

Special Interest Group - Start-up Business Support
Tuesday 22 May 2007, 09.30am @ Cotswold Lodge Hotel

Present: William Barton - West Oxon DC
David North - Business Link
Philip Wootton - Business Link
Llewellyn Bankes-Hughes - Petrosport
Jean Mitchell - OEP
Dave Waller - Oxon County Council
Keith Slater - Caprese Ltd

Nick Quail - South Oxon DC
Chris Carr - Oxon Business Enterprises
Dawn Pettis - Oxon County Council
Mike Jennings - Jennings of Garsington
Barry Wheatley - Bobex Ltd
Karen Matthews - Cherwell DC
Rob McKay - Cherwell DC

1. Apologies

Kiran Noonan - Rebecca Taylor

2. Background

A paper was circulated prior to the meeting which summarised where the impetus for the meeting came from and the importance of new businesses starting up to the economy.

3. What do pre-start-ups / start-up businesses need?

A "Starter for 10" paper was circulated prior to the meeting which outlined a list of advice that might be needed by someone starting a business, taken from the OBE website:

- Market Research
- Marketing
- Finance
- Legal Aspects
- Business Planning

This was generally agreed as reasonable summary.

4. What do we have now

Chris Carr outlined how OBE works with people thinking of starting a business. They offer workshops and events but the cornerstone is the one-to-one mentoring/counselling service. Because of reductions in funding OBE is currently reappraising the way it works but is anxious to continue to support Oxfordshire's economy.

The process does not lend itself to targets such as "new businesses started" as many clients decide not to start a business once the issues are gone through with them or may take many years to decide. There is also the issue of softer targets such as lifestyle changes which are much harder to measure than say GVA.

There followed a discussion about the difficulty of getting data on new businesses, as many will be under the VAT registration level and working from home.

A number of suggestions for sources of information was made and it was agreed that some triangulation of this would be useful.

Sources of information:

- Banks - accounts opened, Barclays seem a particularly good source
- OBE
- Business Link database

Action: Philip Wootton to triangulate data on start-ups. Input from DW and Data Observatory

David North outlined his role in Business Link as Enterprise Gateway manager in Faringdon. The Gateway offers mentoring and start-up support. His other role is as Enterprise Manager dealing with Women and

Rural enterprise in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire and Youth Enterprise across the South East. Elaine Whittaker is responsible for start-up.

Business Links in the South East are now working as a federation. The model is for Information, Diagnostics, Brokerage (IDB) and not delivery.

Start-up is an exception to this because it is seen as requiring special attention. From July 7th pre-start awareness and training programmes will be carried out by 2-3 providers in the South East. The contract will include 100 events likely to be in Oxford and Banbury at various times and some with specific audiences in mind e.g. ethnic minority groups or women. These awareness events will act as funnels into workshops which will in turn funnel into "intensive assists" from Business Link Advisers.

Business Link will no longer fund OBE - which is a loss of £160k income although an interim payment is expected.

5. How do pre-start-ups / start-ups access the support they need?

It was agreed that the behind the scenes structure is irrelevant to business seeking help, but that we need to understand how what model we want and how it works in terms of the client.

There is a funnel model which starts off with large numbers of clients being made aware of the opportunities for starting a business and the process to go through

- Awareness
- Decide to set up a business
- Mentoring
- Less intensive on-going support

There was general agreement that the journey is probably right but that there is considerable confusion about who does what and that it would be useful to have simple shared description of what is happening and the blockages and issues around that.

Action: DN & PW would write a simple description of the journey and an idea of blockages and issues.

Clearly an important aspect of this is the relationship between the different bodies and organisations that clients will approach first i.e. banks, accountants, Job Centres, local authorities. The referral system between organisations must work well and be trusted by all so that the client gets the most benefit.

The importance of the mentoring service was discussed. This "intelligent conversation" can cover many aspects including personal issues to overcome such as lack of self-confidence to specific business issues.

What was needed for the success of the service was discussed:

- Volunteer mentors give their time free but require
- Training plus other support
- Reception of clients / Administration
- Marketing / Awareness raising / liaison with partners

It was indicated that there were a number of organisations involved with specific start-up projects such as the Mental Health Project. However it was felt that although specific support and understanding of these groups was needed the business advice was universal.

A key component of any service is consistency of core funding to ensure a continuity of service.

Mike Jennings emphasised that established business will be willing to contribute to this service *in kind* as mentors and also funding. This happened at TBAC (Thames Business Advice Service, former enterprise agency for southern Oxfordshire) and Mike offered to sponsor.

It was agreed that following an agreed model / journey being written down (DN & PW) that developing the business model, including how it would be funded was the next step. Mike was warmly thanked for his offer and it was duly noted.

6. AOB

7. Date of next meetings

Wednesday 4 July 2007 at 09.30am at Marlborough School Enterprise Centre.

8. Summary of Action Points

- i. Philip Wootton to triangulate data on start-ups. Input from DW and Data Observatory
- ii. DN & PW would write a simple description of the journey and an idea of blockages and issues.