

Economic Regeneration Business survey 2006

This report summarises the results of the Economic regeneration Business Survey administered during 2006. The survey was sent via the postal service to businesses in Walsall. From 6000 surveys distributed 15% were returned with over 8% completed. This is significantly above the level anticipated and allows detailed analysis and trends to be identified.

Results

Length of time in Walsall

Over 22% of the business respondents have been located in Walsall between 21-39 years, with over 16% being located here for 40 years or more, only 9% of respondents are new start ups. After further break down it will be clear to see which industries have been in Walsall for a prolonged period and which businesses are relatively new. From this information we can identify which companies may want partner support i.e. for succession plans, new start up advise, diversification advice etc.

Workforce

Workforce growth

The forecast of workforce growth amongst companies in Walsall appears to be very promising. Only 8% forecast a reduction or decline in their workforce in contrast to the 41% who predict growth during the next 2 years. 51% of businesses predict a no change in workforce.

Staff development issues

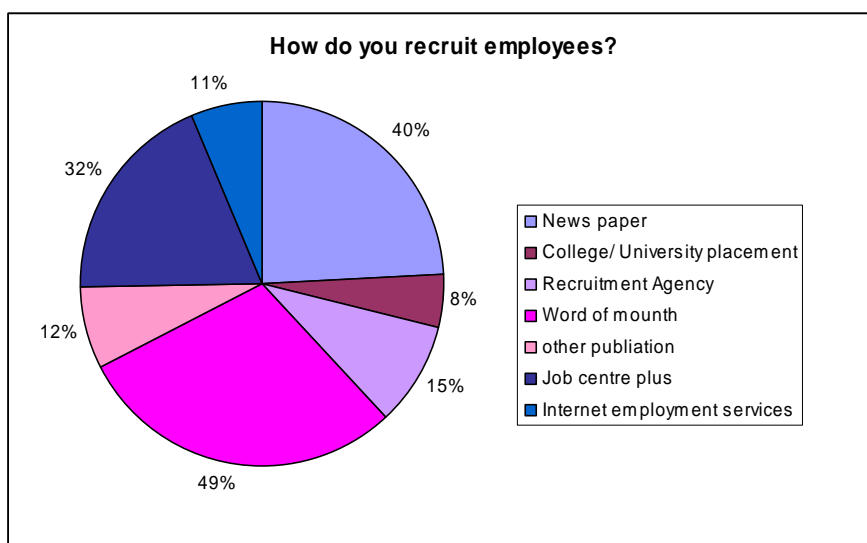
30% of respondent's state they have workforce development issues that need to be addressed within their business. Comments made included "Training, future employees 16-18 year olds in saddlery techniques", "Health and safety training" and "Training for mature members of the workforce". These companies will be referred to the appropriate partner agencies so specialist support can be provided to improve these issues.

Recruitment

60% of businesses state they have no problems recruiting people with the relevant skills. From the 35% of businesses who feel they do have problems the following comments were made. "Basic skills reading writing, problem solving, use of tape measures and basic tools", "Can't get experienced staff, although large corporate insurance companies are closing their offices in Birmingham and Wolverhampton cant get them to come to Walsall", "General lack of skilled HGV drivers", "I am afraid it is basic stuff- writing legibility, grammar, spelling adding up, geography of our country etc lack of experience, "Not enough local colleges providers the necessary training for our industry" and "Problems locating skilled staff".

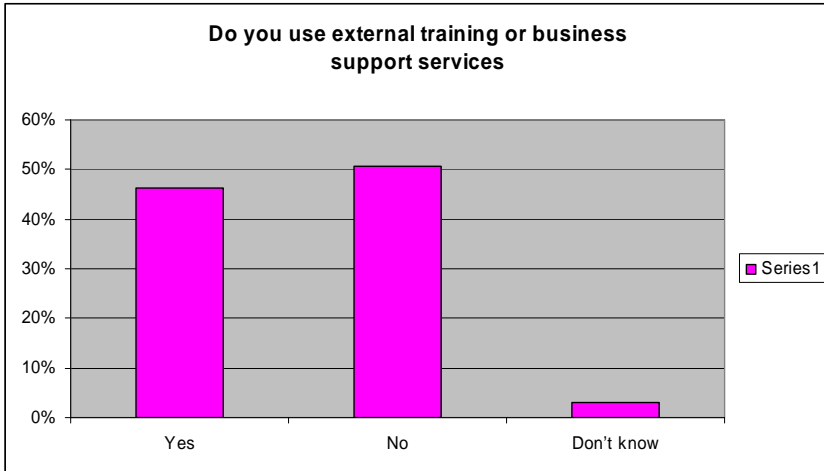
Economic regeneration will take these comments and work with partners to develop and promote existing and new initiatives regarding recruitment and training.

