



Date: 22 June 2017

Title: Business Networking Event 2017

Purpose of the Report: To provide Committee with a summary of attendee's evaluation of the event as well as their identified issues for local businesses.

Contact Officer: Jo Martindale, Partnership Officer

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Three Year Plan – To promote and develop a vibrant town through partnership working and initiatives including management of the street market, provision of town and community promotions, town centre enhancements, tourism and practical support for local businesses.	
Implications:		
Financial		
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery	√	Annual event - 1 st year of a three-year commitment.
Procedural/Legal		
Risk/Health and Safety		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To note the report and summary of feedback from the 2017 Spring Business Networking Event.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the LLP Committee meeting Thursday, 11 February 2016, the Committee received a report in respect of the Business Networking Event (068/LLP). This event had been held annually for the last three years and provided an opportunity for local business people to network, seek advice, develop local contacts and promote their own businesses.
- 2.2 The committee also received a recommendation on 29 June 2016 (092/LLP) to endorse a three year plan for the event commencing from 2017-2019. The committee endorsed the proposal and committed £2000 delivery budget per year.

3. REPORT ON THE 2017 BUSINESS NETWORK EVENT

- 3.1 The Spring Networking event was held on Wednesday 26 April 2017 between 5.30-8pm at Leighton Buzzard Golf Club. It was agreed by the planning group to host the event at this venue due to location, separate break out space, parking and onsite facilities. The event was organised in partnership with Leighton-

Linslade Town Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Federation of Small Business and LB Connect.

- 3.2 The theme for this year's event was 'Business Advice Clinic' in addition to 'Introduction to Networking.' A break out area was provided offering free business support by various local experts. In addition there was three local networking groups who held stands promoting their groups. Plus additional stands by organisers and sponsors.
- 3.3 Although 182 (194 due to double registrations) people registered through the Eventbrite online registration programme, there were 120 confirmed attendees on the night.
- 3.4 The free Eventbrite registration programme was used again this year for ease of online registration and provided very useful data on the businesses. This information was fed through to the New Blendology Digital badge system which was introduced to capture live and post networking valuable data. This new concept was a huge success allowing attendees to tap badges and share information digitally. This information was shared on a big screen throughout the night, showing live social media interaction. A prize was awarded for the person who did the most networking. All attendees received their contact information within hours of the event finishing plus a list of all those who attended, which reduced the workload and work hours of internal staff to collate and share the data. This was a great icebreaker on the evening and something worth repeating in future years.
- 3.5 An evaluation report of the 2017 report has been completed with a full breakdown of the feedback received from attendees, sponsors and organisers
APPENDIX A
- 3.6 The full report offers more detailed feedback from local businesses which Committee may wish to use when seeking to establish local business support activity or when lobbying partners on behalf of the local business community.

