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SOBUSINESS

Business and Innovation Strategy Action Plan 2017 - 2020

South Oxfordshire District Council has developed a Business and Innovation Strategy that outlines how it will help businesses to grow and contribute to our vibrant economy. By engaging with businesses about the opportunities and challenges they face, the council has a better understanding of the needs of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This action plan informs businesses how the council will support them to overcome challenges and make the most of opportunities to flourish and grow.

Action One Superfast broadband

Helping your business work smarter through improved access to superfast broadband.

Action Two Business space

Ensuring that there is sufficient space for your business to grow.

Action Three Skills and employment

Supporting businesses with skills and employment issues.

Action Four Business support and communication

Improving our engagement with businesses to meet their needs.

Action One

Superfast broadband

Helping your business work smarter through improved access to superfast broadband.

How we can help?

- we will work with business to clearly identify where the service needs improving and lobby superfast broadband providers to secure additional funding, particularly within more rural areas of district.
- we are currently on target to achieve 96 per cent of coverage in South Oxfordshire, but are keen to hear from any businesses who are facing issues with broadband speed.
To check if your area is covered, visit www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk or get in touch.

Case Study:

[The Half Moon public house, Cuxham](#)

Superfast broadband is a key concern to businesses in the district. As a result, the council has invested £1,090,000 in the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme supporting the roll out of superfast broadband in the district to support South Oxfordshire's SME businesses.

In 2016, the council identified a particular need for businesses in Cuxham and as such around 75 homes and businesses in Cuxham now receive high speed broadband which gives a faster and more reliable service.



Vaska Battley, landlady at the Half Moon pub highlighted that until the introduction of superfast broadband the pub struggled to take credit card payments at the tables. She explains: "Many bills are paid by credit card at the tables using our remote terminals, and the fast broadband makes this significantly quicker and easier. Customers are also really pleased with the free Wi-Fi service we offer."

Action Two

Business space

Ensuring that there is sufficient space for your business to grow.

How we can help?

- we will help you look for new or 'move on' business space.
- we will improve our signposting of available premises and monitor need through regular interaction with businesses, agents and business space providers.
- we will support the availability of good quality, affordable workspace and 'move on' space by ensuring new business premises are included in key development projects.
- we will work with planning colleagues to ensure appropriate employment land is provided for SMEs.
- we will provide a corporate link to the council and wider partners for any new business development.

Case Study: Groves and Windles, Thame

Businesses have told us that there was a lack of available, good quality and affordable workspace and that they didn't know where to find out about space that is available.

The council's economic development manager met with two businesses, Groves (haberdashery distributor) and Windles (print and production company), previously based in Long Crendon who had outgrown their existing facilities but were keen to stay in the Thame area and move to a new employment site in the town. These businesses were unaware of the support the council could provide.



Officers facilitated a meeting between the businesses, the site developer, Thame Town Council and a pre-application meeting with planning colleagues to discuss the development. Throughout the planning process, economic development officers worked closely to support the businesses and deal with any issues in close liaison with planning colleagues. Officers also supported their need for superfast broadband to be connected to the development from day one. This resulted in two new purpose built facilities for each of these businesses, supporting over 200 jobs in the district with future growth potential. Without officer intervention it is unlikely that this development would have proceeded, certainly not as swiftly and seamlessly as it did.

Action Three

Skills and employment

Supporting businesses with skills and employment issues.

How we can help?

- we can introduce you to a range of education providers, recruitment agencies and professional bodies to support your recruitment needs.
 - we will keep businesses informed about apprenticeships and how they can benefit your business.
 - we will proactively promote career opportunities in local businesses to schools, parents and local job seekers.
 - we will work with you to find out if apprenticeships, interns or work experience students are right for your business.
 - we will work with the SMEs community to inform education providers, recruitment agencies and professional bodies about the best way to engage and work together.
- we will regularly hold workshops and events, such as careers fairs, to link business and education providers and identify skill gaps which the council can help address.
 - we will explain and promote apprenticeships as a first career choice and demonstrate local stories of success.



Case study: Hosting a 'Making Sense of Apprenticeships' event in partnership with Oxfordshire Apprenticeships March 2017

Businesses have told us that they are struggling to attract and retain skilled staff, particularly young people and graduates, and that they need help to attract skilled staff in key sectors. In March 2017, we held an event in Didcot, in partnership with Oxfordshire Apprenticeships and Abingdon & Witney College as part of National Apprenticeships Week to explain to businesses the benefits of apprenticeships and what it can bring to businesses, particularly where there are specialist technical skills gaps.

Action Four

Business support and communication

Improving our engagement with businesses to meet their needs

How we can help?

- we will improve the SO Business website to make it easy for businesses to find up to date and relevant information.
- we will actively communicate via the fortnightly newsletter, @SouthOxonBiz Twitter and LinkedIn.
- we will seek feedback to ensure we deliver the services they need, in an appropriate format.
- we will recruit SO Business Ambassadors to work with us to improve our interaction with businesses to better understand their changing needs.
- we will work with businesses to create and deliver a programme of workshops and networking opportunities.

- we will develop a business engagement and communications strategy to ensure we increase awareness of SO Business and the free services available.
- we will improve our engagement through the use of a customer relationship management system, including an up to date business database.
- we will strengthen links with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Science Vale and OxLEP.

Case Study: SO Business workshop June 2017: Leadership Lessons

Businesses have told us about the need to improve awareness of support available within South Oxfordshire so they can benefit from what's on offer and grow as a result.



The council has developed a series of free workshops on different themes to support local businesses. This particular event, held in Henley, was arranged after an offer from a local specialist marketer to host a workshop for SO Business.

92 per cent of the attendees that responded stated they would be 'very likely' or 'likely' to attend future workshops.

The council promotes these regular workshops through fortnightly newsletters to businesses in the district.

Interesting facts:

8,010

Do you know that South Oxfordshire has 8,010 SMEs (99.8 per cent of total enterprises)?

82%

SMEs make up 82 per cent of all employment in the district

50%

Over 50 per cent of South Oxfordshire SMEs have between 2-9 employees

Get involved:

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-  Twitter [@SouthOxonBiz](https://twitter.com/SouthOxonBiz)
-  [#askSOBusiness](https://twitter.com/askSOBusiness)
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