

**Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council**  
**Place Select Committee – Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020**  
**Scrutiny Review of Business Support and Engagement – Local Authority**

**1.0 What are the key functions of the Council's Business and Enterprise Team?**

The Business and Enterprise (B&E) Team work with local businesses of all sizes to develop a better understanding of their operational needs to ensure we are able to support them and better plan our services and influence those of other agencies. We seek to engage business in the development of projects and harness the skills, knowledge and networks of the business community to promote economic development in Stockton.

**1.1 Our Approach**

We engage with businesses in a range of ways, according to their differing needs. We do this through a combination of targeted approaches, pro-active initiatives and responsive services. Our engagements with businesses can be multifaceted and the relationships will exist for a wide range of purposes, which can include being the initial point of contact for other council services. We need to continue to develop closer one-to-one relationships with businesses in order to understand and respond to their continued investment within the Borough.

The Business and Enterprise Team comprise currently of the following roles

- 2 x Team Management
- 3 x Business and Enterprise Officers
- 1 x Specialist Advisor – Employment and Skills
- 2 x Vacant Business and Enterprise Officer Posts

The B&E team work with a broad range of businesses to encourage and support them to make investment in the borough, to do this we must be accessible to all businesses. Changes within the B&E team have been focused towards supporting the implementation of Economic Growth Plan [www.stockton.gov.uk/egp](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/egp) which has given the B&E team a greater emphasis on how we grow our business base within the Borough.

The B&E team continue to support Businesses that are actively seeking to invest in the Borough and We must also continue to ensure that we support SME's to grow through direct and indirect (signposted) support in order that we maintain the life cycle of business and ensure that we have an environment that all business can grow and prosper within.

**1.2 Business Support**

A successful and prosperous economy is a foundation stone for a successful Stockton. Our prosperity is driven by businesses, so it's critical that we work with them to support their growth and investment in the Borough.

Business Support functions are one of the key enablers for the team to support business and the range of enquires handled can be summarised into the following areas: Access to Finance, Procurement and Supply Chain, Staffing (apprenticeships), Land and property searches.

### **1.3 Business Engagement**

Business engagement activities are the tools by which we can reach our business audience and are used to meet demands for both a face to face, one to many or virtual contact with businesses across the borough. We are now able to engage with businesses in a more coherent and consistent manner due to the introduction of a structured 'account management' approach through:

- Establishing key contact relationships with each business.
- Arranging regular contact with the business, of a frequency that meets the needs of each business.
- Providing a clear, open and responsive communications channel direct to a nominated 'account manager' within the B&E Team.
- Maintaining these communication channels through regular dialogue.
- Attendance at focussed business events/meetings

### **2.0 How do local businesses find out about the Council's support service; how is this communicated?**

We use a variety of communication channels to engage with business to ensure that we are able to keep business informed of support from the Council, partners and other agencies. Enquires can be received via email, phone, web site or referral and depending on the nature of the information provided we can upload details onto dedicated web pages, twitter and or LinkedIn.

To keep our knowledge base and understanding as current as possible we use team meetings to invite partners, intermediaries and other agencies to explore and further understand 'what's on offer' to business both locally and nationally. The ability to use various locations across the borough to advertise 'drop-in information sessions' allows for a greater reach and a varied audience.

Over that last three years we have increased the ways in which we communicate with business such as Linked in and Twitter, to enable an increased visibility and also to maximise time and resources currently available within the team. The key methods of communication include: -

