

## **Work Hubs (Executive Decision)**

*Assistant Director*      *Helen Rutter, Communities*  
*Service Manager:*      *Helen Rutter, Area Development Manager- East*  
*Lead Officer:*            *Pam Williams, Neighbourhood Development Officer – Economy, Area East*  
*Contact Details:*        [pam.williams@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:pam.williams@southsomerset.gov.uk) or 01963 435020

### **Purpose of the Report**

To seek Members support to allocate funds to support the development of a work hub in Area East

### **Public Interest**

This complements our work to encourage viable and growing businesses in the villages and market towns in Area East and thereby increases the potential for more local job creation and employment opportunities

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) To allocate £8,000 from the Members Discretionary Budget ring fenced to support the development of work hubs in Area East, pending the bringing back of a worked up proposal to the Committee in June 2015.

### **Background**

Members will be aware of ongoing work to support businesses particularly in town centres through schemes like the Retail Support Initiative. Preliminary discussions on preferred premises for a retail incubator scheme are held pending the outcome of negotiations by a commercial end user (expansion for an existing business) on those premises.

In parallel with this, visits were undertaken at the end of last year to business hubs in Wells, Frome and Langport, with a view to developing a proposal for the vacant office space at Churchfield. This is part of a wider, corporate look at how we support micro and small businesses, by the provision of office space, with good broadband speeds and other support services to help them to develop and expand into successful businesses.

The Frome business hub is highly regarded and generally considered to be a good model opening in 2007 it was the first shared co-working space to be created outside of London. It was full within 4 months of opening and has remained at full occupancy since. A major expansion took place at the end of last year more than doubling the size of the Frome hub to 14,00sq ft. It offers flexible 'easy in, easy out' terms. The space comprises a mix of hot desks within open plan office space, work pods (100 sq. ft. with own door) and studio offices that are modular and available in multiples of 200 sq. ft. Drive, flexibility, altruistic approach, town centre location and vibrant atmosphere are some of the successful ingredients of the Frome hub

### **Progress Update**

For a variety of reasons the Churchfield accommodation is not a suitable venue from which to promote a work hub, but very early stage discussions have commenced about the development of work hub on another site. Whilst initial discussions, conducted confidentially, are encouraging, at this stage it would be premature to anticipate whether this scheme will

come to fruition. Some interim measures, such as the provision of one or more bookable computers, available to businesses, within Churchfield or other public buildings is also being investigated.

Members are asked to prioritise work to develop a work hub in town centre locations to maximise accessibility as follows:

1. Wincanton
2. Castle Cary
3. Bruton
4. Rural settlements

Depending on the detail of the scheme brought forward, it may be eligible for grant assistance through the LEADER programme, due to be launched in June 2015, or other Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) promoted funding such as European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Details of whether timescales will be compatible and how to bid for these funding streams is awaited.

In the meantime it is felt important to maintain impetus and Members are asked to demonstrate their commitment to bringing forward a scheme locally, through a seedcorn funding allocation.

There is an unallocated balance of £8,000 in the Members Discretionary budget. As a first step, it is recommended that Members ring-fence this sum for the development of work hubs, pending consideration of a worked up proposal for this funding. This proposal could include offering businesses a 'hot desk' with computer access. By offering this low cost flexible solution it may also help us to assess potential demand locally for such provision. In addition to the allocation requested from Area East Committee, officers will look at the possibility of other area and corporate funding sources depending on the detail of the emerging scheme.

### **Financial Implications**

The Members Discretionary budget is a revenue budget with an unallocated balance of £8,000. If the recommendation is supported the 2014/15 budget will be fully allocated

### **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:** none