

19th January 2016**Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****FEASIBILITY STUDY WITH NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY –
INNOVATION OUTREACH SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Committee on a pilot project with Nottingham Trent University (NTU) to increase the accessibility of university led business support in the Mansfield area.
2. To request a contribution of £7,500 towards a joint feasibility study which builds on this work by investigating the need, demand and funding options for a proposed 'innovation outreach service' across the county.

Background

2. Last summer, working with NTU, the 'Summer of Design' was piloted in Mansfield Library. The economic development and library services worked with NTU to develop and deliver the 'Summer of Design'. With the exception of officer time and the use of the facilities, there was no cost to the County Council.
3. The 'Summer of Design' was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 'Future Factory' project established by NTU to support the growth and development of small to medium sized enterprises. All ERDF projects are time limited and 'Future Factory' ceased in September 2015.
4. The purpose of the 'Summer of Design' was to pilot a mechanism to increase the accessibility of university led business support for small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Mansfield area. The partners would now like to give consideration to the replication of this model and the wider potential benefits which could be delivered across the county.
5. The 'Summer of Design' was delivered over an eight week period and consisted of a launch event and weekend exhibition (open to members of the public), followed by a programme of design and product design workshops.
6. Encouragingly, over 110 delegates in total attended the 'Summer of Design' including the launch event and three day exhibition. The workshops were attended by 27 SMEs from the Mansfield area, especially promising as the events were staged throughout the summer holiday period and at relatively short notice. 6 free workshops were delivered, topics were specifically geared towards businesses requiring design and product design expertise, such as 3D software and

introduction to new technologies enabling enhanced use of software and processes.

7. The formal, written delegate feedback from the 'Summer of Design' was extremely positive and as a result, the partners believe there is now merit in conducting a full feasibility study to build on the success of the Mansfield pilot. This proposed feasibility study would evaluate the need, demand, funding and sustainability options for an outreach programme of university-led business support across the county. The feasibility study would also give due consideration to the types of support that would be most welcomed by SMEs across the county e.g. increasing productivity, embedding proven technologies new to SMEs.
8. If as a result of the development of a market-led outreach service, the number of SMEs who engage with and uptake university-led business support could be increased, this would bring an economic benefit to the county. A market-led outreach service could also support the changing rural economy and increase the focus of delivering innovation support to businesses in non-city locations.
9. One important area to be explored within the feasibility study is the evaluation of a mobile innovation service which would complement existing county infrastructure e.g. libraries and innovation centres. The library service could obtain a decommissioned mobile library or youth service vehicle. It is proposed that the adaptation and usage of this vehicle as a mobile innovation service would form a key part of the feasibility study.
10. Additional benefits of the outreach service could include better links between communities and universities, encouraging greater uptake of further and higher education and retention of graduates; up-skilling of the local community; access to innovation facilities for schools and local community groups; access to enterprise support within local communities. These opportunities will be taken into account during the feasibility study.
11. Timescales for the completion of the proposed feasibility study would be approximately six months, the estimated total cost is £22,500. NTU have offered to meet two thirds of the costs (£15,000) and it is proposed that the County Council contribute one third (£7,500) towards this total. The contribution from the County Council's economic development budget would be made from in-year savings from the 2015/16 financial year.
12. The bulk of the £22,500 (£3,500 per month) will be for direct staff costs and approximately £1,500 is estimated for travel and delivery costs – including visits to demonstration facilities elsewhere. The closure of the long standing 'Future Factory' project has inevitably led to the redundancy or redeployment of members of the project team who were employed by NTU on a fixed term contract basis for the life of the project. NTU have created a new full-time and fixed-term project specific role solely to undertake the feasibility study, and one of the members of the 'Future Factory' team has been redeployed into this new role exclusively to undertake the feasibility study on behalf of NTU and the County Council. This role would otherwise not exist within the core NTU staffing budget, and this approach facilitates the retention of relevant skills and knowledge. The feasibility study would

be led by the County Council and NTU who would work together to manage and steer the project.

13. Members may recall that the universities of Derby, Nottingham and Nottingham Trent are working collaboratively to develop and deliver projects funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). These projects are intended to operate pan-LEP and could be an important component of a cohesive innovation outreach offer for SMEs. The D2N2 Growth Hub would have an important signposting role in raising awareness of new projects to support the growth and development of SME businesses across the LEP area.

Reason(s) for Recommendations

14. The 'Summer of Design' was a successful pilot which increased the accessibility of university-led business support for SMEs in a non-city location. In order to build on this pilot and consider how such an approach might be developed to bring greater benefit to the county economy, a full assessment of need, demand and funding options is proposed. The feasibility study would include the evaluation of the decommissioned library/youth vehicle if appropriate.

Statutory and Policy Implications

15. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, 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 within the body of the report.

Financial implications

16. An allocation of £7,500 towards the collaborative feasibility study with NTU will be met from in-year savings from the Economic Development Service 2015/16 budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Economic Development Committee approves the allocation of £7,500 (from in year savings) towards the collaborative feasibility study with NTU to evaluate the need, demand, funding and sustainability options for an outreach programme of university-led business support across the county.

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Constitutional Comments [SLB 08/01/2016]

Economic Development Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments [SES 07/01/16]

The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background Papers

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All