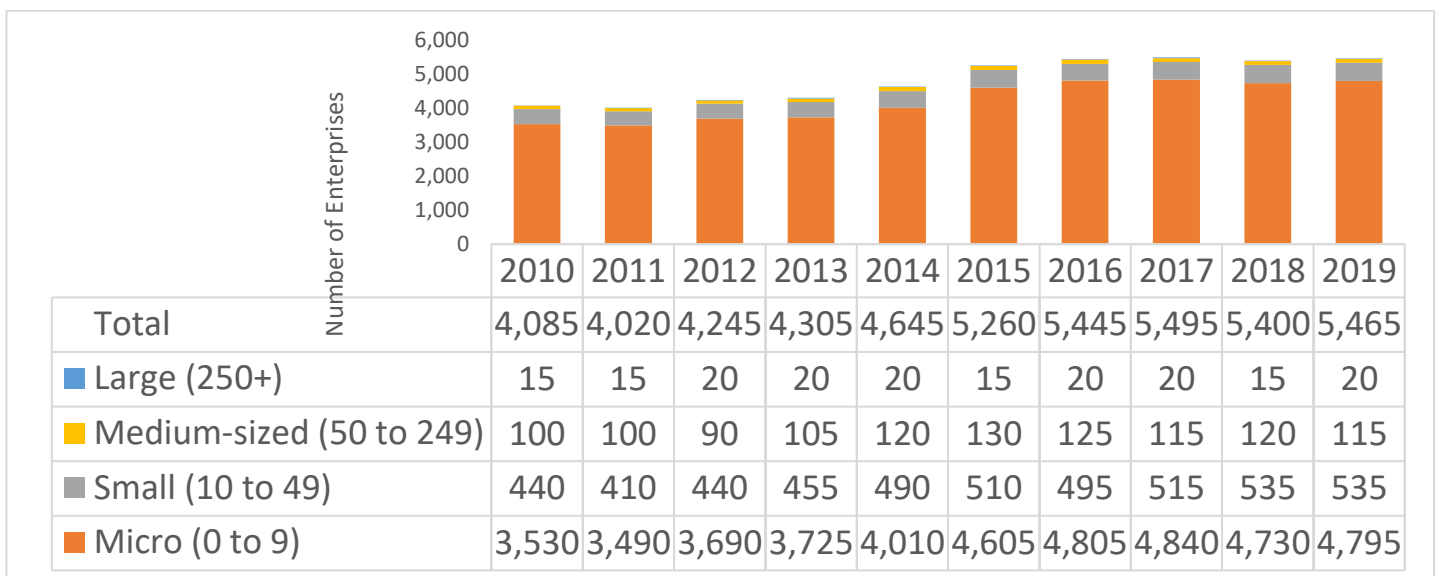
- Council Webpages
- Public Property searches
- Partners – TVCA, DIT, Tees Uni, Intermediaries
- Word of Mouth / Referrals
- Twitter
- Linked In
- Networking events – TVBC, NECC, Stockton MET
- Business Forums – Cowpen BID, NECC Area Meetings, Stockton BID

There are a number of specialist business events, meetings and groups that operate in Stockton and the wider Tees Valley area. These can present opportunities for us to network more informally with local businesses enabling the B&E Team to target a more specialist group of businesses such as Digital, Chemical and Pharmaceutical etc. and establish a better relationship within these business sectors.

### 3.0 What types of business exist within the Borough; include Size, Sector and Employment.

#### 3.1 Business by size within the Borough

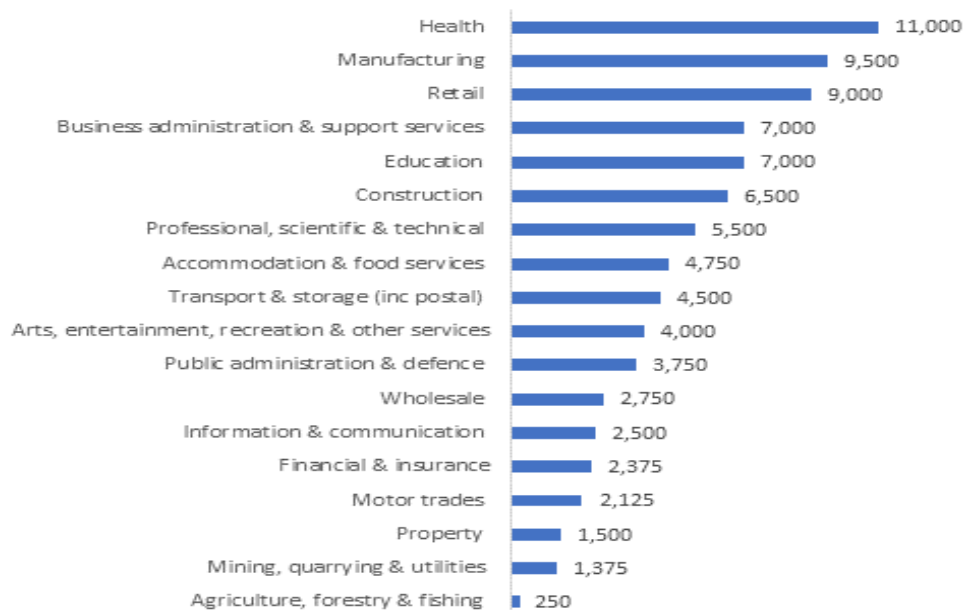
There are several thousand businesses registered within the Borough from micro (1-10 employees) through to large multi-national organisations. Each are important to the economy of the Borough and its residents, and the Council plays an important facilitation role in the sustainability and growth of these companies. As it is at the national level, the majority of business in the Borough are micro businesses and the number of them has increased over the last 10 years.



