

Review of York Business Week 2021

Summary

1. York Business Week (YBW) is an annual event celebrating and supporting businesses in the city. The 2021 event was led by the Council's Economic Growth Team, delivered in partnership with York's business membership organisations and city partners.
2. An evaluation of Business Week 2021 was undertaken through a survey which sought to gather feedback from York's business community on last year's programme of events. There were 35 events attracting over 600 delegates. The Business Conference, networking events, peer to peer support, leadership and wellbeing were the most popular events and topics. The week was particularly popular with small businesses, with fifty eight percent of delegates from small companies of 1 to 5 employees, and reached a new audience with over 60% of delegates being first time attendees at council events.
3. Based on feedback there are a number of ideas to further develop the event in the coming years including programme and delivery infrastructure development and a review of the YBW website. The operating model options include a similar style event to the last YBW with the council providing virtual events and partners having the option to deliver in-person events, as delegates flagged a preference for a mix of virtual and hybrid events. Another option is to reduce the number of Council events that take place during a week-long YBW and for the Council to also deliver a series of events throughout the year akin to the Young Entrepreneurs event that took place this month, and, the business support events that the Council's Growth Managers are planning for this quarter. It is proposed that the Council's Economic Growth team undertakes further engagement with York's business membership

groups before taking a report back to the Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning on this in the spring.

Recommendations

4. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - 1) Note the contents of the report
 - 2) Consider the alternate operating models for York Business Week moving forwards (paras 16 – 20)
 - 3) Support further engagement with partners on the future operating model for York Business Week with a report coming back to a Decision Session in the spring

Reason: To support the Council's delivery of business-focused events across York.

Report

5. York Business Week is an annual event celebrating and supporting businesses in the city. Historically the event has been delivered by the Business Events Teams at Make It York and delivered on a commercial basis with sponsor partners.
6. The recent re-amalgamation of the Make it York Business Team with City of York Council's Economic Growth Team meant that last year's event was delivered on a free of charge basis by the Economic Growth Team with partners including the Federation of Small Businesses, York & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, York BID, Make it York, the University of York, York St John University, York & North Yorkshire LEP and the Ad:venture Programme.
7. The aims of the event were to:
 - Inspire and celebrate local business success
 - Deliver a series of virtual events to address current business aims
 - Understand the middle and longer term opportunities for growth
 - Showcase the Council and partners' practical support for local companies.

8. The week-long programme of activities featured a mixture of 35 virtual and in-person events attracting over 600 delegates and included sessions/workshops on skills, start up support, marketing, networking, mental health & wellbeing, business growth, sustainability, access to finance, carbon reduction and retail trends to highlight a few.
9. The week opened with the Business Week Conference, the Council's flagship event, and featured talks on the Good Business Charter, Local Economic Insights, and the new Labour Market. There was also talks on Reshaping the Economy and supporting Business Recovery along with a panel Q&A session.
10. As part of York Business Week, the Economic Growth Team also secured a visit to Haxby from the national Small Business Saturday (SBS) campaign fleet. The SBS campaign last year was titled 'Small Business, Big Thank You', which was especially pertinent after a difficult couple of years for businesses as a result of the pandemic, and is also entirely suited to the wide range of small and micro businesses in the area. This took place on Tuesday 9th November 2021 and was a great opportunity to showcase local businesses and the local area in the run up to Christmas. The full day event saw the arrival of the fleet - an electric car, scooter and a van, and 6 businesses were interviewed about their businesses and products on local radio. The event was well attended and the national organiser described it a one of the best outings they had during the entire campaign.
11. York Business Week delegates were asked to complete an evaluation survey to give feedback as well as an indication of what they considered to be the more popular events. The main evaluation points from the survey include:
 - Over 45% attended 1-2 events and over 40% attended 3-5 events
 - Over 50% delegates wanted to attend more events but didn't have the time
 - The Business Conference, networking events, peer to peer support, leadership and wellbeing were the most popular events and topics
 - Delegates would like to see more hybrid events
 - 58% of delegates were from small companies (1-5 employees)

- Over 60% of delegates were first time delegates to Council events with all saying they are likely to attend other events
 - It was felt there were too many events crammed into the week.
12. **Costs** – This year’s event was delivered on a very limited budget with the only significant cost being a basic update and development of the YBW website. The website is held, maintained and updated by an external company and the cost of this was £560 +VAT. The Council’s virtual events were delivered via existing virtual meeting platforms, and partners who delivered in-person events met all costs associated with room hire, refreshments and AV etc.
13. **Benefits** – The survey feedback suggests businesses value the business support the week provides and anecdotal feedback gathered in conversations and across networking sessions suggest the same:
- Several businesses that attended the Leadership Challenge said it was the best thing they could have done with their new business and it gave them the confidence to successfully implement ideas they were initially hesitant about
 - The Ad:Venture start up programme delivered intensive start up business support to over 14 businesses
 - The CYC Sustainable Building in-person event sold out and was a very popular event with delegates attending from across York and North Yorkshire
 - The Small Business Saturday visit directly supported 6 local businesses from the Haxby and Wigginton area with marketing and promotional support through local radio airtime and SBS promotions
 - The Growth Managers’ peer to peer sessions were already hugely popular but the YBW showcase gave them added exposure and appeal to attract even more delegates on an ongoing basis. Themes tackled to date include: sales; marketing; branding; social media; SEO; data protection; start-up support; skills; HR; furlough; working remotely; legal; R&D tax credits; and investments
 - Partner events such as The BID’s session on the future of retail were well attended and provided high quality and thought provoking external speakers

- The business conference provides a local and regional economic overview and informs stakeholders of the Council's strategic approach to guiding the development of York's economy.

