



BUSINESS MANIFESTO 2018



Herefordshire
& Worcestershire
Chamber of Commerce



CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
POLICY ACTIVITY IN 2017	5
SKILLS	6
BREXIT	7
INFRASTRUCTURE	8
CONNECTIVITY	9
REDUCING THE COSTS OF DOING BUSINESS	10
CYBER CRIME	11



FOREWORD

**Sharon Smith, Chief Executive
Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce**

The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Business Manifesto 2018 sets out the main policy campaigns we'll be championing on behalf of businesses in the two counties.

The last twelve months have been a turbulent time for local firms, nationally we've seen a snap election, the triggering of Article 50 and a web of complex Brexit negotiations taking place. Locally, low unemployment and the skills shortage continues to challenge businesses, as does transport infrastructure and connectivity.

The vital issues we need to address in 2018 are:

- Skills
- Connectivity
- Brexit
- Transport Infrastructure
- Reducing the cost of doing business
- Cyber Crime

These priorities have been narrowed down following feedback from over 600 local businesses, including results from our Quarterly Economic Survey, Area Council and the regular interaction we have with our Members every day.

We will ensure that the stipulations of this manifesto will not go unheard and, most importantly, that they will influence and shape the direction of policy during 2018. Copies of this manifesto will be sent to local MPs, MEPs, Councillors in both counties and our partners in London, the British Chambers of Commerce, who strengthen our lobbying capacity on a local, national and European level.

The objectives laid out in this manifesto can only be achieved with the continued support from our Members. I'd like to thank those who have contributed to this document and encourage all to promote these key messages throughout the next year.

POLICY ACTIVITY IN 2017

Throughout 2017, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce has campaigned on a range of issues, leading to real changes that will improve the business environment in the region, including:



Developing stronger links between business and education; leading to better school governance and collaborative working across the two counties



Supported the development of key infrastructure priorities, such as the A49 Hereford and the wider A4440 Southern Link Road improvement scheme



Strongly lobbied the Migration Advisory Committee for a migration system post-Brexit that will ensure firms can access the skills and talent they need from the EU



Worked closely with key partners to develop better rail services, ensuring Worcestershire Parkway Station became a reality



Encouraged business to get Cyber Essentials Accredited to improve cyber security across the region



Facilitated a variety of business roundtables and forums with policy makers to influence them on key issues

SKILLS

Skills is consistently raised as the biggest concern for firms in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, which is why we will be focusing on attracting and retaining skills in the two counties in 2018. By facilitating greater collaboration between the worlds of business and education, we will enable our next generation economies to be flexible, highly skilled and, most importantly, world beating.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Lobby for an apprenticeship system that encourages increased participation in quality training by businesses of all sizes, particularly SMEs
- Oppose funding changes that limit the ability of education and training providers to meet business needs
- Lobby to make work experience mandatory for year 10s and encourage work placements to be made part of teacher training
- Appoint 30 new Enterprise Advisers to work with schools and colleges across the region to help develop business engagement



“ At Worcester Bosch we firmly believe that having people with the right skills and competencies in your business is what drives our business performance today and its future development and growth tomorrow. We support the continued professional development of all our employees, but also need to recruit new people with changing skills and talents. We operate large trainee programmes including apprenticeships, and internships, providing a vital blend of academic study and work experience. I therefore strongly believe it is vital to Worcestershire’s economic prosperity that the Chamber of Commerce, the local Authority, the Education and Business Communities all work together to ensure access to good local talent and those leaving the education system are equipped with the right skills for today’s world of work ”

Carl Arntzen, CEO
Worcester Bosch

BREXIT

Apart from skills, Brexit was highlighted as the next biggest issue for firms across Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Brexit is impacting businesses of all sectors and sizes in different ways. Concerns over migration are particularly felt by our vibrant agricultural and food & drink firms across the two counties. Importers and exporters across all sectors are worried about future trade deals, alongside concerns around customs and non-tariff barriers. The UK Government has one shot at a successful Brexit – it's vital that businesses are at the heart of it.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Lobby for a transition period of at least three years to ensure firms across the two counties have time to adjust ahead of Brexit
- Work to ensure that government secures and delivers frictionless future trade arrangements with the EU which reduces costs and trade barriers
- Encourage collaboration with the Chamber and its Members in developing future customs procedures and policies
- Lobby government to ensure our future migration system allows business to continue accessing skills and talent from Europe