The pie chart below suggests that Walsall's businesses most popular choice of recruitment method is that of word of mouth. This interesting finding may link in with the 35% of people who find it difficult to recruit staff with the relevant skills. These companies may benefit from guidance from Job Centre plus who themselves account for 32% of the businesses preferred recruitment method.



External training or support services

The graph below indicates that over 50% of Walsall businesses do not take advantage of the external training and business support services available to them. This figure shows that more must be done to promote the benefits of business support services, such as open days, literature, advertising etc.



From the 46% of businesses who do use external training and business support services 89% state that the service meets their needs.

Key Markets and turnover

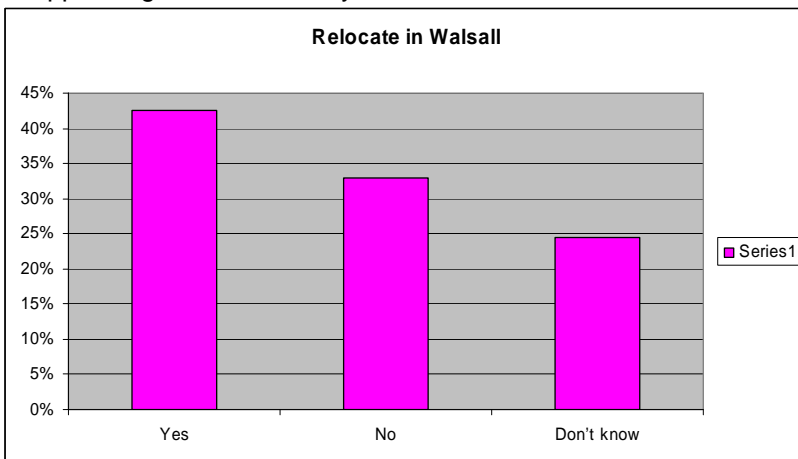
Around 65% of respondents key markets are based within the local area with very few businesses trading outside the UK. This may mean that Walsall might want to try and attract businesses or encourage existing business to deal globally, regionally and nationally as well as locally.

Walsall's businesses have been optimistic in regard their turnover for next year. A massive 58% of businesses stated they expect an increase in turnover with only 12% expecting a reduction.

Further analysis of the results will show which industries are expecting an increase, those who expect they will remain the same and those who predict a decrease. This information will help us identify which businesses may need support in different areas.

Future land requirements and capital investment

Nearly 40% of respondents businesses occupy between 1000 and 5000 square foot of floor space. Over 65% of them expect that their business space requirements will remain the same over the next two years, however a healthy 29% expect an increase. Of those predicting an increase 43% said they would look to relocate in Walsall, a disappointing 33% stated they would look to move outside the borough.



The companies were asked if they were planning any future capital investment in their business, the responses were equally split with 38% stating that they were not planning any future capital investment, 31% stating they didn't know and a further 31% stating that yes they were.

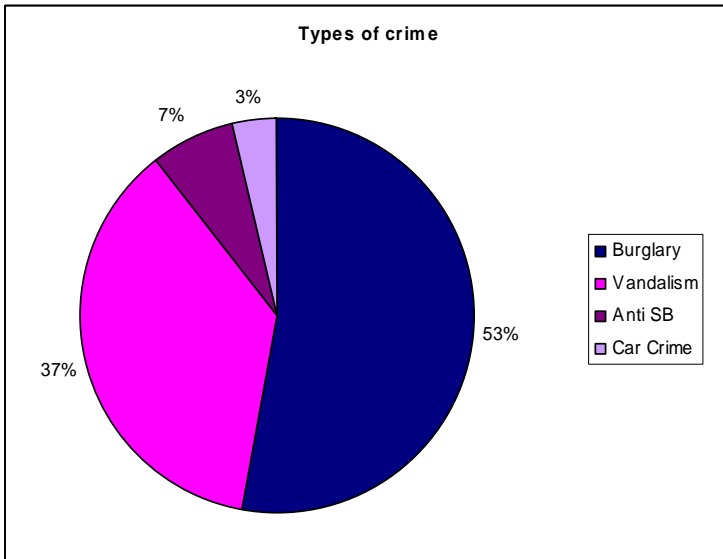
From the 31% of business stating yes they are planning future capital investment over 70% of respondents will be investing up to £250k, only 8% will be investing £750k+.