The Future of York Business Week

14. Historically YBW was delivered by the Events and Business Teams at MIY on a commercial basis. Special efforts were made to find sponsorship partners which generated up to £20,000 to deliver the week long programme of activities. This allowed MIY to employ an AV company, hire venues for the different events, a host for the business conference, and provide lunch and refreshments. The Events Team facilitated the delivery function and the Graphic Design and Web Teams provided printed promotional material and website development and updates. However, this requires a significant time and resource commitment to curate and deliver a full week of events in this fashion. Since the re-amalgamation of the inward investment function with the Council's Economic Growth Team there is no longer the available resources to secure sponsorship or the personnel to curate and deliver an intensive in-person program in the way the larger team at MIY had done previously.
15. In reflection of this, and combined with the pandemic and ensuing lockdown, the 2021 week's activities switched to a virtual platform which eliminated most of the costs associated with venue hire, refreshments and AV. This allowed the Economic Growth Team and partners to deliver York Business Week relatively cost free. If York Business Week was to operate as it had previously been done through Make it York, it would have required a considerable budget (c. £15,000) and personnel to maintain a similar in-person delivery standard.
16. The success of this approach and the positive feedback received means that consideration should be given to replicating this operating model moving forwards, allowing a cost effective approach with partners that maximises participation through a mixture of virtual and in-person events. The Council is able to deliver most of its events on a virtual basis and partners have the option of in-person or hybrid events where they can cover any delivery costs.
17. The benefit of this model is clear in that the council incurs modest costs and any other costs are spread across the partnership. However, the caveat is we lose some operational control and it would make sense to secure support from the Council's Web Services team to update and develop the YBW website as there are likely to be costs associated with

this should we continue to work with an external company. We can also explore how the YBW website could be developed to promote Council and partner business events across the year. Moving forwards, we would need more lead in time to strengthen and align the delivery model with partners.

18. In addition to this approach there is the option to reduce the number of Council events that take place during a week-long YBW and spread them over a 12 month period. This would allow a targeted focus on particular themes throughout the year, and mean that events during business week are not having to compete for delegate time during a busy schedule of events. It would also allow the team to spread the required resources across annually rather than an intensive focus for 4 or 5 months of the year.
19. The aforementioned approach also has the added benefit of allowing time and resources to focus on other key work priorities such as ongoing work with different sectors including roundtables, which enhances the Council's business relationships with local companies and provides a huge amount of business intelligence as we have seen with the recent rail sector roundtables including:
 - Garnering support, advice and intelligence to support the Great British Railways bid to bring the new rail HQ to the city
 - Starting an initiative with Siemens, the National Railway Museum and the Railway Industry Association to create awareness of the rail sector as an employer in schools across the city
 - Harnessing the collective industry and National Skills Academy for Rail ambition to create a Rail Skills Centre of Excellence in York, and incorporating this into the city's Skills Strategy
 - Introducing York's colleges to the rail sector to work with students on delivering a catering service to a local operator and participate in business and sustainability projects
 - Working with industry and the York Career Ready programme to provide work placements and internship opportunities to local students
20. It is therefore proposed that the Council's Economic Growth team undertakes further engagement with York's business membership groups and city partners to develop the future operating model options

for York Business Week outlined above, with a report back to the Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning in the spring.

The Role of Economic Development

21. Economic development plays a critical role in driving economic growth, supporting good quality employment and facilitating an improvement in residents' quality of life. The Economic Growth Team play a pivotal role in enabling and sustaining employment in the city contributing to a successful local economy. The Business Week programme, whether through an intensive week of events or targeted events throughout the year, is a key tool to do this, and coupled with existing work through sector roundtables, provides a focal point for key issues and targeted support.

Council Plan

22. The Business Week activities in which ever form, continues to addresses the following outcomes from the Council Plan:
 - Good health and wellbeing;
 - Well-paid and an inclusive economy;
 - A better start for children and young people;
 - A greener and cleaner city;
 - Safe communities and culture for all; and,
 - An open and effective council.

Implications

- **Financial** – Potential staff costs associated with bringing the YBW website in house
- **Human Resources (HR)** – no implications;
- **One Planet Council / Equalities** – our work positively supports the Council's equalities objectives;
- **Legal** – no implications;
- **Crime and Disorder** – no implications;
- **Information Technology (IT)** – no implications;
- **Property** – no direct implications.

Risk Management

There are no specific risks identified in respect of the recommendations.

Contact Details

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Report
Approved



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Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: n/a

List of Abbreviations Used in this Report:

AV – Audio visual
B2B – Business to business
BID – Business Improvement District
CYC – City of York Council
HQ – Headquarters
HR – Human resources
LEP – Local Enterprise Partnership
MIY – Make it York
R&D – Research and development
SBS – Small Business Saturday
SEO – Search engine optimisation
YBW – York Business Week