

## **BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 7 November 2023

### **Present:**

Councillor Yvonne Bear (Chairman)  
Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (Vice-Chairman)  
Ose Akpom, Economic Development Manager  
Zoe Carr, Penge SE20 BID Company  
Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited  
Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley  
Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company  
Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken  
Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers LLP  
Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Place Shaping & Local Economy  
Manager  
Chris Travers, Orpington 1st BID Company  
Bruce Walker, Lansdown Asset Management

### **Also Present:**

Tim Horsman, Assistant Director for Planning and Building  
Control  
Ben Johnson, Head of Planning Policy and Strategy

## **12 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Jason Stanton – Mytime Active and Louise Wolsey – London South East Colleges, and Kelly Stead – Mytime Active and Liz Lakes – London South East Colleges attended as their respective substitutes.

Apologies for absence were also received from Elena Diaconescu – Bromley Adult Education College, Gary Hillman – N. Hillman & Sons, Lydia Lee – LBB Assistant Director - Culture & Regeneration, Helen McIntosh FCIPR – South East London Chamber of Commerce, Clare Searle – Greener and Cleaner, Chandra Sharma – Federation of Small Businesses, Caroline Tatchell – Splash Damage and Lee Thomas – Fairlight Group.

## **13 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

No questions had been received.

## **14 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27TH JUNE 2023 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING**

The Chairman noted that there were no matters outstanding.

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be agreed.**

**15 LB BROMLEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HEAD OF SERVICE UPDATE**

The LBB Place Shaping & Local Economy Manager provided an update on work across the Economic Development Team (and the slides from the update are attached at Appendix A).

The Partnership noted that the new Head of Economic Development would take up post at the beginning of the New Year.

It was suggested that representatives from the organisations delivering the UKSPF Supporting Local Businesses and People & Skills workstreams should be invited to the next meeting to provide an update.

The Partnership was pleased to note that the turnout at the Winter Lights Spectacular had been phenomenal – there had been a 71% increase in footfall with over 25,000 people attending the event. Spend data was not yet available but a significant increase was anticipated in light of the increased footfall.

As part of the work around the Night-Time Enterprise Zone (NTEZ) a business toolkit had been launched. The NTEZ programme was unfortunately coming to an end at the end of the year and an evaluation of the impact would be undertaken. Any feedback the Partnership had on the programme would be appreciated, survey link would be circulated with the minutes.

In relation to the Open Space Study, the Team would be reviewing the ways in which parks could support the local economy. The findings of this review would be presented to the next meeting.

The Partnership also received a comprehensive update on the Strategic Investment Fund and the work to roll out the dark fibre network and boost connectivity across the Borough.

**16 FOSTER CARERS RECRUITMENT**

The Partnership received a presentation about foster carers recruitment (slides were included in the agenda pack). Members of the Partnership heard that the advertising campaign for foster carers was being rebranded. The Service was constantly seeking to recruit foster carers for the young people in the care of the Local Authority. It was noted that it was a competitive market and the Service was seeking ideas for suitable marketing strategies to attract more potential foster carers to consider joining Bromley.

The Chairman recognised the challenges facing the Service and highlighted that whilst being a foster carer could be challenging at times it was also

incredibly rewarding. It was noted that the Service had some marketing materials which could be circulated following the meeting.

In response to a question, the Group Manager for the Permanency Service, confirmed that there were currently 340 children in the care of the Local Authority and there were 80 foster carers. This meant that the Service was seeking to recruit over 200 foster carers. Currently, the Local Authority was outsourcing to private foster agencies, and this was costly as private foster agencies were run for profit.

It was also noted that the Permanency Service did promote fostering through schools, leaflets were placed in public areas of schools and designated safeguarding leads were asked to promote fostering throughout their school communities.

## **17 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE AND PLANNING OVERVIEW**

The LBB Assistant Director for Planning & Building Control and the LBB Head of Planning Policy & Strategy attended the meeting to provide a Local Plan update and planning overview.

