

6th January 2015**Agenda Item:****REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER, CORPORATE STRATEGY****RESPONSE SUBMITTED UNDER URGENCY PROCEDURE
CONSULTATION RESPONSE – THE D2N2 LOCAL ENTERPRISE
PARTNERSHIP GROWTH HUB STRATEGY****Purpose of the Report**

1. To confirm a response made under the urgency procedure to a consultation opened by the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) on proposals being developed for a Growth Hub.

Information and advice

2. The concept of Growth Hubs has been introduced by Government with a national rollout via Local Enterprise Partnerships following a pilot phase within three areas of Manchester, Cumbria and the Norfolk. At its simplest, Growth Hubs are designed to offer the means whereby businesses across the LEP area are offered a single point of access to comprehensive support services to enable them to start and grow.
3. In the recent Growth Deal announcement, the D2N2 LEP secured a total of £525,000 for the 2015/16 financial year as pump-priming resources to help establish a Growth Hub across its area, being a similar figure offered to other LEPs. The D2N2 LEP is looking to develop the concept from December 2014 and at the time of writing this report, was consulting on a Strategy immediately prior to the “soft launch” of the Hub from early December 2014.
4. This is in effect a pilot phase until the April 2015, but given the importance of agreeing some early principles and establishing the Hub’s terms and references, the Council responded to the consultation within the requested timeframe and the response is attached to this report as Appendix A. It is proposed that the Committee receives a further report on the development of the Growth Hub, potentially at its next meeting.

Reason(s) for Recommendations

5. Decisions taken through the urgency procedures are required to be reported to the next available Committee meeting.

Statutory and Policy Implications

6. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. It is recommended that the Committee notes the content of the report and the response to the consultation.

Celia Morris
Group Manager, Corporate Strategy

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
Geoff George ext 72046

Constitutional Comments

This report is for noting only.

Financial Comments [SEM 19/12/2014]

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

The Strategy and related documentation concerning the development of the Hub by the D2N2 LEP can be viewed here: <http://www.d2n2lep.org/Growth-Hub/strategy-consultation>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All

Appendix 1

This matter is being dealt with by:

Geoff George

Reference:

T 0115 977 2046

E geoff.george@nottscc.gov.uk

W nottinghamshire.gov.uk



Patrick Keen
Growth Hub Manager
D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership
D2N2 (c/o DNCC)
8 Experian Way
Nottingham
NG2 1EP

4th December 2014

Dear Patrick

D2N2 Growth Hub – Strategy Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above. The requested form has been completed and this letter offers further detailed comment on the Strategy as requested.

Overall, Nottinghamshire County Council is supportive of the concept and would offer every encouragement and support in its further detailed development as the Council can see the considerable value of the Growth Hub in facilitating business growth across the LEP area. Before responding to the Strategy In detail, I have some general comments.

It is acknowledged that the detail is to be developed so the lack of clarity as to the precise model is awaited. However there are some references throughout the Strategy to an implied model (particularly where staff appointments are referenced) and the Council would reserve its position until the model has been suitably clarified.

If the initial phase from December 2014 to March 2015 is being deemed to be a pilot phase then its objectives, expectations and operational aspects need to be clearly set out beforehand, accompanied by rigorous targets and monitoring to allow it to be critically and openly evaluated with partners. The pilot phase can then self-evidently help set the operating and commissioning parameters for the next phase from April 2015.

Setting the activities of the D2N2 Growth Hub within the context of other overlapping Hubs will be crucial from the point of view of businesses wishing to establish a single point of contact for advice. Impacting potentially upon Nottinghamshire, there are proposals to establish a Hub for the Nottingham area and another for the Sheffield City Region LEP, the latter also impacting on parts of Derbyshire. It will be vitally important to ensure that business support is mutually co-ordinated, that intelligence is shared, that agreement is reached on coverage and that operationally, a set of protocols are agreed. The County Council is anxious to ensure that Nottinghamshire businesses do not lose out in any potential confusion over overlapping areas and we would be happy to continue to discuss this matter with you and support discussions with the other proposed Hubs. I am in touch with both the City Council and the SCR LEP over their proposals.

The Council's comments on matters of detail within the Strategy may be summarised as follows (based on the headings in the Strategy):

Introduction

It would be helpful to set the tone with some additional brief context about the Government's / BIS' expectations for Growth Hub's generally and the resources made available to the LEP through the Growth Deal to support its delivery. This will help drive the development of the model on a LEP-wide basis, bringing a strong critical mass to the Hub's operation and reinforces the LEP's identity. Within this context, the Hub can and should be able to respond flexibly to meet the particular needs of businesses from across the D2N2 LEP area.

The bullet points referenced here might also reflect the ambitions of the Hub to influence and drive improvements in the quality of business support across the area and to ensure that in the longer term, that businesses across the area have equal access to the full range of support.

What will it do

I would suggest that under section (a) an additional point iii be added here as follows:

- Seeking feedback on how the support can be improved and what is lacking from the available business support offer?

I would also suggest under section (b) that an additional point be added as follows:

- how collectively might gaps in provision and any duplication be addressed?

How will it do it

The programme plan alludes to a model and the deployment of staff etc but is largely conceptual in the Strategy and lacks an approach as to how the pilot phase will be transitioned into the full version and what is proposed. This should be explained further as referenced in the general points above.

Sustainability

Given the above, the section on sustainability reads largely a list of possibilities for future funding. No budgetary details are referenced here and there is a limited sense of what reality may be placed against the suggested funding opportunities. The exploration of efficiencies might also be usefully referenced here through measures like co-hosting, pooled budgets from groupings of partners etc.

EU funding is suitably referenced but you will be aware of the time lag and the issues as relate to the opt-ins of the national schemes which may impact on delivery from March 2015.

Delivery

The initial content here doesn't fully justify the name as this section simply reflects on perhaps self-evident issues as being the factors for success. The latter "3 key ways" section helps reflect on what will be provided but begs some clarity as to how and what needs to be put in place to deliver this. It is accepted that the Strategy document may not be the place for such detail but it will need to be developed quickly, in parallel with the pilot phase.

Under 1(b) – Given that studies and feedback from businesses generally suggest a preference for a conversation (initially at least beyond or in addition to web information) the telephone helpline may draw significant interest. Planning for this over the immediate pilot phase and thence roll-out will be key. We might explore some help directly and could explore the initial contact at least via the Council’s contact centre staff for example but regardless, this issue is one where significant resources may need to be deployed.

This section is the first to reference “staff” which is somewhat in isolation and I suggest this needs a degree of clarification in terms of the model and thence in terms of detail – ie how many staff, the structure, gradings, recruited to which organisation(s), on what terms, reporting arrangements, etc.

It is suggested that generally, businesses are likely to use (in order) social media / web-based means to initially check for what’s available; followed closely by a telephone call and thence referrals for a visit or meeting. Actual business drop-ins to “new” centres are unlikely to be significant unless the advisors are (co-)located within business centres or within areas such as industrial estates. Further points are made on this issue below but as a general principle, it is suggested that the finances available be focused on resourcing the above prime routes of contact.

Beneficiaries

Of the bullet points referencing the types of businesses to be supported, the County Council would generally welcome a presumption that the Hub supports start-ups, expanding businesses and those creating quality jobs, particularly those paying at or above the Living Wage. The cross-relationship with the D2N2 LEP’s SEP is generally sensible given the Hub’s potentially significant contribution in assisting the LEP meet its targets.

Activities / Venues / Geography

While I suggest it is likely that drop-in facilities would not be the main contact route for the Hub, where they are proposed (and where advisors may be located) it would make good sense to house Hub personnel in places with ease of access and where significant business concentrations exist. One possibility would be to explore a co-location within enterprise / innovation centres. This may require some logistical discussion but through its management agreement with Oxford Innovation, the County Council could usefully explore the possibilities in Nottinghamshire. Other such Centres exist across Derbyshire

Having any Hub personnel hypothecated to set defined sub-areas within the LEP area may not help in managing the overall expectations of the Hub. I would advise some flexibility in staff deployment so that the Hub can be as responsive to demand as possible and deploy any specialist support to where it was required pan-LEP.

You will also know that the LEADER programmes have now been approved and that work continues on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) . There are for example, proposals mooted for rural business advisors and the County Council is exploring the hosting of LEADER funded posts and we will be looking to further strengthen the close relationship with the Hub offer through these routes.

Related, the Council would support the branding which preserved the D2N2 LEP Growth Hub perspective and would suggest too that care is required to avoid the “post code lottery” of some services being of better or different intensity, range and / or quality across the LEP wide area. Simply offering what is only locally available to that business runs somewhat contrary to the overall ambition of the Hub.

In terms of the next steps, in addition to the support from the Economic Development team, the Council would be willing to explore some potential practical help both from within the authority on key areas of delivery. While this will require some discussion with the respective managers, the areas we might indicatively suggest include:

- Business Engagement. We have already facilitated access to the Nottinghamshire Business Engagement Group run by the Economic Development Team and that remains an open offer. We also have good links with a number of businesses across the County and can liaise with them further on the Hub.
- Performance Management / KPIs. We may be able to offer someone from the Council's Performance Management and Benchmarking Programme if required.
- Helpline Call-routing arrangements. As referenced above.
- Website development and testing. Given the development of the CRM system and website, a colleague from the Council's website development side might be able to act as a critical friend in its development

Finally, as this consultation falls outside of the cycle of the Council's Economic Development Committee, this response has been the subject of consultation with members but the Growth Hub will be the subject of a report to a future Committee meeting. As mentioned in recent discussions, we would like to offer you the opportunity of attending such a meeting to offer further details of the Growth Hub.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff George
Economic Development
Nottinghamshire County Council