

## **Local Regeneration (Executive Decision)**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To receive a report from Ian Nockolds, Director at Cognisant Research on the Workspace Demand Study and seek funding for a 'one off' business breakfast and tourism attractions business meeting

### **Public Interest**

This complements our work to encourage viable and growing businesses and business support organisations in the villages and market towns in Area East, thereby underpinning job creation and preservation.

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) To re-affirm £1,000 funding for the provision of 'The Lime Room' hot desk space
- (2) To re-allocate up to £2,000 funds originally intended to support creative art work/show room space in Wincanton to support two business events/breakfasts
- (3) To note the findings of the Workspace Demand Study

### **Background**

In October 2015 Members agreed an allocation of £8,000 from the Members Discretionary budget towards the following key strands of work:

- the provision of hot desk facilities at Churchfield
- research into the viability a work hub in Area East
- to support creative art work/show room space in Wincanton

With the exception of the creative art/workshop space in Wincanton which was included in anticipation of a Town Team project then under development, being brought to fruition, there has been progress with the other two strands.

More recently, Members supported the idea of arranging two business events at last month's priorities workshop

### **The Lime Room – hot desk space**

This facility was launched in the summer 2016 as a pilot project to determine potential demand for hot desking space locally. The small room, which has two desks, is situated on the first floor of Churchfields, can be booked on an hourly basis during normal office hours. Users have to first register and pay a deposit. The initiative was widely promoted through social media and other free advertising strands (press releases etc) and in November a local charity began to use the space regularly. This was a useful test of booking systems/registration processes etc but we will also review booking arrangements to ensure that these are as streamlined as possible

At their workshop in February Members agreed to further promote The Lime Room through 'paid for' advertising which will be rolled out over the next few months through traditional media and the workspace networks. Although uptake has been slow to-date it is considered that it would be worthwhile continuing with this (relatively) low cost pilot as it is generally acknowledged it can be difficult to get an accurate estimate of demand for workspace; early uptake is sometimes slow which often means an element of speculative investment in commercially operated hubs is needed to get them off the ground

### **Business events/breakfasts**

It is suggested that there is probably benefit in considering organising two 'one –off' business events this May/June.

The first a meeting of tourism attractions to explore common issues such as the A303 improvements and joint marketing was suggested by several of the attractions during visits by the Area Development Manager and Chairman last year.

The second would be more of a 'network' event open to all businesses the programme for which would be developed in conjunction with the established local business organisations. The District Council's Regeneration Board were supportive of a business breakfast event of this type.

Although these two events were first mooted last year there was not funding allocated to support these events and, in the absence of a project coming forward imminently for creative art workshop/show room in Wincanton, it is suggested that Members may wish to re-allocate the £2k funding originally allocated for this purpose to support the business events.

### **Workspace Demand Study**

We attempted to appoint consultants to undertake this work last summer but were not able to appoint suitable consultants at that point. A further call for consultants in October resulted in Cognisant Research submitting an acceptable proposal within the allocated budget of £5k. They began desktop work in December and commenced telephone interviews in January. A summary of Cognisant Research's findings will be sent to Members ahead of the meeting.

### **Financial Implications**

Within the Members Discretionary budget £8k is ring fenced for regeneration works comprising:

- Up to £1,000 for the provision of hot desk facilities at Churchfield
- Up to £2,000 towards creative art work/show room space
- Up to £5,000 to research demand for work space/hub

If Members approve the recommendations in the reports elsewhere on this agenda and also wish to re-allocate £2k from creative art work/show room space funding towards the two business events as suggested within this report, there will be no remaining unallocated funds in the Members Discretionary Budget.

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

*A well supported business community*

*Measured by: An increase in satisfaction by businesses with the specialist support they receive in South Somerset*

*A vibrant and sustainable Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural Economy*

*Measured by: Increasing local sustainability measured by the average level of self containment for South Somerset Wards*

**Other Implications**

Included within the Area Development Plan

**Background Papers:** Area East Committee Agenda & Minutes October 2015