The Assistant Director for Planning & Building Control confirmed that the problems with the backlog had been rectified. Recruitment continued to be a challenge and there was a national skills shortage but in spite of this the Team continued to perform well and planning applications were processed well above the targets set by Government.

The Assistant Director highlighted the pre-application advise service offered by the Local Authority and it was noted that the Team were looking to expand the offer over the next year.

The case management software was also being replaced and the Team was six months into a year-long project. The new software would go live in May 2024.

Finally, the Assistant Director highlighted the work of the Building Control Team. With new management in place the team was now equipped to deal with larger commercial schemes.

The Head of Planning Policy & Strategy explained that consultations had taken place on options for the Local Plan. Officers were currently working on drafting the Plan and a range of evidence that would be used to inform the Local Plan. The next consultation would be undertaken in Spring 2024.

The Head of Planning Policy and Strategy highlighted that there was currently a great deal of reform to the planning system being undertaken including the Levelling Up Acts which had received Royal Assent the previous week. It was noted that the reforms would inform the timeline of the Local Plan going forward.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Planning & Building Control confirmed that there had been a slight reduction in the number of planning applications coming into the service and two of the vacancies for Planning Officers had been filled with both these factors contributing to the reduction in the backlog.

The Head of Planning Policy and Strategy confirmed that, based on the current situation, he was confident that it would be possible for the Local Authority to meet its housing targets despite the challenges facing the property sector, including the recent rises in interest rates.

It was noted, in response to a question, that the Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration Teams in the Council worked closely together. Regular catch ups took place and there were common lines of communication. The Regeneration Team was consulted in relation to emerging planning policies and the Chairman noted that the Regeneration Team had been a key contributor to the recent Employment Land Study.

In response to a question the Head of Planning Policy & Strategy confirmed that the Orpington SPD would be a relevant consideration in applications coming through the system.

Recognising the recent improvements in the performance of the Planning Service, the Partnership noted that 100% of major applications and 90% of minor applications were determined within the prescribed time or within an agreed extended time. It was acknowledged that the service had come a long way. The Assistant Director explained that the Team aimed to offer an interactive process and worked to secure positive development across the Borough. The Team was fully staffed but constrained by resources. The Service was currently running a budget deficit and as a result was reviewing how the resources available could be most efficiently deployed. The Government had announced an increase in application fees and the Team were looking at the impact this could have on the services provided. The Chairman confirmed that performance was being monitored and another backlog would not be allowed to up. Currently it appeared that resources were aligned with demand. The Chairman also noted that more Member briefings were being delivered prior to the committee stage. This provided developers with the opportunity to understand and address any concerns of Members prior to meetings.

A Member also noted that there appeared to be a willingness for Planning Officers to negotiate and whilst it was not always possible to reach agreement the willingness to negotiate was welcomed. It was also recognised that there were some frustrations around the timescales involved in the pre-application process. The Assistant Director confirmed that the service hoped to deliver improvements in this regard and would provide feedback to the Team.

A Member also expressed concerns around outsourced Section 106 processes with delays in this process adding to the pressures of housing

delivery. It was agreed that the feedback would be provided to the legal service.

In respect of stakeholder engagement, the Assistant Director highlighted that the service had to operate within the statutory framework. Views from all stakeholders were welcomed, and the Local Plan process provided the opportunity for stakeholders to feed into planning policy.

## **18 UKSPF UPDATE**

### Bromley Business Advisors Programme - Anthony Crowther, Goldsmiths College.

The Partnership received a presentation from Anthony Crowther (attached at Appendix B).

In response to a question from the Chairman, Mr Crowther explained that businesses could access the service through the Council. There would also be online and in person sign up. The Bromley Business Advisors programme was also looking to work with other organisations such as the Federation of Small Business (FSB) and the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) in order to access more businesses.

It was also noted that engagement with the Council's Permanency Service (Children's Services) could be made through the Economic Development Team.

### Local Supply Chains Programme

The Partnership received a presentation from Liam Hickley, Newable (attached at Appendix C).

The Chairman noted that more than one attempt had been made to encourage local small businesses to submit tenders for Council contracts and there was value in trying to stimulate economic growth in this respect.

### Property Advice Services Programme

Naima Omasta-Milsom from the London Business Partnership provided a presentation to the Partnership (slides were included in the agenda pack).

It was agreed that contact details for the Property Advice Service would be circulated following the meeting.

In response to a question, Ms Omasts-Milsom confirm that the lease review service was offered free of charge. Webinars were also run which provided advice around property issues.

## **19 PARTNER UPDATES**

Due to time constraints the Partner Updates were postponed to the next meeting however the following update had been provided by the FSB/FSB London prior to the meeting:

- FSB is the UK's largest campaigning group for small businesses and the self-employed, lobbying governments on the issues that matter to small business owners. Anybody can subscribe to the Weekly Latest Newsletter here: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/news.html>
- On 18<sup>th</sup> October, FSB Outer South East London Bromley in-person event at Copper Ceylon was very successful; next in-person event being planned for January 2024.
- On 16<sup>th</sup> November: Celebrating Enterprise Week: The power of mentoring in driving small business growth (with Association of Business Mentors): <https://www.fsb.org.uk/event-calendar/celebrating-enterprise-week-the-power-of-mentoring-in-driving-small-business-growth16nov23.html>
- Both non-members and FSB members can attend FSB online and in-person events. Find out more by visiting the FSB Events Calendar: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/event-calendar.html>
- Join FSB National Chair Martin McTague and the Work Foundation for a pre-Autumn Statement webinar as part of Work Matters 2023. Topics of discussion will include what the latest labour market statistics & inflation data means for workers, businesses and communities, and how they will impact the Autumn Statement on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. The webinar is on 15<sup>th</sup> November: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/work-matters-2023-an-election-budget-tickets-738902345807?aff=oddtcreator>
- FSB Policy Reports launched since last Bromley Economic Partnership: 1. Net Benefits? Small business use of online platforms - The digital revolution has transformed the landscape for small businesses. Online platforms, from eBay and Amazon to UberEats, Deliveroo and Booking.com, have become indispensable tools for many, as evidenced by the surge in their adoption during the Covid pandemic and their continued use since. Issues such as late payments are not unique to online platforms, but their prevalence among large online platforms has the ability to exacerbate the problem. Large online platforms have the resources to pay small businesses more promptly, and it is only fair and reasonable that they should be held accountable for their payment performance. Read the Key Findings and Recommendations here: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/net-benefits.html> 2. The Tech Tonic - Shifting the ground on tech adoption and innovation in small businesses - Read the Key Findings and Recommendations here: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/the-tech-tonic.html>
- ULEZ Expansion: FSB London is interested to know how small businesses in the Bromley borough adjusting to the ULEZ expansion. FSB London has lobbied the Mayor of London and many of our articles on our FSB Greater London Regional Voice pages share how we have lobbied, e.g., one article here: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/ulez-scrappage-scheme-and-retrofitting-what-small-businesses-and-sole-traders-need-to-know.html>

- Thank you to those small businesses (FSB members and non-members) who took part in a recent survey of self-employed, entrepreneurs, sole traders, etc which will help FSB shape our policy asks of Government. See: <https://x.com/FSBGtrLondon/status/1719019248314396745?s=20>
- Thank you to FSB members and non-members who completed the FSB High Streets survey; also thank you to all London Borough Councils who recently took part in a series of online High Streets Roundtables hosted by FSB – a policy report on High Streets out soon.
- FSB policy report relating to ‘Tackling Business Crime’ out soon.
- Please be reminded of FSB Membership Benefits for small businesses (0 – 249 employees): <https://www.fsb.org.uk/join-us/membership.html>
- FSB London invites Bromley Council to take the FSB Local Leadership Pledge like other London Borough Councils have done so already. For information, please see: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/-fsb-policy--local-leadership.html> Waltham Forest Council was most recent to pledge: <https://x.com/FSBGtrLondon/status/1707735635669213258?s=20>

## **20 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

3.30pm, Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024

4.00pm, Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024

The Meeting ended at 5.43 pm

Chairman