

BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 26 March 2024

Present:

Councillor Yvonne Bear, Portfolio Holder for Renewal,
Recreation and Housing (Chairman)
Katy Woolcott, Head of Estates, London Biggin Hill Airport
(Vice-Chairman)
Ose Akpom, LBB Economic Development Manager
Zoe Carr, Manager, Penge SE20 BID Company
Christopher Evans, Chief Executive, Community Links Bromley
Frances Forrest, Manager, Your Bromley BID Company
Adrian Gabriel-Lovell, Borough Partnership Manager, Jobcentre Plus
Gary Hillman, Director, N. Hillman & Sons
Mike Humphries, Corporate Manager, Handelsbanken
Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Place Shaping & Local Economy Manager
Daniel Murray, LBB Head of Economic Development
Clare Searle, Chief Strategy Officer, Greener and Cleaner
Lee Thomas, Director, Fairlight Group
Chris Travers, Executive Director, Orpington 1st BID Company
Bruce Walker, Chairman, Lansdown Asset Management

Also Present:

Adam Breeze, Breeze Strategy Ltd
Graham Walton, Democratic Services

31 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from -

Russell Clarke – Director, Sundridge Investments Limited
Mike Lewis – Partner, Michael Rogers LLP
Robert Sargent – Managing Director, Cobalt Ltd
Chandra Sharma – Federation of Small Businesses
Liz Timms – Director, Treval Engineering Limited.

32 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received.

33 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23RD JANUARY 2024 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING

The Chairman noted that there were no matters outstanding.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2024 be agreed.

34 BROMLEY ECONOMIC OUTLOOK UPDATE

Daniel Murray, LBB Head of Economic Development, provided a summary economic outlook presentation.

In terms of GVA for 2021, Bromley's total of £7.5bn was good, below Croydon but above other boroughs in Southeast London, but the GVA per job filled figure was not so productive at £62k – this indicated a need to drive up the value and productivity of local companies. The next 10-year trend figures would be available in April, but the 2021 figures showed that although Bromley was above the Outer London mean average, the gap had closed.

Employment by sector showed a dominance of health, education and retail and more jobs were needed in value-added sectors. Job-posting data showed over 4,000 jobs in the last twelve months.

Footfall data for Bromley Town Centre showed post-lockdown improvements to 2023, then a slight drop off. Similar data was available for other town centres, and the data could be presented for different days of the week or hours during the day.

Analysis of the nearly 15,000 businesses in Bromley showed that 92.6% were micro businesses, 7.1% SMEs and only 0.3% were larger businesses. However, it was important to ensure that these larger businesses remained in the borough.

In terms of enterprise, business births versus business deaths, data from 2018-2022 was dominated by pre/post lockdown; there was a slow recovery, but the figures were still negative for 2022. An upturn was anticipated in the 2023 figures. Bromley was very slightly behind the Outer London performance, but was broadly following the same trends.

Bromley had received £43.4m funding from Innovate UK since 2004. This was lower than its neighbours, partly due to the absence of a university in the borough. It was important to analyse this and seek greater funding levels.

Data just purchased from Data City based on a data scraping methodology to identify emerging economy businesses mapped against Real Time Industrial Classifications (RTICs) allowed the Council to understand the local innovation economy more effectively. 830 businesses had been identified in Bromley, and these could be presented by sector, employee numbers and turnover. These businesses and any clusters needed to be identified and supported.

The Borough had about 3.7m square feet of office space, with just under 20% rated 4 or 5 star. The overall vacancy rate was 5.8%, with over 18,000 square feet of 4 and 5 star space vacant. The Borough needed to do more to promote its commercial spaces and to improve its quality. Similar data was available

for the industrial and retail sectors. It was suggested that there had been grade inflation affecting the definitions of quality, and that in reality most of the accommodation was below standard, with very little high quality office space in the Borough.

A table showing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) completions related to London and Partners from 2019-2023 showed Bromley near the bottom of the chart, with room for improvement. The data around FDI could be challenging. For example, Castlepoint was registered in Bromley, but its offices (and therefore the jobs) were based in Westminster.

In response to questions, further work would be carried out to understand the 2024 10% drop in footfall for Bromley Town Centre.

