Between mid-June and early August 2017, Central Bedfordshire Council conducted a telephone survey of 250 businesses in the region, in partnership with the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership. The survey aimed to identify economic issues and opportunities, to support the growth of local businesses and the local economy. The survey was representative of the size, sector and geography of businesses in the area.

### BUSINESS LOCATION

Central Bedfordshire is a positive location for business:

- **66%** rated Central Bedfordshire as a ‘good’ place to do business (61% in 2015)

Positive and improving perceptions of the physical infrastructure, with the following rated at least ‘good’:

- **76%** (56% in 2015) Rail network:
- **64%** (62% in 2015) Road network:
- **75%** (49% in 2015) Transportation of freight:

### BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Positive current performance:

- **50%** of businesses said performance had improved over the past 12 months (49% in 2015)
  - while **17%** said it had deteriorated (5% in 2015)

Optimism for the future:

- **44%** of businesses expect performance to improve in the next 12 months (56% in 2015)
  - while **3%** expect it to deteriorate

### BREXIT

Negativity and uncertainty over Brexit, with access to single market, labour and skills key concerns:

- **15%** of businesses said leaving the European Union will have a positive impact
- **30%** no notable impact
- **38%** a negative impact
- **16%** were unsure of the impact
Skills are a key issue for local businesses:

- 31% of businesses cited lack of skilled labour as a key constraint on growth (remains the top cited constraint as in 2015)
- 35% of businesses had vacancies in the last 12 months (also 35% in 2015)
- 20% had hard-to-fill vacancies (14% in 2015)
- 27% reported skills gaps amongst current staff (29% in 2015)
- 19% said they found skills shortages amongst potential recruits when trying to fill vacancies (17% in 2015)
- 8% currently employ apprentices (6% in 2015)
- 37% would consider employing apprentices
- 44% of businesses offer work experience

Gradual increase in apprenticeships, with scope for further growth:

- 20% of businesses innovated in the last 12 months (29% in 2015)
- 22% expect to innovate in the next 12 months (33% in 2015)

Notable numbers of businesses are innovating, although there has been a decline over time:

- 20% of businesses aware of SEMLEP (also 20% in 2015 and 8% in 2014 and higher than the average across SEMLEP of 13%)
- 18% of businesses had heard of the Velocity Growth Hub, including 2% that had used it in the last 12 months (this is similar to the average across SEMLEP)

Visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/business/economic/overview.aspx to view the full report.