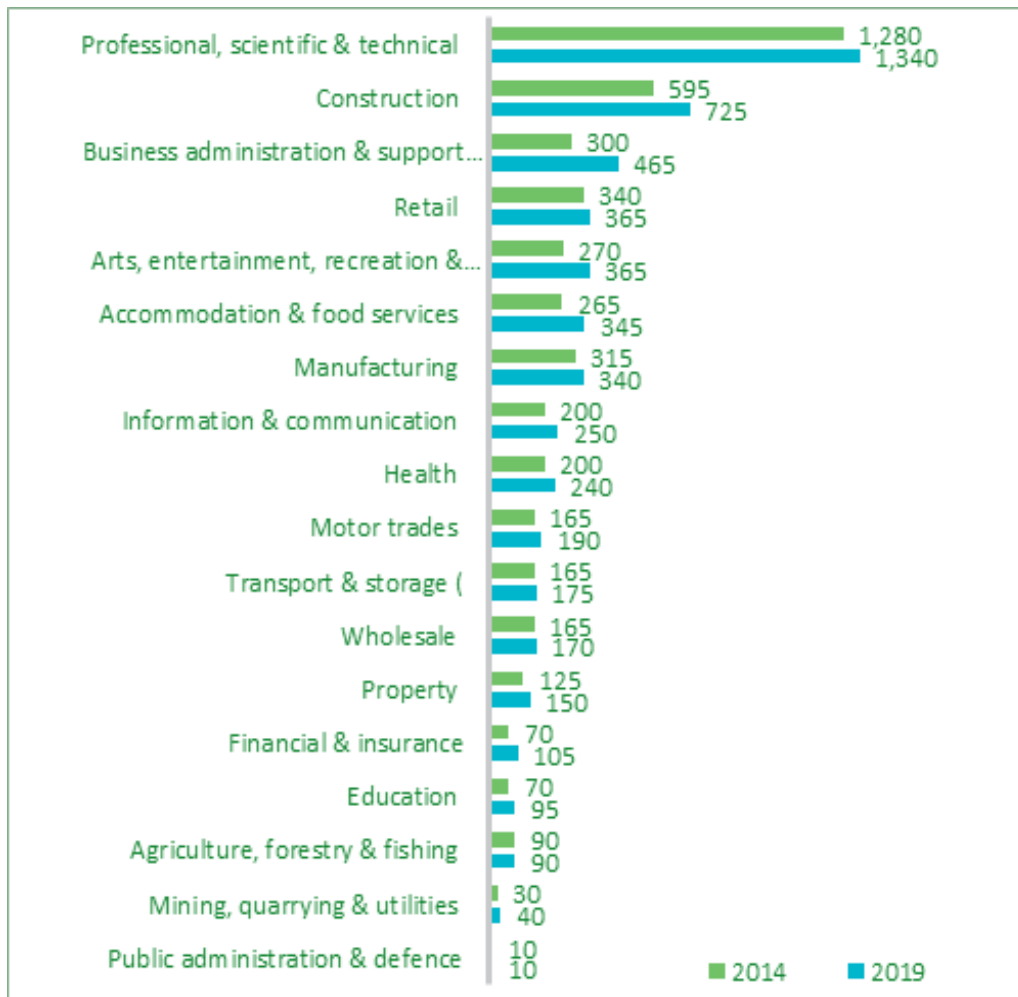
#### 3.2 Business Sector by Employment within the Borough

Health, Manufacturing and Retail are the largest sectors in terms of employment in the Borough.

