registrations. This demonstrates that the refreshed Deal for Business is achieving the aim to engage with new businesses.

- 4.2 Fifty eight percent (174 businesses) of the 300 registrations have completed the online self-assessment form. Within this the following memberships have been achieved:

Gold level - 5 businesses

Silver level - 109 businesses

Bronze level - 60 businesses

- 4.3 Follow up engagement is being made with the remaining 126 businesses to encourage completion of the self-assessment forms. It is encouraging to see so many businesses achieving the silver membership level.

- 4.4 The re-launched Deal for Business is also enabling officers to have a different conversation with businesses and explore community wealth building opportunities. Positive examples are already coming forward including:

- Silver member Interact is located in Trencherfield Mill employing over 300 staff, mainly young people under 30 in their call centre operation. Officers worked with Interact to develop a comprehensive health and wellbeing offer for their staff. This included financial advice through Unify Credit Union and arranging a partnership with a local caterer, Red Pepper Bistro, to supply healthy food options. Red Pepper Bistro had significant financial difficulties through the pandemic and this new partnership has benefitted the business in its recovery.
- Stephenson's, is a solicitors firm located in Wigan Investment Centre employing 250 staff. Stephenson's is one of the 5 organisations to achieve gold membership reflecting their level of commitment. Stephenson's has invited the council's fostering team into their workplace to raise awareness of fostering amongst their employees.
- DMR Training is located in Leigh and has achieved silver membership. Through the positive relationship with this business officers engaged

with the owner to potentially assist Barclays Bank retain a presence within Leigh town centre following the closure of their high street branch. Barclays now operate from premises owned by DMR Training on selected days within the week to enable customers to speak in person to Barclays staff.

- As part of their social value commitment bronze member Design Plumbing Services/Homes by Design located in Winstanley wanted to explore if they could gift houses in their portfolio to support the crisis intervention team. Officers brokered an introduction and the crisis intervention team report that the relationship is progressing well.

5. Future Direction

- 5.1 Work will continue to increase the number of businesses in the borough that are signed up to the refreshed Deal for Business to encourage regular engagement.
- 5.2 Additionally, as we have reached twelve months since the first registrations, the process of the annual reviews will commence. It will provide the opportunity to ensure that the Deal for Business processes are working as expected and to identify businesses that have progressed with their membership level.
- 5.3 With our continued support we would like to see more businesses progress into Gold membership level. Whilst the current economic situation may make this more challenging our focus will be to support businesses to increase their scores demonstrating continuous alignment with the values as set out in the refreshed Your Part / Our Part benefitting not only the business through increased resilience and growth, but the employees, residents, local economy and the environment.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The collaborative partnership with the Business Consortium has stimulated a conversation on how stakeholders across the borough can support our local economy to build resilience and achieve inclusive, sustainable economic growth.
- 6.2 Through this, the development of the refreshed Deal for Business is a practical initiative that has been co-designed with businesses to encourage wider business engagement and support underpinned by community wealth building principles.
- 6.3 Businesses have welcomed the structured approach and see clear value and benefits from the self-assessment form, promotion/collaboration opportunities, regular engagement and a different approach to how they can give back to their community. This is reflected in the number of registrations and the percentage of new businesses that have signed up for the first time.

- 6.4 The introduction of a membership tiering structure has resonated well with local businesses and there is a real sense of achievement and pride amongst those businesses that have achieved silver or gold membership levels.
- 6.5 The refreshed Deal for Business will be a key initiative to support and guide our business base through the increasing economic and social challenges facing our local businesses and communities.