

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
7 February 2017

Subject: **SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS NETWORKS**

All Wards
Portfolio Holder for Economic Development & Finance: Councillor P R Wilkinson

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 This report outlines a proposal to develop a grant scheme specifically to support the further development of business networks across the District. It requests approval to allocate £40,000 from the Economic Development Fund to support the delivery of this initiative, which supports the Hambleton Economic Strategy (2014) themes of Business Support and Vibrant Market Towns.
- 1.2 With almost 4,000 businesses in our area across 31 sectors, business networks are particularly important. They not only provide an opportunity for introductions, but also a vehicle for providing useful information to businesses which they can sometimes miss. It has been evidenced that business networks improve communication, encourage mutual support between businesses, promote collaboration and assist in strengthening local supply chains and improve resilience and business confidence. They also provide a mechanism for the Council to engage with businesses, promote events and initiatives and build positive relationships.
- 1.3 There are 10 business networks which exist currently / are in development across Hambleton as follows:
 - Thirsty Thursday in Stokesley,
 - First Monday based in and around Northallerton,
 - The Northallerton Small Business Group,
 - Northallerton Retail and Business Forum,
 - Thirsk and District Business Association,
 - YO60ners/YO61ners,
 - Handlesbanken Ladies Group, Northallerton
 - Great Ayton Business Forum
 - The Easingwold Town Business Group (in development),
 - Bedale Business Group (in development).
- 1.4 The Council has established links with all of the networks and it has been identified that access to resources to support them to deliver meetings, events and effectively promote themselves to increase their membership is a common challenge. There are generally one or two businesses within the network which take the lead and put additional time in on a voluntary basis as they are committed to driving the networks forward.
- 1.5 The proposed grant scheme would be available to the business networks to specifically support their further development and effectiveness. As the business networks are at differing stages in their development it is anticipated that a range of activities could be supported under the scheme – from website development to effective use of social media to improve marketing and promotion.

2.0 LINK TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

- 2.1 This project supports the Council's priority to support local economic growth. Further support for business networks is a project which has been included in the Council's Economic Strategy, Hambleton 'A Place to Grow' within the Business Support Priority Theme.

3.0 RISK ASSESSMENT:

- 3.1 There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 The costs of the scheme are included within the Economic Development Fund approved by Cabinet in December 2014 and have been earmarked for 2017-2018.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Specific criteria and grant conditions will be developed as part of the scheme.

6.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 Equality and Diversity Issues and have been considered however there are no issues associated with this report.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves
- a) the allocation of £40,000 from the Economic Development Fund to establish a delegated grant scheme to support business networks; and
 - b) that the delegated grant scheme is managed by the Business & Economy team who will develop detailed guidance and eligibility criteria.
 - c) subject to the details set out in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 the grant criteria be agreed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

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DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY AND PLANNING

Background papers:	None
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