

Executive

25 June 2015

Report of the Economic & City Development
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Online Business / E-Commerce Scrutiny Review Final Report – Cover Report

Summary

1. This cover report presents the final report – Appendix 1 – from the Online Business / E-Commerce Scrutiny Review and asks the Executive to approve the recommendations arising from the review.

Recommendations

2. Having considered the Final Report and its annexes, the Executive is recommended to:
 - i. Approve the recommendations shown in paragraph 11 below.

Reason: To conclude the Scrutiny Review in line with CYC Scrutiny procedures and protocols.

Background to the Review

3. At a meeting of ECDOSC on 28 January 2014 the Committee considered a briefing paper on a proposed scrutiny review of Online Business / E-Commerce in York.
4. Increasingly the traditional High Street retail sector is having to explore a multi-channel approach to reaching its markets but independent businesses may not have access to the technology or skills to take advantage of new ways of earning custom.
5. The Committee agreed there was a need to encourage traditional retail and independent businesses to make the most of newer

technologies and telecommunications and that this topic was suitable for review. The Committee agreed to set up a Task Group made up of the following Members to carry out the work on their behalf.

Task Group Members:

- Cllr Anna Semlyen
 - Cllr Ian Cuthbertson
 - Cllr Joe Watt (later replaced by Cllr Neil Barnes)
6. At a meeting in March 2014 the Committee agreed the following review remit.

Aim

Identify how City of York Council may better support city businesses to develop their online opportunities and improve their sales, marketing and profitability.

Objectives

- i. Identify gaps in current support for online business and commerce
- ii. Identify any barriers the business community may face to increasing online working and possible solutions;
- iii. Investigate how a business, using online methods, can increase its profitability;
- iv. Investigate mentoring / matching opportunities
- v. Examine the opportunities for funding.

Review Findings

7. Members were disappointed to note that despite numerous efforts to gather information through an online survey, meetings with professional organisations and pop-up business cafes, there was little hard evidence to highlight what support business people actually wanted. This made it difficult to identify meaningful outcome targets.
8. However, having considered in detail the work of the Bishopthorpe Road Traders' Association to promote the "Bishy Road" brand the

Task Group agreed there would be value in trying to extend this model to other areas of the city. Task Group Members identified the corporate model adopted by traders in Bishopthorpe Road as a way to develop the online involvement of businesses as it offered a relatively easy way to help businesses and business growth.

Review Recommendations

9. After considering the evidence, the Task Group identified their recommendations, which were subsequently discussed by the full Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 11 March 2015.
10. In considering the review recommendations the Committee recognised that a number of them would previously have been made to the Economic Development Unit, but as a result of the introduction of Make It York some of the recommendations would need to be picked up by that body. Ideally the Committee would have welcomed the opportunity to feed in their views prior to the Service Level Agreement being agreed. However, due to the April Cabinet meeting being cancelled this has not been possible.
11. As a consequence the Committee endorsed the following recommendations. That City of York Council should put in place a plan with timescales to:
 - i. Ask Cabinet to amend the Service Level Agreement for Make It York to include:
 - a) Use the success of the Bishopthorpe Road Traders' Association to encourage other neighbourhood trader groups to collaborate on social media projects to increase business and profitability;
 - b) Liaise with volunteer ambassadors to encourage local traders' groups to engage in joint efforts and form local associations;
 - c) Use social media to spread news about deals, events and skills sharing e.g. digital newsletters and blogs;

- d) Link to a range of networking Facebook and Meet Up groups with short descriptions of their purpose on its York Means Business website;
 - e) Support continued business advice events along with the Local Enterprise Partnership and feature pop-up events on social media and the Council's residents' newsletters such as Your Voice;
 - a) Provide wider training in social media and online skills where appropriate in bids for financial support to the relevant LEPs.
 - ii. Encourage Make it York to review and add to its business emails database particularly for small traders and to email regular information to businesses on online skills training opportunities.
 - iii. Encourage Make it York to include online and digital skills training as part of its marketing to local businesses so as to develop a "York Online" brand approach to help local businesses make better use of online marketing and communications.
 - iv. Ask the Interim Director of City and Environmental Services to:
 - a) Facilitate road closures and street events to stimulate other collaborative groupings between traders and other organisations in a locality;
 - b) Pre-publicise to traders, residents' groups, residents' forums and Councillors through Council channels forthcoming road closures for city/regional events (e.g. European Mobility Week, 16-22 September 2015 www.mobilityweek.eu) and encourage local traders or voluntary groups to combine and communicate to each other around such events.
 - v. Ask the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods to facilitate circulating by email guides on running street parties to support such events to local trader and residents' groups and list the guides on a Council website on a page about economic development through street events along with

suitable case studies (eg <http://www.bishyroad.net>);

- vi. Ask the Director of Customer and Business Support Services to:
 - a) Ensure WiFi availability in the city centre is publicised and clearly signposted;
 - b) Examine the possibility (with Make It York where necessary) of engaging occupants of the proposed Guildhall Digital Hub to promote training in social media and online skills in communities across the city. Any group eventually formed to address this should include community outreach and respond to the recommendations arising from the recent scrutiny review on Disabled Access.

Council Plan

12. This review is linked to the create jobs and grow the economy element of the Council Plan 2011-15.

Options

13. Having considered the Final Report at Appendix 1 and its associated annexes, Executive may choose to amend and/or approve, or reject the recommendations arising from the review as set out in paragraph 11 of this report.

Implications and Risk Management

14. The implications and risks associated with the recommendations above are detailed in paragraphs 96-99 of the Final Report at Appendix 1.

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Online Business /E-Commerce Scrutiny Review Final Report