



Businesses seeking 'more than just talking shop'

By Paul Cahalan

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South London could be in recession for years if the Mayor of London's new Outer London Commission (OLC) proves to be little more than a "talking shop", business leaders have warned.

The OLC, which met for the first time last week, is tasked with ensuring that the views of outer London are taken fully into account when the Mayor is developing policy and making planning decisions, including the regenerating of suburban areas.

Currently there are more than 160,000 businesses in outer London, employing more

than 1.6million people, OLC chairman William McKee said at its inaugural meeting.

Mr McKee, who at the meeting also announced his new board, which includes leaders from the worlds of business, architecture and politics as well as Councillor Serge Lourie, leader of Richmond Council, said: "The Mayor has rightly placed realising the economic potential of outer London at the heart of the commission's work. In support of this, we will be examining other key planning considerations including transport infrastructure and factors affecting the quality of life in outer London."

But Peter Pledger, chief executive of South London Busi-



ness, which represents businesses south of the Thames, said that, while south London welcomed the new OLC, it was vital it delivered on its remit.

Following a meeting with the heads of south London's Chamber of Commerce, he said: "We need the OLC to be more than a talking shop.

"It has a great chance to listen to south London businesses and help them through the toughest trading conditions many have ever seen.

"If it doesn't deliver, we could

be in recession for many years longer."

The OLC will hold four meetings in outer London areas before submitting a preliminary report to the Mayor in June.

Mayor Boris Johnson said he wanted to expand the number of businesses in outer London through extended business programmes and the £600m skills training budget.

□ Will the OLC work? Let us know your thoughts on this and other ways Mr Johnson could help south London businesses.

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