Daniel Murray was due to meet with the Innovate UK Regional Rep and this would help to understand how the innovation offer could be improved.

Bruce Walker asked whether there was any high-quality office space available in Bromley. Lee Thomas responded that he was aware of two schemes nearly ready, but overall there was not much available. Investment funding was hard to find; there were people and organisations wanting to come to Bromley, but they were seeking only high-quality accommodation. Aspiration and deliverability were key.

Another comment was that Start-up Bromley worked well for particular types of business, but what was on offer for micro-businesses more generally? The next stage of business support was under discussion and firmer plans would be clarified later in the year. In conclusion, it was essential to understand the innovation economy, to understand what these businesses needed to grow and to support them.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

35 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE

(A) UKSPF Bromley Business Growth

The LBB Economic Development Manager Ose Akpom explained that there were four elements of the programme – (i) the Suppliers Bromley programme, aiming to facilitate supply-chain opportunities, (ii) Growth Builder, providing support for businesses to grow, (iii) the existing Start-up Bromley for entrepreneurs and (iv) the Bromley business hub. More SMEs were being engaged on the programme but fewer entrepreneurs – Start-up Bromley would be looking to address this.

There were comments that the launch event had not been promoted widely enough and that some businesses were not aware of it. Officers would renew their efforts to promote it using a range of approaches and networks. There were also comments that the new Council magazine was not reaching every household as intended – the magazine was also on the Council website –

[Our Bromley Magazine](#) (Page 29 for Bromley Business Growth).

In terms of KPIs, Jobs created was on target, but jobs safeguarded looked behind target, although this was due to delayed reporting. Other outcomes were improving. A new element was the Green Mark award which highlighted carbon reduction and environmental management – this was being piloted across 10 SMEs.

(B) Strategic Investment Fund - Digital Infrastructure

Bromley had received £937,744 funding from the Strategic Infrastructure Fund grant in kind awarded by TfL to extend a full fibre network to connect 21 Council sites across the Borough. This would be in place by December 2024, and access would be extended to other public sector and commercial organisations, and to priority areas such as Biggin Hill and the Cray Valley.

(C) Economic Strategy Refresh

Daniel Murray reported that the Economic Strategy 2021-23 was due a refresh – a growth plan would be shared at the Partnership's next meeting. This would be followed by consultation over the summer and final approval at the October meeting.

(D) Town Centres – Night Strategy update

The LBB Town Centres Manager, Lorraine McQuillan, gave a presentation on Bromley's Night Time Enterprise Zone. Several of events had been held throughout 2023. The events had generated a 107% increase in footfall between 6pm and 9pm, and had particularly attracted people from outside the Borough. There had been an effective social media campaign and the @BR1 Lates Instagram page was still active. A business toolkit had been developed, some additional lighting and electricity supply had been installed and the Good Work Bromley campaign had aimed to reinforce high standards of employment practice.

On the back of this success, it was proposed to extend the benefits and learnings to the whole Borough through a new strategy. An evidence base had been commissioned. There would be a consultation with businesses, residents and night workers. In particular, the strategy would attempt to future-proof town centres by ensuring that they were not wholly reliant on retail. A report was available on all the Night Time Enterprise Zones (Vauxhall and Woolwich, as well as Bromley.)

The Chairman commented that the report reflected Bromley in a very good light, and she offered her thanks to all those involved. However, the funding had now been spent, and Bromley would have to be creative to build on what had been achieved, including for other town centres. Ms McQuillan confirmed that they were actively seeking sources of external funding.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

36 DEEP DIVE TOPIC: INWARD INVESTMENT

Daniel Murray introduced the “deep-dive” topic – inward investment. He had arranged a forum of commercial agents and developers on Tuesday 4th March, from which two key points had emerged. The first was that the borough was almost invisible to West End agents, not on their radar, and the second was the need for a strong supply of commercial space to offer the market. Another workshop was planned on 7th May to address this key issue.

Adam Breeze – Breeze Strategy Ltd, joined the meeting online to deliver a presentation on establishing an inward investment service for Bromley. Adam had 30 years’ experience and had advised on over 100 locations. Nearly every location was promoting itself to attract jobs and investment.

