

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

**Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 18 April 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Helen Mirfin-Boukouris (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Roger Davison, Terry Fox, Neale Gibson, Steve Jones, Alf Meade, Sioned-Mair Richards and Steve Wilson

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jillian Creasy and there was no nominated substitute.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where a resolution may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1 There were no public questions or petitions.

5. DISCUSSION WITH BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES - ACCESS TO FINANCE

5.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy Officer (Scrutiny) on Access to Finance for Businesses, to which was appended a briefing presentation which the Committee had received at its meeting on 21st March 2013.

5.2 Attending for this item were Kevin Bennett and David Campbell-Molloy, Creative Sheffield. Businesses representatives in attendance were Julia Gash, Bag It Don't Bin It; Amanda Perry, Fancie; Terry Lee, EE Ingleton Engineering; Alex Gunn, Bike Rehab and Amy Farry, Ginger Media.

5.3 Each of the business representatives introduced themselves, providing brief information on their business and commenting on problems which they had experienced and how these had been resolved. The representatives particularly focused on access to finance but specific reference was made to the use of internships and the way in which the Council's Business Rates Department had dealt with a particular issue.

5.4 Following this, Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- The Council had set up First Point for Business which was a telephone number where businesses could obtain information on Council issues which affected businesses. There had been some promotion of this service, but further work was required as the business representatives present were not aware of it. The Welcome to Sheffield website provided details of business support services and this had been launched through Marketing Sheffield but again, this clearly required some publicity. It provided information for investors, start-up businesses and those looking to grow.
- The training offered by the Santander bank was available to those who were not its customers.
- The lack of business networking opportunities in Sheffield made establishing contacts and the exchange of ideas more difficult.
- Consideration was being given to implementing a mentoring programme, an entrepreneur exchange and ways in which the First Point for Business service could be developed.
- There was evidence to suggest that certain banks would not work with businesses which had a turnover below a certain level.
- The Santander women's leadership course offered business networking opportunities. It would be helpful if there were similar opportunities available in Sheffield.
- The business representatives would never have considered approaching a Councillor to resolve any Council related business issues.
- The business representatives would be happy for Councillors to visit their businesses.
- If the banks were not lending, it may cause businesses to resort to desperate measures and become involved with the lower end of the financial market.
- Businesses may find it useful to invite their Bank Manager to visit their premises, on perhaps an annual basis.
- Established businesses were more able to afford to pay interest on business loans, so any help in this respect should be focused on start-up companies.
- About 3 or 4 years ago the Council hosted networking events with the focus being on start-up businesses and it may be that the more established businesses were lost sight of in the process.
- As a business friendly Council, it was important to ensure that any services provided to business operated in a joined up manner.

5.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks the business representatives and officers for their contribution to the meeting and notes their comments;
- (b) requests that the Policy Officer (Scrutiny) writes to the Councillor Leigh Bramall, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Development, to summarise the Committee's recommendations and suggestions made in relation to:-
 - (i) Businesses' experience with the Council's Business Rates Department and Bailiffs and the possibility of the Committee undertaking a Scrutiny exercise with regard to the Council's use of Bailiffs;
 - (ii) The fragmented nature of advice and support for business;
 - (iii) The potential for the Council to facilitate business networking opportunities;
 - (iv) Actions which the Council could take to promote fairer access to paid work placements and internships; and
 - (v) The role of Councillors in working with local businesses, particularly in relation to accessing Council services; and
- (c) requests that Councillor Leigh Bramall, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Development's, response to the above be communicated to the business representatives present at the meeting.

6. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

6.1 The Policy Officer (Scrutiny) submitted the Committee's Work Programme for 2013/14 and the Forward Plan for the period 3rd April 2013 to 31st July 2013, for consideration.

6.2 RESOLVED: That:-

- (a) the contents of the Committee's Work Programme 2013/14 be approved subject to consideration being given to the inclusion of an item providing an update on the new Market on the Moor; and
- (b) the Forward Plan for the period 3rd April 2013 to 31st July 2013 be received and noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be the Special meeting to consider the call-in of the Cabinet decision on the modernisation of the Planning and Highways and Cabinet Highways Committees, and the call-in of the Cabinet decision on Rural Broadband, to be held on Tuesday, 23rd April 2013 at 10.00 am in the Town Hall.