“As we head into 2018 I think we are all aware that we have experienced a challenging time. In the long term I am sure that REHAU as well as our customers and suppliers will find a way to compete and grow in the post-Brexit landscape. The length of time this process takes however will depend largely on the deal our government manages to secure. The disruption that will inevitably be caused by a ‘hard’ Brexit is not to be underestimated. There is no doubt however what I witness amongst the team at REHAU and our industry peers is how we are capable of responding to challenges with innovation and new and different solutions”

Martin Hitchin, Chief Executive
Rehau

INFRASTRUCTURE

For our local economy to build sustainable success it is imperative that business can move their people, products and services around the two counties, and beyond, with ease. Locally we need an infrastructure network that meets the needs of businesses, with key improvements in roads and rail, in order to support a growing business community and exciting developments such as the NMiTE University in Hereford.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Develop a set of future transport priorities for businesses in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Support the swift commencement and completion of committed road improvement schemes, such as the dualling of Carrington Bridge and the wider A4440 Southern Link Road improvement scheme and work with key partners to see the Hereford Bypass become a reality
- Continue to lobby for better train services between Hereford and Birmingham and to campaign for a journey of under two hours between Worcester and London Paddington
- Encourage local government to open up more land in the two counties for business use and to provide more support for growing firms



“As a national leader in the delivery of new housing developments, Keepmoat understands the vital need for the right infrastructure across Herefordshire. While our developments in housing, business and leisure helps bring jobs and prosperity to the area, we can only be successful in our attempts if we have the right infrastructure in place. It's vital that policy makers support the two counties key transport projects in order to achieve and support business growth, as the local business community continue to cite transport issues as a crucial concern for the area”

Richard Moore, Project Director
Keepmoat Homes

CONNECTIVITY

Getting connectivity right is vital to the success of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, with opportunities over the next twelve months to be seen as world leaders in digital infrastructure. Firms, rural and urban, still experience not-spots and we must work towards high quality mobile networks and broadband for all.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Work to ensure that businesses in all parts of the two counties have access to a world class digital infrastructure, particularly in rural 'not spots'
- Support key partners in bringing the 5G test bed to Worcestershire and realising its potential in the future
- Build stronger relationships between the business community and broadband delivery partners
- Call for targets to include both download and upload speeds



“Connectivity is seen by many firms as an essential utility, which was backed-up by two thirds of delegates at the 2017 WLEP Conference. The right digital connectivity enables a myriad of services such as business-grade broadband and VoIP, as well as a host of cloud services. Every firms digital transformation will be driven by their communication infrastructure and the performance, capacity, speed and scalability of this connectivity will be a deciding factor for business success or failure. Worcestershire becoming a 5G test bed highlights the commitment to being a connected county for all, and organisations should prioritise future proofing their digital infrastructure”

Richard Lane, Managing Director
EBC Group

REDUCING THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

2017 saw rising costs for many firms as fluctuating exchange rates squeezed importers across the country. Therefore as we head into 2018, it is essential that business costs – local and national, along with business rates – remain incentivising, fair and accountable. Now more than ever we need businesses to invest in training, premises and productivity, not cut back.

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Call on government for no new upfront taxes on businesses for the duration of the next Parliament
- Campaign for more flexibility to use the Apprenticeship Levy funding to support other high-quality workplace and vocational training
- Lobby for a radical overhaul of the broken business rates system to deliver a fairer system that is more responsive to local economic conditions
- Work with key partners to establish business support needs after EU funded programmes end due to Brexit



“ There appears to be a disconnect between policy makers and the businesses and business owners that have to interpret and implement new legislation. The Apprenticeship Levy and Pension Auto-Enrolment are good examples of where the concept is admirable, looking to directly address key socio-economic issues. However, the application of these concepts in the real world can be a burden, from both a cost and administrative perspective, with little or no support for those it directly impacts. It is important that the Chamber acts as a voice for the large number of SME businesses that make up the majority of Herefordshire and Worcestershire’s economic community ”

Ben Mannion, Director
Hewett Recruitment

CYBER CRIME

£27bn is the estimated cost of cyber crime in the UK – businesses are one of criminal's biggest targets and many firms across the region have reported attempted attacks. Firms often feel isolated and unsure what to do when they become a victim of a cyber crime, perhaps a reason why the numbers of businesses reporting cyber crimes is so low.