He clarified that inward investment included foreign-owned firms but also local companies needing to expand and UK companies coming to the area. It was important to look after existing companies in the area. Being close to London was an advantage and an opportunity for Bromley. It was important to also focus on attracting funding to support regeneration and to attract and retain talent and high skilled employees.

The landscape of inward investment was changing – Brexit, Covid, war, and various economic challenges all had a direct impact. There had not been a time when so many companies were considering re-locating. Companies still needed offices, but their needs had changed, and re-furbishing offices into hotels had become common. Hybrid working and working from home had changed perceptions of commuting distances, while the desire for shorter supply-chains was leading to re-shoring of production – a recent survey had revealed that 58% of UK manufacturers were considering this. AI and other technological advances were also having an impact on recruitment. Global politics and macro trends were having a domino effect reaching down to local high streets.

The market place for locations was hugely competitive. Inward investment was not a magic tap – it needed work. Although Bromley was, perhaps, behind the wave, it could jump to the front of the queue by promoting its positive benefits. The “shop window” / “front door” was important, as was the idea of a concierge approach to nurture potential investors and stay with them.

An online search had only found information from around ten years ago. Bromley was the largest and greenest boroughs, one of the wealthiest, best connected and best educated, yet it received less than half a percent of London’s inward investment projects.

Bromley had to decide what in particular it wanted and why – what did the borough want to look like in 5, 10 or 15 years? What did companies want and need that Bromley could offer, and how did that compare with other locations? How could the Council identify targets and engage with them? Massive expenditure was not necessarily the key – there were already too many

organisations making noise; a small, well-trained and proactive team was needed to focus on the right markets and intermediaries. This knowledge and the resources required then needed to be built into an action plan.

The Chairman thanked Adam for his presentation, and conceded that Bromley had not put much effort into promoting and marketing itself. She invited comments and questions.

Katy Woolcott stated that, from the perspective of Biggin Hill Airport, the world was becoming smaller and more connected and markets more global. Bombardier had come to Biggin Hill due to the proximity to London, and this brought related smaller companies to the airport. Biggin Hill was the only business airport within London – a unique and high value asset. It was important to invest in training and education for local people as otherwise these companies could just bring in employees from elsewhere in the world. The potential to capitalise on the airport was phenomenal – but a progressive planning policy was needed to facilitate this.

Lee Thomas added that it was necessary to provide the funding for a small team and promote itself properly.

Bruce Walker supported more development at or near Biggin Hill Airport and asked whether there was any possibility of limited commercial flights into the airport to take advantage of its unique position and the borough's transport links to central London. The Chairman responded that, despite the commercial and employment benefits, there was substantial pushback from residents about noise issues and the perceived risk of the airport turning into another Luton or Stanstead. However, there had been no objections to Bombardier and some developments would be welcomed. Work was going on to develop the next iteration of the Local Plan, and this would focus on opportunities to develop in the Cray Valley, at Biggin Hill Airport and in town centres, particularly Bromley.

Zoe Carr asked whether the Borough's strategy could potentially develop using the airport as a key focus for investment and development. Adam Breeze responded that it was still possible to attract inward investment just based on a small number of locations, such as the airport. What was needed was not a broad advertising or branding strategy, but a dedicated team who could target the right markets. The Chairman stated that a strong business case was needed to justify the expenditure within the Council, which was stretched just to deliver statutory services.

Michael Humphries commented that the Cray Valley and town centres should offer some quick wins; bringing in the right businesses would bring in others in a self-perpetuating cycle. It was important that all partners worked together to follow through on all opportunities. Lee Thomas added that a small team to generate and coordinate inward investment was necessary, and pulling in the larger global businesses would attract other organisations.

Lee Thomas reported that there were a lot of businesses that had really struggled in recent months – improved productivity was needed.

Adrian Gabriel-Lovell introduced himself as the new Jobcentre Plus Partnership Manager for Bromley and Bexley.

38 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

4.00pm, Tuesday 11th June 2024
4.00pm, Tuesday 15th October 2024
4.00pm, Tuesday 14th January 2025
4.00pm, Tuesday 1st April 2025

The Meeting ended at 5.42 pm

Chairman