These businesses may benefit from some advice and support from Black Country Investment and Business Link as further funding and valuable advice may be available.

Business crime

The results clearly indicate that crime is a big issue for Walsall businesses. Over 60% of respondents have been a victim of crime with 80% of these businesses being victim to more than one type of crime. Burglary and vandalism seem to be the most common type of crime as indicated on the pie chart below. It is obvious that more needs to be done for businesses to help combat crime.

The information from this survey will help us to develop schemes and ideas to deal with this issue. Partnership working with Police, Walsall Safer Borough Partnership and the TCM group is planned for the future.



Transport

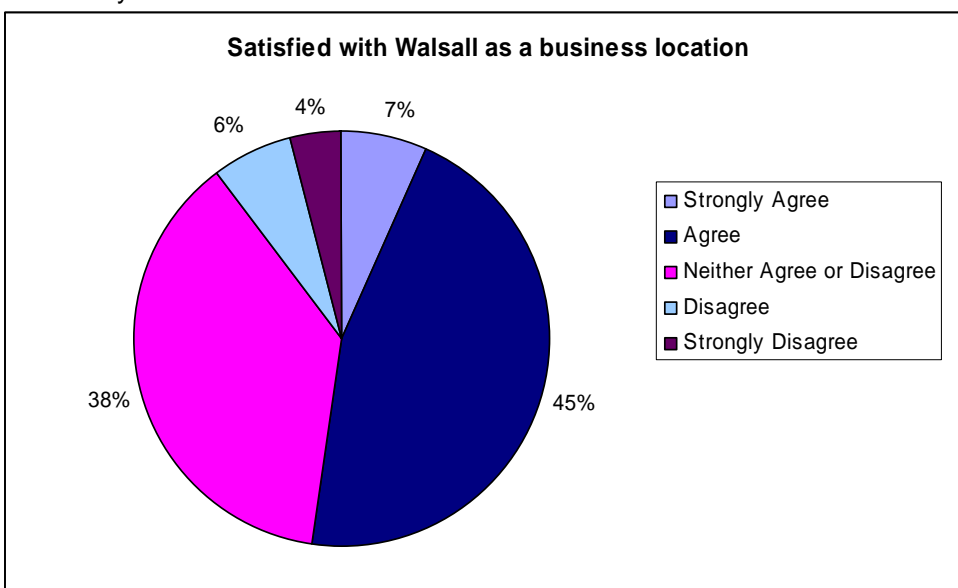
Walsall's Town Centre Transformation Package is currently underway and aims to reduce the amount of traffic in and around Walsall's town centre. However with the "unreliability" and "cost of public transport going up" more and more people are driving to work making the roads unbearable for commuters, the results show that over 65% employees drive to work rather than using public transport, walking or Cycling.

More than 55% of businesses car parks are over 90% full indicating that more needs to be done to improve and promote public transport links, accessibility issues and car sharing initiatives.

Businesses satisfied with Walsall?

Finally, the businesses were asked if they agree with the statement 'Overall I am satisfied with Walsall as a business location.'

An impressive 45% agreed however a disappointing 38% chose to opt for neither agree nor disagree. Economic regeneration plan to contact the 6% of disagree and 4% strongly disagree and work with them to try and resolve issues they have had for them to come to this conclusion.



Conclusion

There is further information that can be analysed from the survey and that can be of use to determine partners future business plans. There are also many actions resulting from the questionnaires that Economic Regeneration will ensure are carried out. This will include referrals to partners and raising issues with relevant partners to develop active responses such as to tackle the business Crime issues. Contact the Economic Regeneration Team for further information on 01922 652570 or goddards@walsall.gov.uk