

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: Monday 7 September 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Kadoma Room Stevenage

Present Councillors: M Downing (Chair), M Hurst (Vice-Chair), D Bainbridge, J Brown, J Fraser, M Hurst, A McGuinness, J Mead and P Stuart.

In Attendance: Peter Cabon and Spencer Tagg of (WENTA) Management Committee Lucy Hann, Executive Director, Commercial Development (North Herts College), Paul Findlay, Director of Business Development, University of Hertfordshire, Paul Maguire and Tom Carroll (clients of the BTC workspace)

Start/End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
Ended: 7.25 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor R Broom.

There were no declarations of interests.

2. MINUTES – 7 JULY 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee held on 7 July 2015 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CENTRE (BTC) REVIEW INTERVIEW

The Chair invited Tom Carroll and Paul Maguire to share their experiences as clients of BTC incubation and workspace. Both Tom and Paul answered Members questions regarding what the benefits were to their businesses from being based at the BTC. Tom Carroll indicated that BTC provided a professional environment that met his requirements as he wanted to work away from home. Both clients highlighted a number of benefits such as the location of BTC, its accessibility, good transport links from London, networking opportunities amongst other clients within the BTC complex, as well as the very attractive 3 month no fees introduction and then very competitive desk/room hire rates for a new business.

Both BTC clients suggested that creating an internal market place amongst clients within the BTC complex would help with start-ups and advisory support could be

explored for businesses interested in importing and exporting goods and services.

Peter Cabon and Spencer Tagg of WENTA management team explained the various activities undertaken within the BTC and the transition process of businesses from commencing in the incubator on to the grow-on space and finally to the managed workspace.

Members were concerned that one of the buildings within the complex was not accessible by physically disabled persons. Peter Cabon indicated that this issue would be captured during the next review exercise. He, however, assured the meeting that all clients were asked of their requirements when applying to be part of the incubator space.

Members were advised that age diversity amongst the BTC clients remained a challenge as young entrepreneurs in their twenties only accounted for 7% of the current client base at the centre.

In response to a Member question on the possibility of expanding incubator spaces in to other venues in the town, Peter Cabon informed the meeting that WENTA would willingly provide support but this would require income generation to make it economically viable.

On the question of seeking European funding to provide further test trade grant funding, Peter Cabon advised that there was currently an ERDF bid in place that could pay for supporting incubators.

Lucy Hann of North Herts College highlighted the opportunities available for businesses based in the BTC such as work placements and apprenticeships, short courses for employees, business breakfasts. Additionally the College had a dedicated advisor available to respond to enquiries from BTC clients.

Lucy Hann acknowledged that although there was regular dialogue between NHC and Wenta/BTC, there was scope for future partnership working.

Paul Findlay informed the meeting that University of Hertfordshire was planning to extend its academic places each year with courses of interest to business commerce and industry and that the university would be developing new degrees for apprenticeships where the employer meets the cost of tuition fees and provided work placements.

In response to a question, Paul Findlay advised Members that there was no competition between BTC and the University and that Wenta had supported and provided advice to its students on a wide range of issues. Paul Findlay acknowledged that the University had its own business incubation but with a relatively lower number of participants. Paul agreed to provide the review with details of graduates' career destinations, following their graduation.

4. NEXT STEPS

Members were informed that a site visit to Kennington Workspace and the impact hub at Pop Brixton was being planned for early October 2015 and that a meeting to

interview Councillor R Raynor, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport was scheduled for Tuesday 29 September.

Members were also informed that 21 December 2015 had been provisionally reserved for the Final Report and Recommendations to be submitted to the Committee.

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair