

## **RPPR Engagement Meeting with Business Representatives**

The Leader, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Economy, supported by officers, met with Team East Sussex business representatives to share spending and savings plans for 2019/20 on 28 January 2019. Following a presentation on the context and proposals, the following issues were discussed with the business representatives.

### **Business Rates**

- It was noted that the NNDR pilot was largely a financing matter between East Sussex councils and the Government. It would not have a direct impact on business, although was very welcome as one-off funding to reduce the savings needed by ESCC in 2019/20.
- Business representatives offered to support lobbying, particularly in relation to the inability of locally raised business rates to support the social care needs in East Sussex and also to emphasise the need to tax business in a way appropriate for the current nature of business. It was noted that the Federation of Small Businesses had lobbied for some time for a tax based on a combination of turnover and property.
- The overdue nature of a revaluation of business rates was noted and it was recognised that, from the Council's point of view regular resets would be welcomed, particularly if the timing was in line with medium term financial plan periods, but that any increase in business rates would not be welcomed by business.

### **Funding**

- The business representatives welcomed the additional funding East Sussex County Council had received, for pot holes for example. They noted, however, that the one-off nature of such funding did not allow for effective medium term planning and that there was sometimes a gap between what was announced nationally and what was received locally.
- The outlook for the following few years was discussed and the importance of lobbying strongly in the lead up to the Comprehensive Spending Review, which would determine the quantum of money available for local government, and the Fair Funding Review, which would determine how funding was split, was emphasised. It was noted that a minimum of a repeat of this year's one-off funding would be required in next year's budget for services to be sustained.

### **Council Plan**

- The delivery of 2018/19 Council Plan targets for economic development and the planned targets for 2019/20 were welcomed.
- The business representatives received further detail of the "scale up" programme for growing local businesses that was being explored.

### **Local Procurement**

- There was a discussion about the extent to which the County Council procured goods and services locally and some further information promised.
- The importance of enabling local sub-contractors to access ESCC supply chains was emphasised and noted.

## **Skills**

- There was a discussion about what more could be done by businesses and the County Council to encourage the participation of both in improving career opportunities and readiness for work.
- There was a request for further information about the county's relative productivity following recent recalculations at a national level.
- There was a discussion about the importance of future planning for the county's high streets, particularly given the changes in demand for retail. There was a range of views about the extent to which high streets are currently thriving and the reasons for that.