2018 Employment Figures by Broad Industrial Sectors



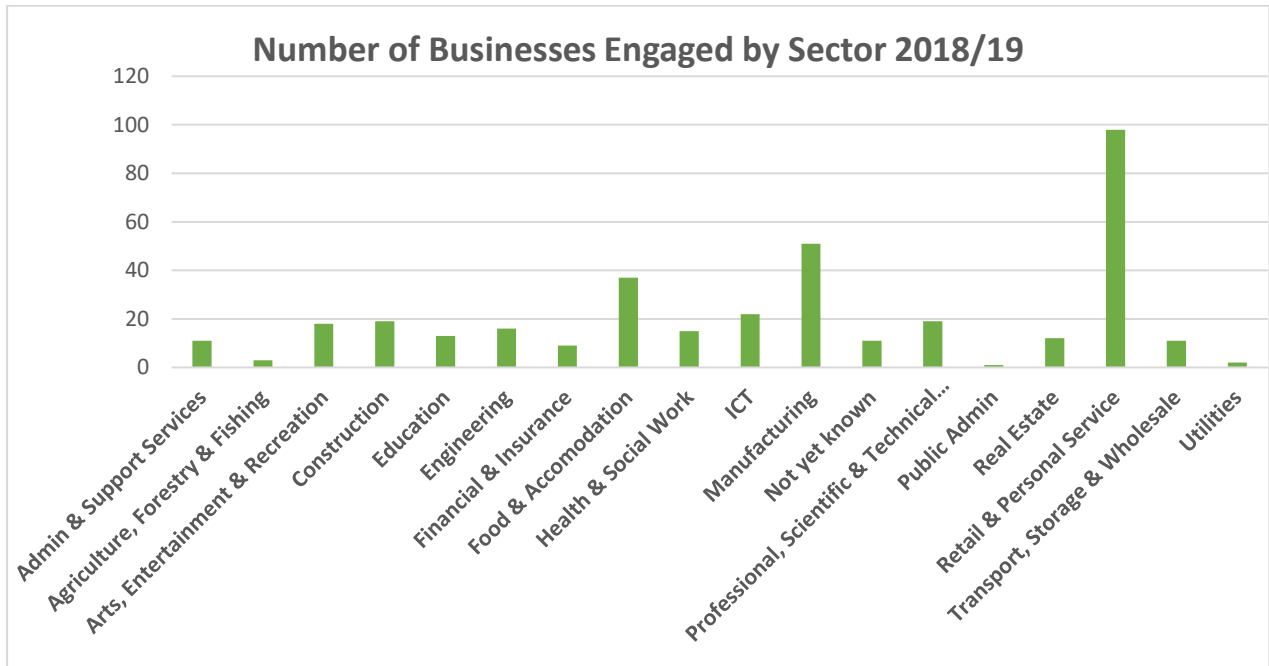
### 3.3 Number of Business Sectors represented within the Borough



### 4.0 What types of businesses (and where are they sited) approach the Council and what do they seek?

We continue to provide a responsive service in dealing with enquiries from both new and existing businesses of all sizes. Depending on the nature of the enquiry this will primarily be the provision of information (e.g. premises and sites) and signposting to advice and support by email, phone, web site etc.

#### 4.1 Number of Business Engaged by Sector



#### 4.2 CASE STUDY: SECTOR BASED

**Initial Enquiry:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Party contact to discuss information regarding land usage, potential environmental concerns and access rights to an engineering site.

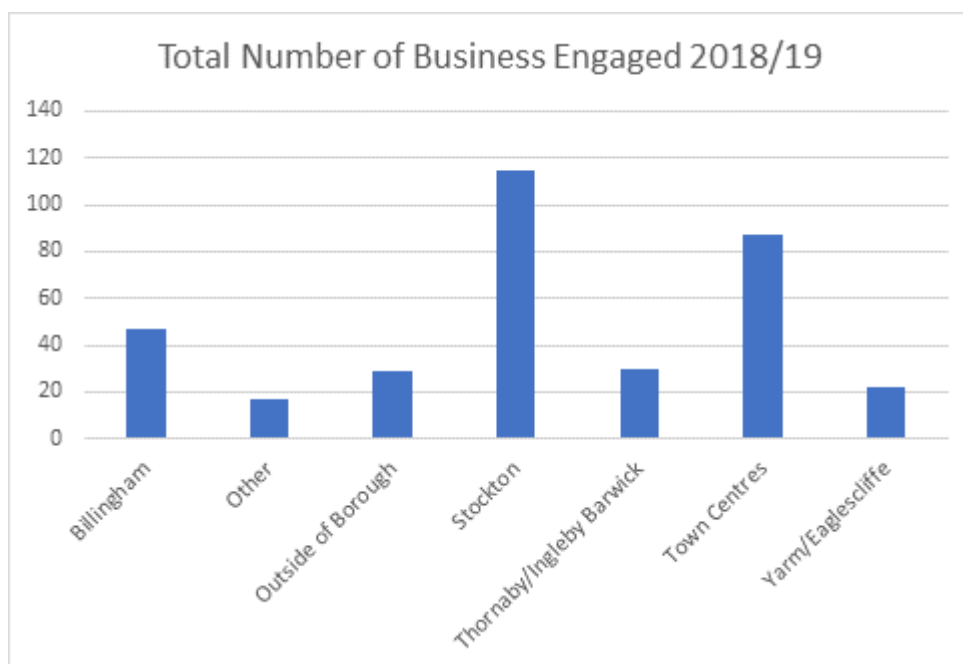
**Initial meeting:** Met with land owner initially to further understand plans regarding expansion and new investor, agreed way forward in relations to support regarding access rights, planning and any financial support to both land owner and investor.

