

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economic Development and Rural Affairs
Date:	22 January 2013
Title:	Smarter Working Centres
Reference:	4530
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

Contact name: Hannah Payne

Tel: 01962 846830

Email: hannah.payne@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- a) The purpose of this paper is to provide background to the County Council supported network of Smarter Working Centres, including their success during the credit crunch but, due to the significantly reduced demand for the service in 2012, recommend the closure of the network.

1.2. This paper seeks to

- *Provide background information about the Smarter Working Centres project and evaluate the performance of the project*
- *Review the financial and resource implications of running the project*
- *Recommend the closure of the project.*

2. Contextual information

2.1. In October 2009 Hampshire County Council established a network of Smarter Working Centres (SWCs) across Hampshire as part of their Recession Response Programme.

2.2. These are low cost, low-commitment drop-in office spaces which can be booked by the hour, day or week. They offer a wi-fi enabled professional working environment, with workspaces, meeting and training rooms available for hire. Customers can either check availability and book online using the dedicated SWC website, or they can drop-in to the centres.

2.3. The first centre opened in February 2010, and the aim was to help to provide start-up companies with an option between working from home, and signing a long-term contract with an office.

- 2.4. In total there have been nine Smarter Working Centres in Hampshire. The centres have been spread across the county and located in Fordingbridge, Eastleigh, Fareham, Lyndhurst, Basingstoke, Aldershot, Gosport, Havant and Portsmouth. The Centres tend to be a dedicated room for flexible use within an existing business unit.
- 2.5. A written contractual agreement was in place for each SWC for the initial 12 month period. There is no longer any contractual agreement between Hampshire County Council and the SWCs.
- 2.6. The centres are run on a franchise model where Hampshire County Council supports the network with marketing materials, and conducts central, network-wide marketing, and the centres themselves are responsible for local marketing.
- 2.7. Between April and September 2011 a new marketing campaign was launched by Hampshire County Council for the SWCs. This gained widespread coverage for the network in a range of free and paid newspapers across Hampshire and also countywide business publications.

3. Finance

- 3.1. A total of £56,195 has been spent on the Smarter Working Centres project, £27,341 on the Centres themselves and £28,854 on marketing and website maintenance.
- 3.2. Website maintenance is undertaken by local web company Webfeet and an annual agreement is in place for a fully maintained website for £1,860.

4. Performance

- 4.1. Occupancy targets for each SWC had been set as 25% occupancy after 12 months of opening and 40% occupancy after 24 months of opening.
- 4.2. Since opening, the network has had 720 bookings by businesses in total. Although not reaching occupancy targets, bookings were steady in 2010 and 2011 but have decreased in 2012.
- 4.3. In 2012 there have been only 83 bookings across the whole network (14 via the website and 69 via walk-ins and for internal use). 53 of these have been in the Basingstoke centre (14.5% occupancy), 26 in Fareham (7% occupancy), 3 in Eastleigh (1% occupancy) and 1 in Aldershot (0.3% occupancy). Havant, Gosport, Lyndhurst and Portsmouth have had no bookings in 2012.

5. Other key issues

- 5.1. Fordingbridge has moved out of the network having filled their vacant space on a more permanent basis.
- 5.2. The Havant and Gosport SWCs have also expressed that they no longer wish to operate within the network due to filling their space on a more permanent basis.
- 5.3. The network has been consulted with via invitation to a meeting at Hampshire County Council and by formal letter sent on 4 December 2012.
- 5.4. In terms of resourcing within the Economic Development Office this can vary to between one to two hours each week. This usually involves dealing with website enquiries from the public, liaising with Webfeet and the SWC Operators if any website maintenance issues arise, and preparing advertising copy if required.
- 5.5. However, in recent years a greater range of private sector provided managed workspace has become available in the marketplace, and the need for the SWC network has diminished.
- 5.6. As a result, the SWC network is now an unnecessary intervention which is a duplication and in competition with the private sector.

6. Future direction

- 6.1. Following agreement from all of the SWC Operators the website will be withdrawn and the network no longer promoted by Hampshire County Council.

7. Recommendation

That the success of the Smarter Working Centre (SWC) in providing support for businesses during the credit crunch and the recession be noted but, in recognition of the significantly reduced demand for the service in 2012, the network be closed and the project ended.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1 The proposals in this report have been developed with due regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Council's equality objectives. An assessment of the impacts in this service area can be found at [Reduce barriers to sustainable economic growth across Hampshire](#) and [Enable businesses to thrive in Hampshire](#).

It is considered that the issues covered by this report will not have impacts requiring further specific actions by the Council above those already established in its existing policies and working procedures.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. None

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? No impact

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? Not applicable