

CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – COUNCILLOR MARK SMITH

Economic Development

Business Support and Skills

Over the last year, the Business Support Team within Economic Development has actively supported new and existing businesses to access start-up and growth finance. Support comes from a number of sources including Lancashire-wide schemes (Accelerating Business Growth and the Fuse Fund), the Government Start-Up Loan fund, and an impartial brokerage service Access to Finance, as well as the Council's own Investment Fund.

Four Blackpool businesses were awarded £917,000 of financial assistance through the Accelerating Business Growth (ABG) scheme alone towards investments of over £6m, set to create over new 100 jobs. The largest grant awarded of £624,000 went to Bispham-based Laila's Fine Food, a £3.6m investment to extend production and warehousing facilities, creating 63 new jobs. A new Lancashire Growth Fund is set to replace existing schemes shortly.

The Blackpool Investment Fund (BIF) approved a further £367,000 in loans/ grants towards eight investments unlocking a further £1m towards works enabling re-use of former Regent Cinema building, re-use of space for a new hospitality venue attached to Viva Cabaret, a recording studio and distribution centre, land purchase for a factory extension, design costs necessary to unlock a £700,000 grant award to the Grand Theatre, shop improvements to a popular haberdashery shop in South Beach and works associated with bringing the New Market, South Shore, back into long-term use.

The Get Started team assisted new businesses to obtain Start-Up Loan funding worth £305,700 during 2014/ 2015 (bringing the total accessed since 2012/ 2013 to £712,650).

The Business Support Team will be based at Blackpool Enterprise Centre from July in order to provide a focus for all business support enquiries, advice and training for would-be entrepreneurs.

Skills

A key aim of the Blackpool Tourism Academy, a consortium of leading tourism employers committed to developing workforce skills, is to roll out WorldHost Customer Service skills across the resort. In only seven months, some 1146 training places have been completed and encouragingly this is now starting to expand beyond larger employers to a range of smaller hotels and hospitality businesses. Blackpool needs to complete at least 2,500 training places to become the first UK seaside resort to achieve WorldHost Destination status. Blackpool Council has its own WorldHost licensed trainer who can deliver the full suite of training available which ranges from the fundamentals of customer service skills to "Service Across Cultures" which increases staff awareness of other cultures giving them practical skills and advice to help them communicate effectively with visitors from overseas.

Getting People into Work

Positive Steps into Work

During 2014/ 2015, the Positive Steps team provided employment support to more than 500 people across the Fylde Coast, with 429 moving into paid employment.

This significant achievement was possible due to the successful implementation of a number of contracts, including the Work Programme, a mandatory Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

scheme for the long-term unemployed, which pays on results of people assisted into and sustained in employment.

Collaboration with the Council's Public Health directorate has led to the design of a number of Healthy Futures projects, targeted at getting specific groups of customers back to work.

Healthy Futures (South Beach/Claremont) offers individual support to those living in particular areas of the town and our advisor is integrated into the Selective Licensing team, which offers wider support to families. Healthy Futures (Recovery/HIV) offers employment support to clients who have come through drug and alcohol recovery services and are now ready to consider going back to work and those who have been diagnosed with HIV and access the Shiver help service.

This wide-ranging support allows us to offer different levels of support to local unemployed people to ensure their needs are met. In June, Healthy Futures (Clifton) was launched and aims to assist at least 100 residents to become more work-ready through an integrated package of advice, guidance and work-focused measures, delivered in the community.

Employment advisors will provide personalised back-to-work support in conjunction with the Wellness Service to include the option of a health MOT and ongoing support from health trainers. This will unlock access to a range of health and leisure support that will run parallel with employability support to provide a holistic approach. The 12-month pilot project is funded from a combination of ward budgets, Public Health and Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited Tenants Support Fund.

The in-house work placement scheme, Chance2shine, has gone from strength to strength in the last 12 months with 150 people undertaking a four-week supported work placement, with 39% of participants progressing into employment. The offer has extended to the private and voluntary sector where some 68 placements were completed. The Chance2shine work placement project recently received the Fair Train Gold Standard for the quality of the work placements provided.

The Positive Steps team is leading on a new £2.1m mental health and employment pilot project due to commence in November this year. It is one of four national pilots co-funded by the Government and the European Social Fund. It is anticipated that 1,000 Blackpool jobseekers with mild to moderate mental health issues will be offered a combination of psychological therapies and employment support concurrently to enable them to move closer to work. An approval is awaited on the European Funding element prior to the project commencing.

Relationships with the Winter Gardens Company

An extensive programme of top-quality musical theatre commences on 9 July when the West End production of CATS opens at the Opera House for the summer season. It will be followed by a series of productions including The Glenn Miller Story, the revival of Tommy the Rock Opera, the premiere of Last Night A DJ Saved My Life (starring David Hasselhoff) and A Christmas Carol.

The car park to the rear of the Winter Gardens building is due to be demolished in the autumn, opening up a significant amount of space for alternative use.

Relationship with other Leisure Assets (Merlin), Blackpool Tower complex and associated buildings Former Tower Lounge

Good progress is being made on the development of the former Tower Lounge. The development will result in the opening of a new themed family restaurant by a national operator.

Tower Illuminations

The Tower Illuminations repair and maintenance programme continues apace, moving toward full operation for the 2016 season.

Youth Employment

The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the end of April was 6.8% which was an improvement compared to the same time last year (7.3%). This equates to 350 young people. The percentage of young people who were “Not Known” to Connexions at the end April 2014 was 4.3% which was an improvement compared to the same time last year (4.9%). The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds in learning (jobs with training, college courses) is 82.3% compared with 80.9% the previous year. The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds in jobs with out training is 12.3% compared with 12.1% the previous year.

The Youthability Hub continues to see growth in the numbers of 16 to 24 year olds attending. This increase has been driven by having a focus on different vocational areas that includes employers from that sector area promoting careers and providing job opportunities. In June the sector areas being focussed on are Hospitality in conjunction with the Premier Inn and Automotive Industries in conjunction with Arnold Clarke.

The Pathway to Traineeships programme, “Advance” is now underway providing 8-week skills and work experience courses for unemployed 19 to 24 year olds. To date 29 young people have accessed this provision with 26 achieving qualifications. Out of the 29 starts, 82% are currently in a positive destination.