

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE****MINUTES****Date: Thursday 17 September 2015****Time: 6.00 p.m.****Place: Shimkent Room Stevenage**

- Present** Councillors: M Downing (Chair), M Hurst (Vice-Chair), L Briscoe, R Broom, J Brown, M Hurst, and A McGuinness.
- In Attendance:** Simon Speller, Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council.
- Start/End Time** Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
Ended: 7.20 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor J Mead and P Stuart.

There were no declarations of interests

2. BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CENTRE (BTC) REVIEW INTERVIEW

Councillor S Speller provided Members with an historical background to the setting up of the BTC in the 1980's highlighting both its benefits and challenges to Stevenage over the years. He indicated that during this period Stevenage had experienced a decline in manufacturing industries which resulted in high unemployment rates. With the town over reliant on a few large employers, the Council had been keen to address this by diversifying the economy, hence the establishment of the BTC.

In response to a question on the possibility of expanding incubator spaces into other venues, Councillor Speller acknowledged that an arm's length or independent management company such as WENTA could play a supporting role in establishing new businesses within neighbourhoods.

In response to a question on whether the BTC was still fit for purpose considering its original aim, Councillor Speller informed the meeting that although the mission has moved on, the setting up of BTC was a success story that SBC should be proud of it as the setting up of a business incubator site was, at that time, a unique thing for district councils to engage in. He acknowledged that BTC was a small but significant and iconic part of SBC's business strategy as the centre had helped to create an environment to address the town's sole reliance on manufacturing.

In response to a Member question, Councillor Speller advised that it was not possible

to engineer a situation where the BTC employed predominantly Stevenage residents but could attempt to create a working environment that would attract new and start-up businesses from Stevenage and the region with the result that they could employ Stevenage residents.

Councillor Speller welcomed the scrutiny of the BTC as it would provide Members with an opportunity to consider the current service and its remit needed to be reviewed. He also acknowledged that any economic initiative such as the BTC should be led through an arm's length organisation rather than by the Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor S Speller, the Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council for his contribution to the review.

3. DRAFT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair informed Members that as the review was still ongoing it could not at this stage finalise the report and recommendations until the Committee had had the opportunity of interviewing Councillor R Raynor, Portfolio Holder for Economy and Enterprise and Transport and the Interim Assistant Director of Regeneration and had undertaken a site visit to gather evidence. It was hoped that the final draft could come forward in December 2015.

4. NEXT STEPS

Members were informed that a site visit to Kennington Workspace and Pop Brixton is scheduled take place on 12 October 2015

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair