

Pre Interview Questions for Witnesses

Areas that the review wishes to consider:

- *BTC Future Operations - Is the BTC an incubator space or a managed work space?*
- *BTC Funds - Should the receipts generated by the BTC be reinvested into test trading grants for start-ups or recycled and used to develop a new enterprise facility*
- *BTC Future Talent - How can we improve our relationship with Hertfordshire University and North Herts College to grow a pipeline of start-up talent with roots in Stevenage? Is there scope for more vocational/apprenticeships to be supported?*
- *BTC Future Focus - Does the BTC need to have similar brand values/identity to that of Stevenage BioScience Catalyst or does it need to do something different?*

Members previously agreed to ask questions on the following areas):

Cllr Jim Brown will investigate previous years data from 2008-9 to current data looking at turnover

(see separate document for Cllr Brown's observations and questions with responses from Gail Rowe)

Cllr Matthew Hurst will lead questioning on *BTC Future Operations - Is the BTC an incubator space or a managed work space?*

Prior to meeting with representatives of the BTC Management team at the site visit on 7 July 2015, it looked like the ratio of workspace to incubation was more in favour of workspace than Members would have considered was suitable given that the BTC is both a workspace and incubation centre. However, following the discussion with Peter Cabon and Spenser Tagg it is apparent that the ratio is about right given the capacity of available incubation space at the BTC. Members are therefore satisfied that the current balance of use of the BTC is correct but they would appreciate that the BTC Management team monitor the situation and should expansion of incubation be necessary then arrangements to respond to this within the site would be acted on.

Members are now more fully briefed on the operations of the BTC and are content that it is not an either or position regarding workspace and incubation but rather the two functions complement each other with businesses moving from incubation into workspace at the appropriate time for each business.

Questions for BTC Wenta:

- How and when are decisions made about moving business on from the incubator to managed work space?

- Would the availability of more space for managed work space benefit the current structure in enabling more business to enter the incubator space?
- Do WENTA foresee the need to change its operational model to focus more on incubator space or managed work space
- What would trigger any expansion in incubation space at the BTC?
- Would Wenta/ BTC Management team consider expanding into other venues for business incubation, for instance if the Council invited Wenta/BTC to provide incubation support for popup retail/food businesses in current vacant town centre premises?

Cllr Doug Bainbridge will lead questioning on *BTC Funds - Should the receipts generated by the BTC be reinvested into test trading grants for start-ups or recycled and used to develop a new enterprise facility.*

Members are aware that there is a balance to be had between deriving a very valuable income stream for the Council from the BTC management fee in what remain challenging financial times for local government against using a proportion of this income to reinvest into more new business support mechanisms like test grade grants.

Question for Portfolio Holder & Head of Regeneration & seek the views of Wenta:

- Should more of the receipts be used to reinvest into more test trade grants for new start-ups?
- Should more of the receipts be used to reinvest into a new enterprise facility along the lines of the impact hub PopBrixton which Members will be visiting?

Cllr Michael Downing will lead questioning on *BTC Future Focus - Does the BTC need to have similar brand values/identity to that of Stevenage BioScience Catalyst or does it need to do something different?*

Members are of the view that perhaps comparisons between the BioScience Catalyst and the BTC are not helpful. It would be difficult for the BTC to achieve similar brand recognition as the BioScience Catalyst given it is built around a single industry of life sciences and an anchor multinational business based in Stevenage, whereas the BTC is offering incubation and workspace to a much wider business base. The BTC's unique selling point to SME's is, its location, price, flexibility, facilities and expertise and support all under one roof. A facility that many other local authorities would be keen to have in their area.

- Building on the successes of the current BTC/Wenta/SBC partnership should the Council through the BTC and its Management Company be looking to broaden its offer, perhaps appealing to a different business start-up/age demographic in areas such as pop up retail and restaurants in a town centre location?
- Is the current focus the right one? Should the Council and its partners be looking to offer a different start-up offer, if not as outlined above are there any further areas that are not being considered?

Cllr Michael Downing will lead questioning on Equalities & Diversity Issues – Are there any E&D issues to consider in this review?

Questions for BTC Wenta:

- What is the profile of businesses over that last three years (where full records are available) that are based at the BTC for established workspace and incubation businesses in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and disability?
- If there are any areas that have been noted previously for improvement regarding Equalities and Diversity issues what are they and how have these been implemented? e.g. being accessible to businesses from people with a disability etc
- Regarding the BTC's equal opportunities policy. Members are interested not just that it that it exists, but is it reviewed regularly and implemented, permeating the whole operation?

BTC Future Talent - How can we improve our relationship with Hertfordshire University and North Herts College to grow a pipeline of start-up talent with roots in Stevenage? Is there scope for more vocational/apprenticeships to be supported?

Questions for University of Hertfordshire and North Herts College:

- Are there links between graduates who want to start-up businesses basing themselves in Stevenage and the University that can be developed? Is the incubation centre provided by the Council in Stevenage and that provided by the University in direct competition for the same local talent?
- Could the Council via Wenta/BTC be providing more opportunities for vocational apprenticeships with either start-up businesses or perhaps grow-on businesses based at the BTC, who may have capacity to recruit the right individuals coming through NHC? Is there an alignment between the business needs of these businesses and the young peoples' skills coming out of NHC?
- What future events/programmes could be established to promote more students from University of Herts and NHC to access the business advice of the BTC regarding starting their own businesses

Questions for BTC Incubation Client:

- Can the client tell Members some brief information about their business, i.e. type of business, how long in incubation etc
- How has starting your business in the BTC incubation facility tangibly benefited you and what has been the biggest help to you starting your business at BTC?
- Do you feel you are more established now with the onsite support you have received compared with if you were on your own in your own premises?
- Would you recommend BTC incubation to anyone starting a business in the area?
- Were the fees for incubation about right for you when you were starting out?
- What could improve the start-up incubation client experience at BTC?

Questions for BTC established Workspace Client:

- Can the workspace client tell Members some brief information about their business, i.e. type of business, how long established etc
- What was the transition from incubation to workspace like?
- What are the benefits for your business from staying at the BTC? Have you considered moving premises, and if so, what has kept your business at BTC?
- Have you found the fees progressive and competitively matched as your business has grown?
- Are there any things that could be improved for workspace clients at the BTC?