

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

15th January 2008

WINCHESTER DISTRICT BUSINESS CENTRE – UPDATE

REPORT OF HEAD OF CULTURAL SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB1297 - Winchester District Enterprise Centre – 26 July 2006

WTF68 - Winchester Business Hub – 18 January 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Winchester Business Centre opened to the public on 2nd October 2007. A partnership project between Winchester City Council, The University of Winchester, Winchester City Centre Partnership and the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Centre is already attracting regular users and has benefited from positive media interest. This paper provides an update for Members on the project, including some early usage figures and a list of current commercial sponsors of the Centre.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Report be noted.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Following agreement in previous Cabinet and Town Forum reports, Winchester Business Centre was opened on 2nd October 2007. The centre provides access to business advice and signposting services; affordable central meeting space, and a headquarters for the Winchester City Centre Partnership (WCCP) - the Winchester BID organisation - and the local office of the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NHCCI).

2 Developing the Centre

- 2.1 Winchester City Council leases the property at 10 Parchment Street from A2 Housing Group, initially on a two year basis, and sublets to NHCCI who jointly run the centre with the City Centre Partnership.
- 2.2 The City Council was responsible for overseeing the refurbishing of the property, which had previously been used as an internet café. Locally-based Design Engine architects redesigned the interior, with the rear section blocked off to create a meeting room. New fixtures and fittings and security systems were included in the overall refurbishment cost.
- 2.3 The project was delayed by several months as a result of legal processes around the Change of Use application and the leasing arrangements. Building-related problems also arose during the refurbishment, and some minor snagging work is still taking place to ensure the business centre is meeting the needs of its clients adequately. This is likely to be complete by the end of January 2008.

3 Facilities and services

- 3.1 The Business Centre is run jointly by WCCP and NHCCI, and is also their office base in Winchester. In order to open the Centre to the public, officers from these organisations have altered their working patterns to ensure that at least one officer is present during public opening times. These opening times are 9.30am – 4.30pm, Tuesday - Thursday. The Centre is available for use outside these times by advance booking. It is hoped that core times will be extended in due course when the level of income from services enables the organisations to employ an additional part time member of staff.
- 3.2 The Business Centre offers workspace facilities for visiting business people. This is in the form of a formal 'workbench', or in comfortable seating at a round table. The area is also used as an informal meeting space, in addition to the formal meeting room which offers acoustic confidentiality. The kitchen is available for all visitors to use, and includes a low cost but high quality hot drink vending machine.

3.3 There are also modern IT facilities, including two large flat screen televisions capable of showing presentations and other digital material. The Centre provides wireless internet access throughout, and a Cannon office machine available for clients to print, photocopy, scan and fax at affordable rates.

3.4 The Centre supports the work of local artists through displays of their work on its walls, and opened with a show of photographic artwork by Kay May, co-ordinated through the City Council's arts development service.

4 Usage

4.1 It is too early to monitor use of the centre in a meaningful way, but the first quarter of operation has already attracted good levels of interest which has helped to build awareness of and traffic to the facility.

4.2 During the course of the three launch-day events, over 100 business contacts and guests came to view the Centre. Whilst promotional budgets are modest, word of mouth publicity – supported by positive local media articles – has ensured that there is already good take-up of the facilities.

4.3 One of the first events to take place at the business centre was the award ceremony for the Hampshire Hospitality Awards, presided over by the Mayor. Also in October, the Centre hosted an exhibition of the three shortlisted proposals for a new piece of public art in Parchment Street. The exhibition was visited by around 100 people over its 15 days.

4.4 The Business Centre has enjoyed a variety of usage during the initial start up period including;

- Internet access by established businesses and start up businesses. 39 visitors used the Internet only out of all the services available.
- Training sessions for independent retailers through a local training provider
- Networking events by commercial sponsors of the centre
- Informal meetings held by external clients – the informal meeting space has been host to 117 users to date.
- Formal meetings by established businesses and start up companies – the meeting room has been formally booked for use for 40 hours to date.
- International meetings both virtual and in person
- Formal meetings by established local businesses seeking off site accommodation
- Business Link surgery appointments with business start ups and growing businesses
- Partner meetings (eg monthly NHCCI area committee meetings)
- Display space for local creative industries

- Display space for Winchester City Council Parchment Street consultation
 - Information, advice and guidance from WCCP and NHCCI to walk in clients, both new and existing contacts resulting in referrals to Business Link, NHCCI, Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council and business centre sponsors
- 4.5 The Centre has been promoted through Winchester City Council and its project partners. A new web site has been created at www.winbiz.org.uk together with a services booklet which is available to clients on request. The Centre is to be further promoted in 2008 through a sponsorship agreement with the Hampshire Chronicle and through Business Centre partner publications.
- 4.6 The City Council's new service level agreement with WCCP requires quarterly monitoring figures for usage of the Centre.

5 Budgets and funding

- 5.1 The capital cost of developing the Business Centre totalled £37,000, provided as follows:

Commercial sponsors	£10,000
University of Winchester	£ 5,000
Winchester Town Forum	£ 5,000
Winchester City Council	<u>£17,000</u>
TOTAL	£37,000

- 5.2 The running costs are estimated at £20,000 per annum, funded through contributions from WCCP, NHCCI, Winchester City Council's economic development budget, income from sponsorship directed at ongoing running costs (including from the University of Winchester) and from income from services at the business centre.
- 5.3 There has been a good response from commercial sponsors, and further partners are being sought to help offset running costs and bring about further service developments. A list of current sponsors is attached at Appendix 1.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 Economic prosperity, especially to 'provide the environment and facilities for business start up and growth within the District'.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 Paragraph 5 provides budgetary information for both the refurbishment and the ongoing operation of the centre. All contributions from Winchester City Council have been provided from within existing economic development budgets.

7.2 Significant officer time was required to oversee the project to opening, but it is anticipated that the main requirement once snagging is completed will be for performance monitoring and service review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – List of Business Centre Sponsors

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Arqiva

Brighter Prospects Ltd

Condor Office Solutions

Denplan Ltd

Dutton Gregory Solicitors

Hampshire Chronicle Group

Original 106 FM

Royal Bank of Scotland

Sparsholt College

Technilink IT Ltd

Thornfield Properties Plc