

# Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership Announces

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Berkshire, 1st November 2012. The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) today announced the key goals and objectives of its re-formed SME Forum. The forum is made up of representative businesses from across the sub region and is focused on the key issues that affect the Thames Valley SME community.

It was agreed that the forum will lobby on two immediate goals:

- **Faster Broadband Access**

There is a hunger amongst SME businesses for better broadband access. Without superfast broadband, the Thames Valley Berkshire sub region risks losing its position as a world class economy. The take up of broadband however, is higher than in other areas of the UK, which could present a risk as other areas of the country may be prioritised for this investment. There is a need therefore to lobby local businesses to register their demand for better access to superfast broadband.

- **Making Local Authority Procurement More Available**

The TVB LEP wants to enable more SMEs to bid for public sector contracts. While the South East Business Portal is used by most of the local authorities to advertise opportunities, there is scope for joint procurement initiatives and a need to better highlight these opportunities to SMEs. The TVB LEP will be writing to each of the local authorities through the Thames Valley Procurement Forum to start to generate a baseline for procurement and to encourage the use of a standard spend analysis tool.

Amanda Gee, Chairman of the SME Forum and Managing Director of local SME Berkshire Media Group comments:

“With 44,000 SMEs in the Thames Valley, the LEP’s goal is to level the playing field so that SMEs can compete on a more equal footing with larger organisations. This means providing SMEs with the same advantages such as better access to finance to stimulate growth, and the ability to bid more effectively for local authority procurement projects, especially in the health care sector. We also believe widening access to superfast broadband across the region is vitally

important as better access to broadband enables SMEs to create operational efficiencies in the way they work. We were shocked to find that some SMEs report they actually have better connectivity in their homes than in their business spaces.”

Moving forward the SME Forum will also be turning its attention to the market opportunities presented by the green economy and the healthcare sector. For more information on the initiatives that the SME Forum is driving forward and to get involved please contact Tim Smith, Business Director for Thames Valley Berkshire LEP on 07500 870172.

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About Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Thames Valley Berkshire LEP is a business led body, working to maintain the status of the sub region as the engine of the UK economy. It comprises of key leaders across the business, education, voluntary

and community sector and six unitary authority areas of: Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham. The LEP's priorities are improving infrastructure, for example, the Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRAtH) programme; access to superfast broadband and finance; and ensuring a work-ready population through the development of skills and education opportunities.

For more details on Thames Valley Berkshire LEP please visit the website <http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk>. Organisations interested in bidding for Growing Places Funds should contact Tim Smith on 07500 870172 or email [tim.smith@thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk](mailto:tim.smith@thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk). You can download a full briefing and FAQs document on Growing Places Funds via the website.

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