

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Decision Report**

Decision Maker:	Executive Member – Economic Development
Date of Decision:	1 March 2010
Decision Title:	Smarter Working Centre – Grant Application Approval
Decision Reference:	1374
Report From:	Director of Economic Development

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out the grant application received from the following prospective Smarter Working Centre operator:
 - Lyndhurst and District Community Association (Amount £9,000.00).
- 1.2. This paper seeks formal approval of the grant application referred to above.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The Smarter Working Centre (SWC) network forms part of the County Council's £425,000 LABGI (Local Authority Business Growth Incentive) investment in 'Recession Response' initiatives approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources on 9 April 2009.
- 2.2. The SWC network will be independently operated as a local agency-supported business hub (eg Business Link/Job Centre Plus) offering low-cost, bookable by the hour, internet-connected 'pay-as-you-go' professional work, meeting and training space for businesses of all sizes. A purpose-designed website will offer real-time booking, a secure payment facility and take-up reports.
- 2.3. The economic prosperity aim is that start-up businesses, existing home-based businesses, entrepreneurs and commuters will each consider use of a Smarter Working Centre. The availability of such centres is expected to encourage business start-ups, contribute to a reduction in micro-business failure rates and at the same time help reduce peak-time commuting and business travel.

- 2.4. The programme is being delivered by the eHampshire Partnership with the operational budget administered by the Economic Development Office.
- 2.5. The application forming part of this decision report has been assessed and achieved the minimum grant-criteria score (see Section 4, below, for applicant scores).

3. Finance

- 3.1. LABGI funding of £100,000 was approved and allocated to the Smarter Working Centre initiative by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources on 9 April 2009.
- 3.2. The overall allocated budget above includes a provision for the website development (£8,000) and a further small sum (£2,000) set-aside for related marketing and PR activities. A £90,000 match-funding amount has been provided to contribute to operator set-up and year one core operational activities.
- 3.3. A maximum match-fund amount of £9,000 can be applied for and allocated per applicant - £4,500 for set up costs/£4,500 for year one operational support. The latter is claimable in month six and twelve against evidenced and agreed spend. The grant application received and included in this Decision Report meets the main grant criteria and also complies with the grant limits.
- 3.4. Approval of the application will leave an unallocated amount of £43,022.22 in the SWC LABGI match-fund scheme.

4. Grant Application Summary

- 4.1. The applicant below has submitted an expression of interest and has subsequently – with guidance – completed the full Smarter Working Centre Grant Application. The detailed application – which contains such as reference statements, the required quotes/estimates from prospective suppliers of set-up equipment, etc – has been reviewed and assessed by (i) Chair of the eHampshire Partnership and (ii) the Economic Development Office Business Development Manager. A summary of the application follows.
- 4.2. **Lyndhurst SWC – Criteria Score 28.** This application is from Lyndhurst and District Community Association – a registered charity run by independent trustees recruited from local community, local enterprise or employer bodies. The association has been established for over 50 years and is a successful, respected organisation. Its most recent and notable achievement has been the securing of lottery funding that is being used to completely ‘renew’ the existing community centre and library building. The building redesign includes provision for the Smarter Working Centre in the form of dedicated (four work-spaces) and shared space (eg meeting/training, event and communal space). Investment in business level broadband (BT) and wireless connectivity forms

part of the commitment made by the association. Meet and greet services will be provided by Community reception and support staff who will be trained in the operation of the Smarter Working Centre website booking and payments system.

- 4.3. The location is in the heart of Lyndhurst, next to the Tourist Information Centre and a large car-park. Preliminary research conducted by the Association suggests there may also be use of the Smarter Working Centre by tourists to the town. The Association has close ties with the New Forest Business Partnership and also with the Parish and New Forest District Councils from whom a strong endorsement has been received. The refurbishment will ensure a pleasant and business-like working environment with modern amenities, which, supported by experienced local staff, should lead to an excellent customer-experience for Smarter Working Centre members. The plan is for the centre to be open by the end of March 2010. An open day is provisionally scheduled for 17 April.

5. Performance

- 5.1. Each of the grant applications put forward and approved for funding from the Smarter Working Centre LABGI funds will be administered and delivered by the proposing party, in this case the Lyndhurst and District Community Association.
- 5.2. The County Council Economic Development Office will monitor the delivery of these projects by means of regular progress reports from the project administrator (every six months from the commencement date). After 12 months' operation, each Smarter Working Centre operator will be formally reviewed against the agreed set of operational criteria. If successful, the Centre will retain its 'accredited' status for a further period of 12 months. A fee of £150 will be levied to cover administration costs.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1. **Risk One** – Smarter Working Centre Operator goes out of business – the grant scheme requires the applicant to provide cash-flow information, provide two references and obtain a letter of endorsement from the Local (District) Authority.
- 6.2. **Risk Two** – Take-up is not achieved at the required (sustainable) level – the requirement for match-funding, designed in local agency partnering plus regular review and the proposed annual accreditation should help minimise this possibility.
- 6.3. **Risk Three** – Quality/Service Levels are not maintained – the selection criteria guard against this possibility as does the on-going monitoring and annual accreditation. The website booking system also captures usage and member data and will be used as the basis for selective quality checks.

7. Recommendation

7.1. That the grant application listed below requesting funding from the Smarter Working Centre Recession-Response Initiative scheme be formally approved:

- Lyndhurst (Community Centre) £9,000.00.

Funding is approved subject to a requirement that the involvement of Hampshire County Council is acknowledged by the applicant in all publicity material.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

This proposal provides an opportunity for improved wellbeing and through reduced travel a positive contribution to 'quality of place'.

Allocation of funds under a Grants Scheme also require a formally approved clear set of criteria.

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.)

Document

Location

Grant Application Criteria & Score Sheet

<I:\Chief Executives\Economic Development\Tony C\Smarter Working Centres>

Individual Grant Application Forms (NB mostly completed 'off-line') and including supplier cost estimates etc. as evidence to substantiate the grant amount applied for)

Available for inspection on request at Hampshire County Council, Economic Development Office (Room 322), The Castle, Winchester S023 8UJ

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1. An SWC EIA has been completed and was reviewed on 11 September by the Departmental EIA representative for completeness.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. Not directly – though may possibly make a small contribution by way of providing a local hub for those in and seeking work opportunities.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

When established, the Smarter Working Centre Network will provide additional opportunities to work and meet close to where individuals choose to live. The initiative encourages more sustainable working practices and should reduce peak-time commuting and to a lesser extent business travel (together accounting for 38% of transport initiated CO₂ emissions).

With the centres being established in existing buildings, this provides limited opportunity to influence building energy-efficiency. However, SWC IT guidelines do suggest low-energy 'green IT solutions.

- 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.