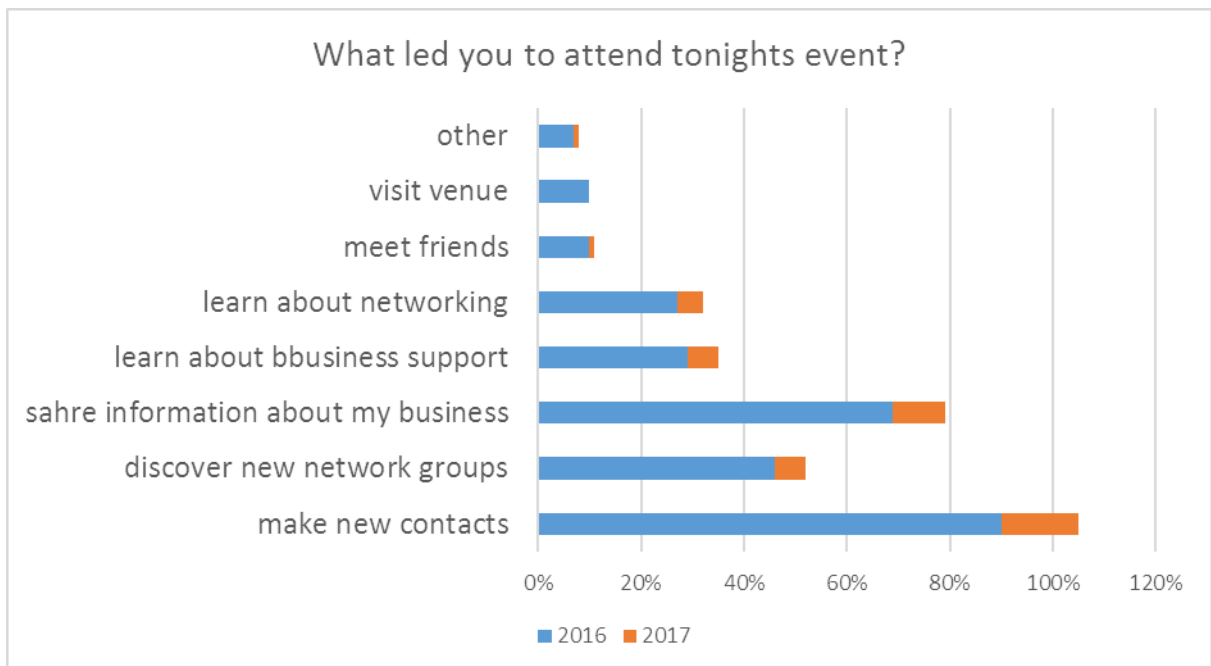
4. BUSINESS NETWORKING EVENT SURVEY AND FEEDBACK

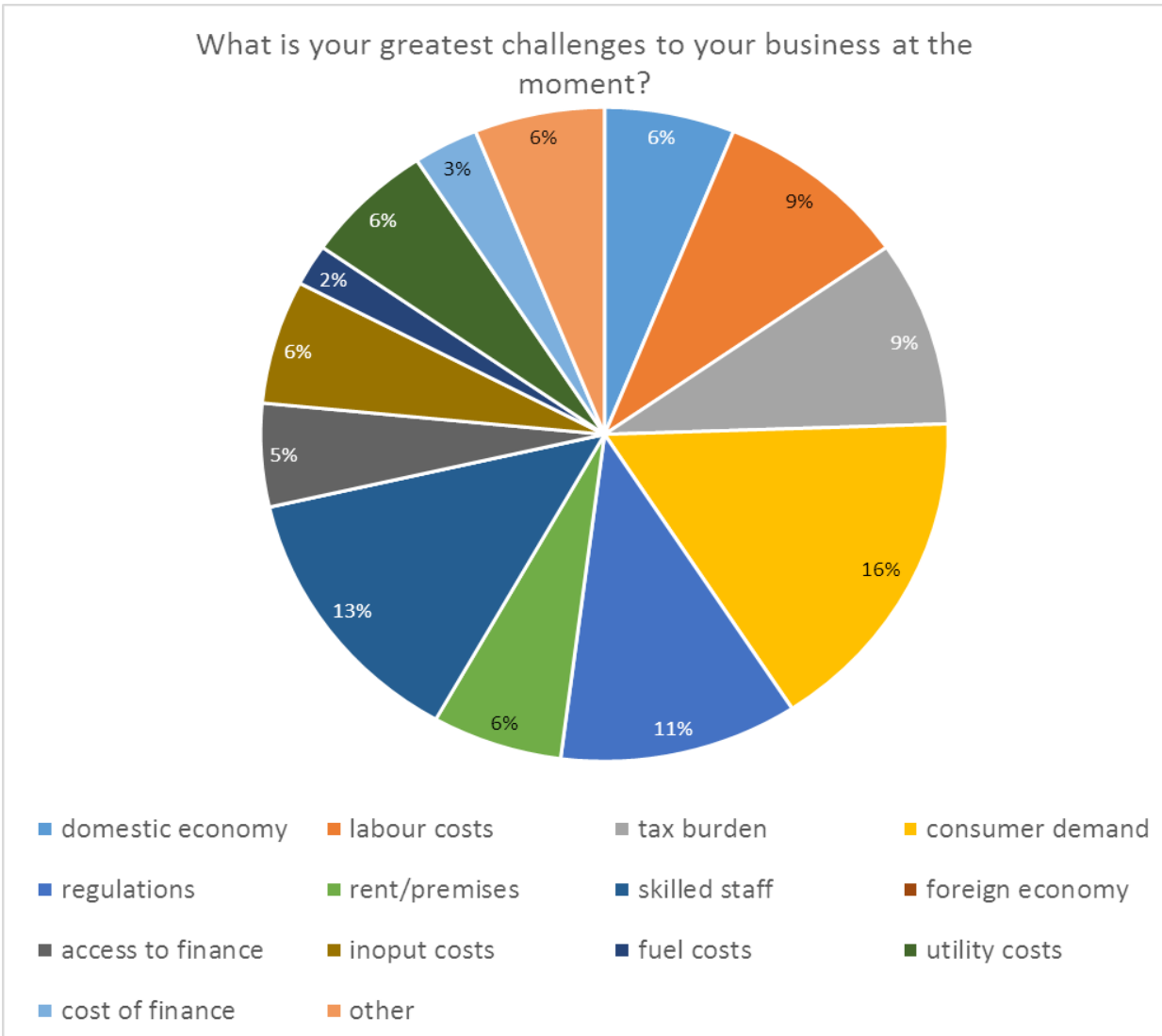
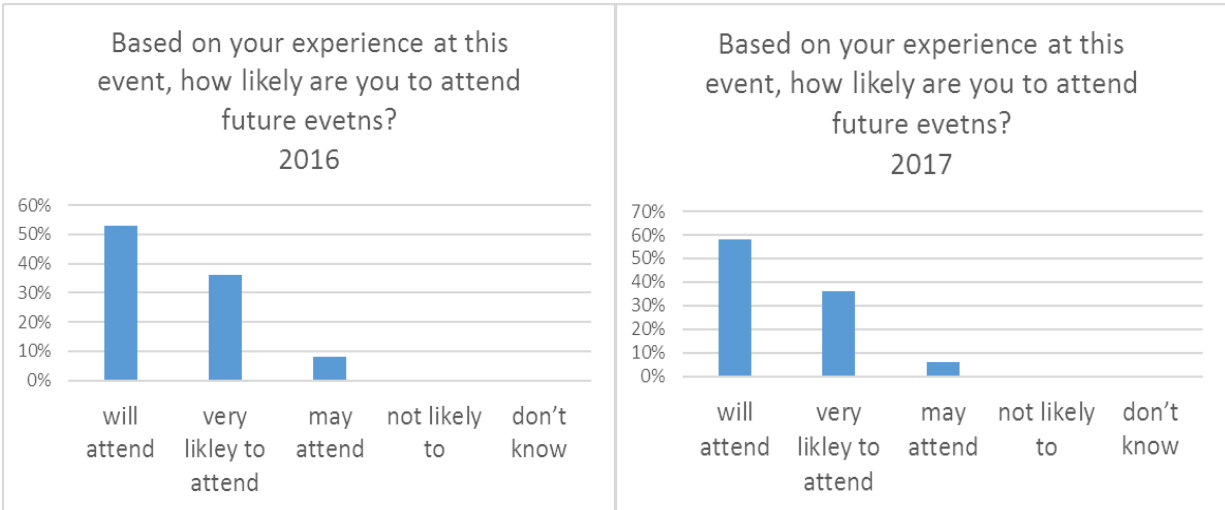
- 4.1 Some of the pertinent statistics gathered include the following:-
 - 97% of businesses attending found the event to be useful to their business.
 - 94% of those attending will, or are very likely to, attend a future event.
 - 98% felt the event met their expectations.
 - 100% were likely /somewhat likely to recommend the event to other businesses.
 - 100% of respondents rated the event excellent (54%) or good (46%).
- 4.2 Comments gathered from the survey identified that attendees have made contacts that will help move their business forward and that they valued the opportunity for networking and gaining referrals.

