

Special Interest Group - Business Support
Monday 17 September 2007, 10.00am @ Unipart, Oxford

Present: William Barton (WB) - West Oxon DC
Philip Wootton (PW) - Business Link
Jean Mitchell (JM) - OEP
Dawn Pettis (DP) - Oxon County Council

Keith Slater (KS) - Caprese Ltd
Karen Matthews (KM) - Cherwell DC
John Vernon (JV) - JTA Management (& OBE)
Ross Hurley (RH) - SEEDA

1. Apologies

Llewellyn Bankes-Hughes - Petrosport, David Parkes - South Oxon DC, Toby Warren - Vale of White Horse DC, Kiran Noonan - Rebecca Taylor Ltd. Mike Jennings - Jennings of Garsington, Chris Carr - Oxfordshire Business Enterprises, Barry Wheatley - Bobex Ltd, Dave Waller - Oxon County Council, Ian Wenman - Shaw Gibb (& IoD), Steve Daniels - Oxford City Council

2. Minutes and Actions

- i. JM to write this up and via DW present it to the Data Observatory

Minutes were completed and circulated. JM to follow up with DW.

Action: JM to follow up with DW re Data Observatory research into metrics for monitoring start-up activity and long term survival.

- ii. DW to discuss metrics with GOSE

Connected to previous action point.

- iii. DW to update map

Agenda item

- iv. CC to supply info on referrals in and out of OBE.**

Outstanding

- v. All to consider what is needed that is not available now on this journey

Agenda item

- vi. JM to add Flyers to future meeting agenda

As appropriate

- vii. JM to consult group about Business Simplification presentation

Agenda item

3. Business Simplification - an introduction

RH gave a brief presentation on Business Support Simplification which is a National initiative announced by Gordon Brown in budget speech. RH's presentation is attached with the minutes. Ann Johnstone from SEEDA has offered to give a presentation on the results of the consultation when they are available.

4. Where we got to last time

Dave Waller had produced a powerpoint presentation which attempts to encapsulate the key issues from the Enterprise Journey map, which was discussed at the last meeting. This presentation was circulated prior to the meeting. As a follow on to the Business Support Simplification Presentation, JM highlighted the slides (replicated below) referring to this and the role of Business Link.

Simplification agenda

- Issue of complexity and confusion in the market place recognised
- Results in advice and help not being sought
- Indicators are that those that seek advice are more likely to succeed
- Proposed model is single access point (Business Link) with Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage process

Issues: 1. Uncertainty

Business Links as main access channel needs to be:

- trusted
- unbiased, independent
- no conflict of referral & delivery
- have capacity & can do the job
- first access point very knowledgeable
- open and communicating
- knowledge of & able to refer all support (private & public)
- FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING BUSINESS

This is a huge task, Business Link will need all the support we can give them to achieve the above.

Next Steps 1:

Making Business Link the 'Access Brand' broker of business support service

Partners need reassurance that BL:

- *Will focus on & deliver benefits to business*
- *That IDB model is adhered to*
- *That the system is working for business*

BL need support from partners:

- *Improve referral signposting to Business Link*
- *Agree 'ways of working' with Business Link based on responsiveness to clients and evidence*

There was discussion around what was needed and how to support business link. JV suggested that the journey should be looked at from the customers point of view and that the market should be segmented. The following were suggested:

- No funds, no major business experience
- With business experience, some cash - probably require specialist support e.g. marketing, finance
- Technical spin-outs
- "A bit down the track" - step change of some sort
- Management buy out
- Buying an existing business
- Know what want - require access to information

There was a discussion about these and how to identify what segment the customer was in. A decision tree or diagnostic was needed. The group thought that this had probably already been identified and various members agreed to look into this.

Action: PW look at Business Link diagnostic in terms of start-up

Action: JV to check National Enterprise Agency for segmentation or diagnostic

Action: RH to enquire about start-up group in the Business Support Simplification agenda and what they had looked at.