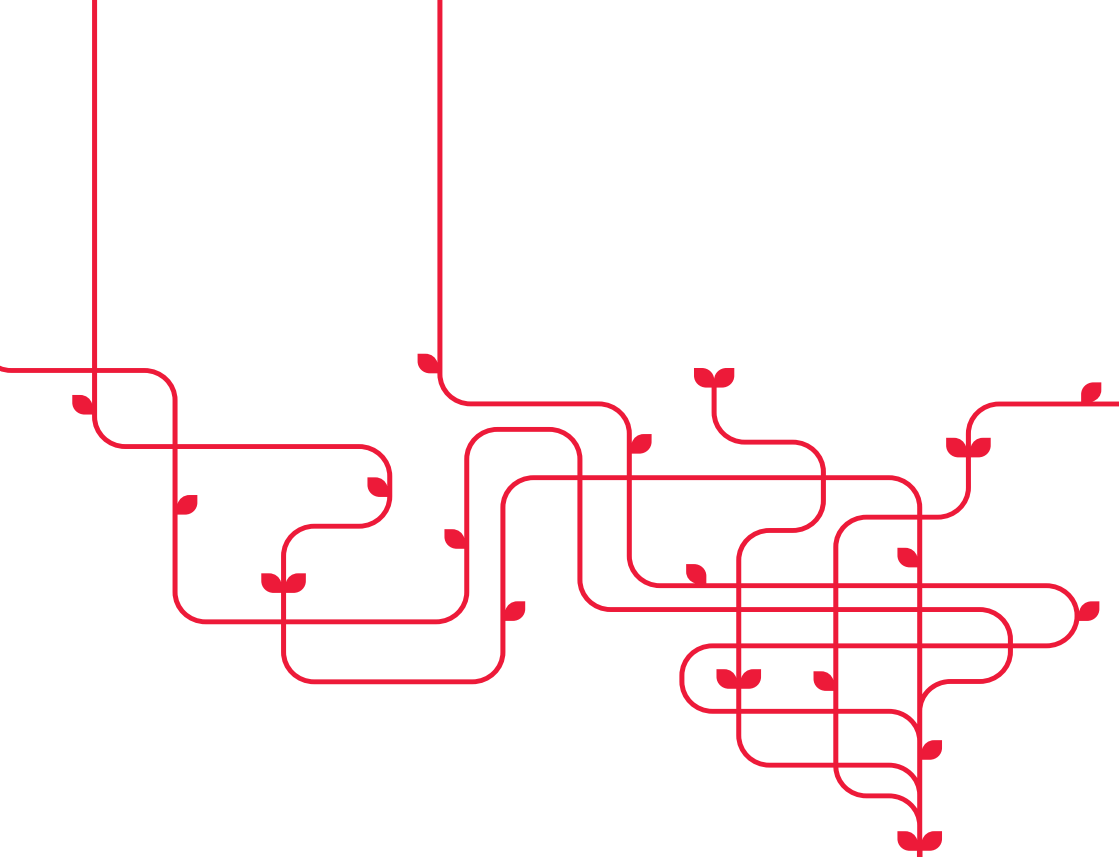
Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce will:

- Urge firms to see cyber security as a risk but also an opportunity for growth and promote the take up of the Cyber Essentials Accreditation
- Continue to promote the importance of and grow the Cyber sector in the two counties, encouraging further development at the hub in Malvern and the completion of the Cyber Security Centre in Hereford
- Represent the local business community on the West Mercia Cyber Crime Partnership Group and build greater links between local firms and West Mercia Police
- Encourage businesses to report all instances of fraud and cyber crime to Action Fraud



“Worcestershire is a growth hub in multiple industries, all of which have healthy appetite for research and development. It's also known for its flourishing “cyber valley” - a true hub for tech innovation and skills. The European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) has made it clear: good cyber security practices align with economic policy. Worcestershire is fast becoming a thought leader in this area, demonstrating a clear commitment to invest in the digital economy. We already have the talent and the tech innovation in the two counties; now let's make sure we continue to provide the investment needed to become a global leader in digital technologies”

Nicola Whiting, Chief Operations Officer
Titania



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