- 4.3 Feedback from the delivery group, inclusive of the partner members, indicates that the use of Blendology has added value to the event in terms of capturing key data and information and a key reporting method plus useful as a meeting tool for attendees.
- 4.4 The event itself serves to continue to add to the collaboration between members of the delivery group and enables us to continue to deliver the support to local businesses.
- 4.5 Private sector funding was received this year which incurred some issues and the working group will review the sponsorship channels ahead of next year's event.
- 4.6 Some comparison data based on performance from the 2016 event. Data captured from the full evaluation report.
- 4.7 In 2016 97% of attendees agreed the event met their expectations and 98% in 2017. 89% of attendees found the event useful to their business in 2016m this increased to 97% this year.

Registration by Business size

No of employees	2016	2017	How many contacts have you made?	2016	2017
1-2	100 (57%)	106 (54%)	0-5	30 (43%)	12 (22%)
3-10	47 (27%)	55 (28%)	6-10	29 (41%)	25 (45%)
11-50	15 (8%)	19 (10%)	11-15	7 (10%)	11 (20%)
50+	15 (8%)	15 (8%)	16-20	2 (3%)	6 (11%)
			21+	2 (3%)	1 (2%)





5. THREE YEAR PLAN

- 5.1 The business networking event has proven invaluable to local businesses based on feedback from those attending.
- 5.2 The three-year plan, which began this year, aims to continue to define the overall objectives with a view to set up measurable outcomes that can be evaluated. The final evaluation can then be undertaken in year three and used to inform the next steps.
- 5.3 The purpose of this approach is to identify if attendees have experienced ongoing outcomes from the event which will help monitor the effectiveness of the events and address any need to make changes for the following event.
- 5.4 The period of three years also provides year on year comparison data on local business issues and needs identifying changes or trends.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The business networking event represents an opportunity for local businesses to interact and raise issues pertinent to local business as well as develop their own trading opportunities. The outcomes measured at the 2017 event show that it is considered a valuable tool for and by Leighton-Linlode businesses and highlights a need for more frequent events.
- 6.2 The evaluation forms received post the events only strengthens the case for this event every year and demonstrates the benefits and impact it has for the business community.

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