



Pledges for Business

Developed by London Councils working with boroughs and businesses, the Pledges for Business set out how boroughs can better support their local economy, looking across boroughs' business facing activities, including business support, licencing, business rates and planning. The Pledges have been agreed with borough Leaders. This briefing gives an overview and summary of key points in the Pledges.

Overview

London Councils' Pledges for Business was launched in July and is an overarching document to help boroughs inform their processes to become more effective at supporting local businesses.

Background

The original version was developed in consultation with business groups and boroughs and was signed off at the December 2019 Leaders meeting. The first lockdown in March 2020 delayed the launch of the pledges. The pledges have now been refreshed to reflect the impact of the pandemic and the changes were consulted on with cabinet lead members and business groups at the start of 2021. The changes reflect the current economic situation and aim to build on the refreshed relationship that boroughs have developed with businesses during the pandemic, via the distribution of government grants and working closely to ensure safe reopening.

Key Points

The pledges are a tool for boroughs to consider their corporate approach to supporting local businesses. They set out boroughs' central role in creating an environment where business can recover from the impact of Covid-19 and thrive and highlight four key roles for boroughs:

- Placemakers & Champions setting out an agreed vision for an area and communities and bring together the resources to deliver this.
- Convenors of business and the local communities bringing together partners, including the business community and local residents, and brokering a common plan for an area.
- Regulators – ensure business friendly services delivering effective regulation at a local level, protecting and balancing the needs and rights of residents, customers and businesses.
- Providers of core infrastructure providing and maintaining core infrastructure, including roads and pavements, lighting, and increasingly in promoting digital connectivity.

The pledges look across the boroughs' services and suggests a series of practical actions that can be taken to enhance the support for the local economy. This may include:

- undertaking customer satisfaction surveys for business facing services, such as licencing and business rates, and acting on the findings to improve the service.
- ensure a joined-up approach to businesses as they access borough services, for example via a single digital account for businesses.
- reviewing licencing policies to see where a pragmatic approach can deliver economic and social benefit, building on the success of rapidly supporting additional open-air dining during the pandemic.
- staging Business Rates bills to reflect businesses cash flow issues.
- supporting businesses to be more sustainable, for example, around ambitious recycling targets and reducing energy usage.
- raising air quality standards via freight consolidation, electrical vehicles and active travel.

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Next steps

Boroughs are encouraged to adopt the Pledges for Business and use it as a checklist to review and improve their services to business across the whole of the council.

London Councils will support boroughs with implementing good practice over the coming year.

This will include:

- Continue to host meetings for Cabinet Lead Members for Economic Development to compare approaches to responding to the Pledges for Business.
- Work with partners, including business groups, to engage with service areas to look at the options to enhance processes.
- Seminars for boroughs to exchange good practice in key areas of the pledges.
- Explore one-to-one borough peer review discussions, where paired boroughs work through their approaches to the pledges.
- Undertaking a review in 2022 on progress on the delivery of the pledges.

Commentary

As the Pledges for Business is a corporate vision for a borough, looking across a range of service areas, it will require senior political and officer level engagement, to ensure the buy in from across the council.

While boroughs have significantly increased their engagement and support for business during the pandemic, they still face a challenge in building a positive relationship.

The joint London Councils and London Chamber of Commerce annual survey of London's business leaders showed in 2020 only a quarter (25 per cent) feel that their local council acts on the concerns of local businesses, while six in ten (59 per cent) feel boroughs do not act very much or not at all.

In 2019, London businesses were more positive with a third (34 per cent) feeling their local council acted on the concerns of local businesses. This change was driven by a rise in those businesses who state they are not sure if their boroughs actions on business concerns (8 per cent in 2019 compared with 16 per cent in 2020).

London Councils has produced a report (Boroughs, businesses and the pandemic) celebrating

the work of boroughs in supporting businesses during the pandemic. The pandemic has driven changes within boroughs, for example:

- greater cross-departmental working to support businesses, for example in distributing the estimated £6.4 billion in business rates relief and grants delivered to local businesses during the pandemic.
- Regulatory officers changing their approach to more advisory rather than enforcement to support struggling businesses understand changing Covid regulations.
- Examples from Kensington and Chelsea and Wandsworth on supporting al fresco dining.
- The work of Brent and Greenwich in safely hosting major events in Wembley and the O2.

These new approaches will need to be embedded to support London's economic recovery.

Author: Stephen King, Head of Business and Enterprise (T: 020 7934 9670)

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Links:

[Pledges to Business](#)

[2020 Business Survey \(year 4\)](#)

[Businesses, boroughs and the pandemic \[pdf\]](#)

This member briefing has been circulated to:

Portfolio holders and those members who requested policy briefings in the following categories: Economy, Skills and Enterprise