

## **New opportunity for rural micro businesses to voice their opinions and help design future support programmes**

Devon County Council is launching a research project which aims to engage with rural businesses and sole traders to find out what might be preventing them from boosting their productivity and what help they may need.

The 'Engaging Rural Micros' project will initially look to engage with over 100 micro businesses, targeting the Mid Devon and North Devon area through short surveys, detailed conversations, focus groups and other research.

Micro businesses\* make up 90 percent of the rural economy in Devon, which makes their continued development essential to the future of the County's economy.

The Engaging Rural Micros research is calling for micro businesses in four less productive sectors to share their experiences. These sectors are health and social care; manufacturing; trades (e.g. construction, market traders, lifestyle businesses); and tourism (including accommodation, food and retail).

The aim of the initiative will be to find out more about the needs of these businesses and how to make it easier for them to access and engage with business support programmes in Devon. Micro businesses or sole traders in any of these four sectors (outlined above) are invited to contact the project team about their needs, what they think of the current support on offer, to help ensure future support programmes are right for their business.

There are lots of ways to get involved, ranging from a two minute questionnaire, to a whole day discussing needs and helping to design a support programme that's right for local businesses.

The findings of this project will be used to inform the design of a new trial to help prepare businesses to embrace development opportunities. The trial could enable them to confidently take advantage of mainstream business support and use their time and resources more effectively to increase profitability and productivity. Businesses taking part in the research will have the opportunity to express an interest in taking part in the business support trial.

**Councillor Rufus Gilbert, Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Economy, Enterprise and Skills, said:** "This is an excellent opportunity to learn first-hand what the barriers to rural economic growth really are, and a stepping stone towards better engagement with micro businesses. This provides them with a platform to make their voices heard and tell us about their needs. Micro businesses underpin our local economy, so encouraging the four target sectors to embrace innovation and modern business practises will have a much wider impact, stimulating productivity across our economy."

Rural micro businesses and sole traders in Mid Devon and North Devon in the sectors of health and social care; manufacturing; trades; and tourism, can have their say by contacting Devon County Council's Engaging Rural Micros project team.

To take part in this research or find out more:

- Email: Rio.Bayley@[devon.gov.uk](mailto:Rio.Bayley@devon.gov.uk) about taking part in surveys, business case studies, and focus groups.
- Call: 01392 380753 to chat to the team, or take part in a quick survey-style telephone conversation.
- Follow and Like: [fb.com/RuralMicros](https://www.facebook.com/RuralMicros) and @RuralMicros on Twitter to stay up to date with the project team's whereabouts each week as they visit local market towns, industrial parks and business hotspots.
- Or visit <https://new.devon.gov.uk/economy/business-support/engaging-rural-micros>

### **Notes for Editors:**

\*Micro businesses are businesses with fewer than 10 employees.