

# The Economy, Jobs and Prosperity

## Where we are now

The Draft South East Plan recognises that East Sussex is dominated by low paid jobs; low skills and educational attainment, and areas of deprivation; poor housing in some areas and poor transport. There are also important economic differences between the mainly urban coastal parts and inland rural areas. The Government's recent review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration focuses on such "functioning economic areas". The revised South East Regional Economic Strategy recognises the particular problems of the south east coastal area, and looks at actions that may need to take place in the rural south east. Recognising these problems, the county has been highlighted by the Regional Development Agency as an area of need. Most businesses are micro to small and medium sized with a small turnover. They tend to trade in local markets within 10 miles of their business. Business survival in some areas is also low. With so many very small businesses, reaching them to give support and help to survive and grow will take focussed effort. More needs to be done to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, for example in environment related business or more traditional sectors such as tourism: entrepreneurship is generally weak due to lack of 'free finance' or low skills. Skills levels are mixed and particularly poor in our most deprived communities. Significant investment has been made, and still needs to be made into improving educational attainment, skills and aspirations to help develop the skilled workforce businesses need. Across the County, the voluntary and community sector are supporting people's transition into work, training or enterprise through volunteering.

Over 80% of jobs are in the service sector such as hotels, restaurants, transport and tourism. Local authorities and other public service agencies are amongst the largest employers. Private, voluntary and community sector enterprises need to be supported and encouraged to compete. The county's average unemployment rate is lower than the national average, but higher than the regional average. The rate differs across and within Districts and Boroughs with Hastings having the highest rate, Wealden the lowest. 57,000 people of working age are 'inactive' because, for example, they are studying, caring for relatives, early retired, sick or disabled. This is above the regional average. Levels of part-time employment are high at 28.6% compared to the regional average of 24.7%. Again, localities differ - Hastings has the highest inactive rate, Rother the lowest. Job opportunities are limited with fewer jobs per person than the

regional average. There is insufficient business accommodation in the county now and in terms of future demand assuming growth similar to that in England and Wales. It will be increasingly important to both retain existing employment sites and allocate new sites to ensure the economic success required for East Sussex. Hastings, Bexhill, Eastbourne, Hailsham, Seaford and Newhaven need regenerating and, as result, are areas of economic potential and growth. If these areas can be regenerated they would make a major contribution to the local economy and the prosperity of our residents.

## The Challenges Ahead

There are four key areas that need to be addressed for the county's economy to grow and prosper: creating sustainable enterprise and improving productivity; reducing the barriers to employment (e.g. affordable childcare, public transport and low wages); developing essential infrastructure (e.g. transport, business accommodation and housing) and increasing academic achievement and skill levels. These issues are a bigger problem in some parts of the county than others, so targeting efforts will be necessary. Our urban areas - Hastings, Bexhill, Newhaven and the Eastbourne/Hailsham triangle require particular attention due to their economic needs and development potential.

**Our strategic priority for 2026** is to narrow the economic performance gap within and between communities in the county and between the county and the region, in order to develop a thriving, diverse and sustainable economy where everyone can prosper

## Our key tasks will be to:

- Support local businesses to start up, diversify and grow
- Attract new and sustainable business and investment into the county
- Encourage and support innovation and entrepreneurial activity
- Facilitate the development of more affordable, modern and environmentally friendly business accommodation and sites
- Reduce barriers to employment and address worklessness
- Promote further and higher education and learning opportunities
- Invest in and promote skills development, especially in key sectors
- Recognise and support the different economic needs and development potential of our urban, rural and coastal economies
- Develop high-value and priority sectors such as engineering, ICT, environmental technologies, construction, care and retail
- Reduce child poverty by 2011 and eradicate it by 2020.