Currently a start-up approaching Business Link would be referred to a start-up workshop and allocated a generalist adviser. It was unclear what happened if they did not want to attend the course.

JV noted that the referrals from Business Link to Oxfordshire Business Enterprises had dropped significantly and their main source of referrals was now the OBE website.

5. Start-up - what next on the Mentoring services

An interim solution which will maintain the mentoring service via Oxfordshire Business Enterprises brand has been agreed, with Cherwell District Council hosting. There was a concern that referrals would drop and the group agreed to promote the OBE services as appropriate as there was no budget for marketing. This was welcomed by the group but it was clear that a longer term strategy needs to be developed.

To prepare this plan further information was needed on budgets and costs.

Action: KM agreed to approach a colleague about Worcester Enterprise activity's budget

Action: KS agreed to supply budget figures from Bucks activity

Action: JV agreed to look at figures from OBE

It was noted that SEEDA were funding mentoring services for women start-ups which reveals that they value mentoring activity even if the current Business Link funding model does not include mentoring.

Action: JM to find out more information on women's start-up mentoring and how it is funded.

JV noted that a significant amount of work is done by OBE (Chris Carr mainly) in working with organisations such as Job Centre+ and Ex-offender organisations to offer support. This is marketing activity which needs to continue if referral rates are to be maintained.

PW noted that an effective model is to have as wide a funnel as possible which captures everyone but quickly filters into appropriate forms of support rather than having separate recruitment programmes. This includes mentoring services.

It was agreed that the group needed to work on a business plan for a "perfect" mentoring service by seeking advice and information from those involved. JV agreed to survey the mentors as to how the current service could be improved.

Action: JV to survey current mentors on "perfect" service.

The proposals discussed at the last meeting from Mike Jennings should be integrated into the "perfect" service and it may be that a multi-centre option is considered. Mike's proposals were based around the business centre that Mike runs in South Oxfordshire.

Important aspects of the mentoring service are:

- Referrals
- Location (for meetings)
- Materials - hand outs (information)
- Maintenance of mentoring team - recruitment, assessment, accreditation
- Marketing/visibility

6. Business Link Advisory Board (BLAB)

The first meeting of the Oxfordshire Business Link Advisory Board will take place on 9 October. The value that the SIG has placed on the mentoring service in Oxfordshire needs to be fed into the BLAB. JM agreed to prepare a paper.

Action: JM to prepare a paper on mentoring services for the BLAB

7. What next for the SIG

- Feed thinking and plans into BLAB
- Develop "perfect" mentoring service
- Develop Business Plan for mentoring service

8. AOB

DP noted that she has been tasked with preparing a paper for the Oxford City Strategic Partnership looking at start-up support in deprived parts of Oxford. PW agreed to supply information on the proposed outreach worker who will be based in Milton Keynes but be tasked with supporting start-up in deprived wards.

Action: PW to feedback information on Outreach worker

The general view of the group was reiterated that business support should be offered to those that want it. This is far more effective than trying to convince people that they want support.

9. Date of next meetings

Tuesday 30 October 1.30pm - OCC agreed to host

Action: JM to circulate further dates at approx 6 week intervals.

10. Summary of Action Points:

- i. JM to follow up with DW re Data Observatory research into metrics for monitoring start-up activity and long term survival.
- ii. CC to supply info on referrals in and out of OBE.
- iii. PW look at Business Link diagnostic in terms of start-up
- iv. JV to check National Enterprise Agency for segmentation or diagnostic
- v. RH to enquire about start-up group in the Business Support Simplification agenda and what they had looked at.
- vi. KM agreed to approach a colleague about Worcester Enterprise activity's budget
- vii. KS agreed to supply budget figures from Bucks activity
- viii. JV agreed to look at figures from OBE
- ix. JM to find out more information on women's start-up mentoring and how it is funded.
- x. JV to survey current mentors on "perfect" service.
- xi. JM to prepare a paper on mentoring services for the BLAB
- xii. PW to feedback information on Outreach worker
- xiii. JM to circulate further dates at approx 6 week intervals.