**Support Offered:** After Initial diagnostic completed, the B+E Team coordinated Partners and investors with sign posting to TVCA and Other partner agencies to enable access to funding to support their own investment. Co-ordination of planning application and environmental concerns raised.

**Outcome:** New investor on-site and have been introduced to the wider business community, site now operating and investment into the wider area.

**Post:** Regular meetings now included within Forward plan and ongoing support enquires picked up.

### 4.3 Number of Business Engaged by Location



### 4.4 CASE STUDY: LOCATION

**Initial enquiry:** contact from an existing town centre business, requiring larger premises to grow their current business model.

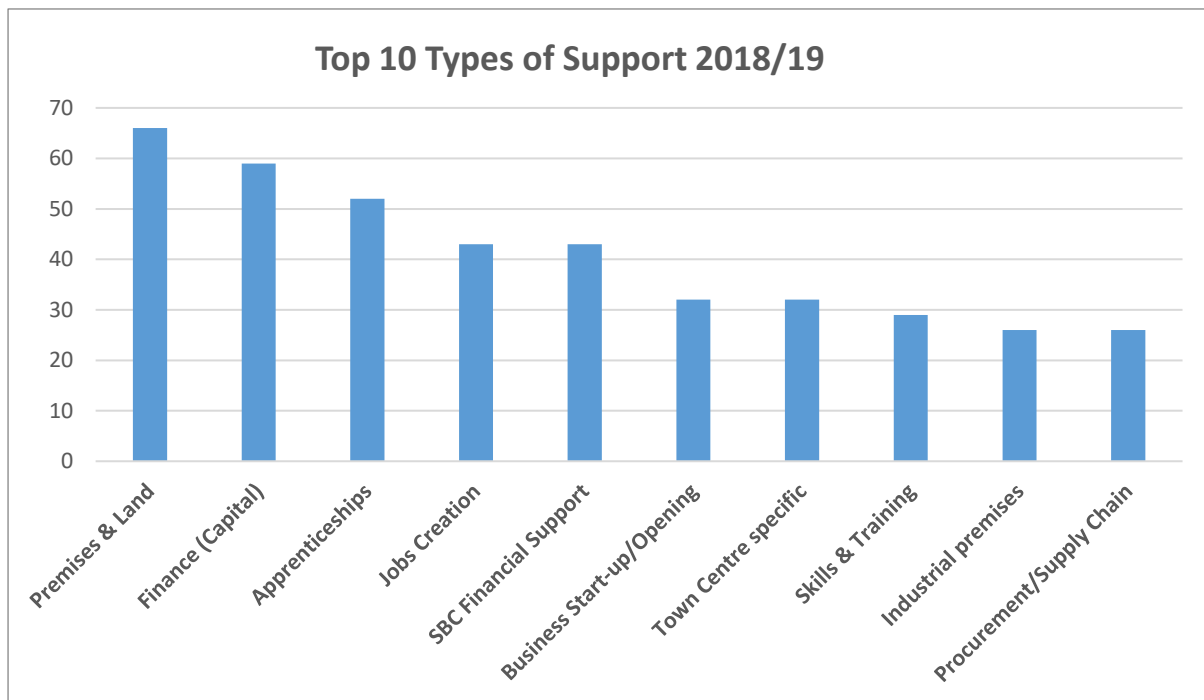
**Initial meeting:** met with business owner to gain insight into background as to why the business needs to move, purpose of growth and investment. It was important to the business for continuity reasons, to remain in very close proximity to their current premises.

**Solution:** following a detailed search a property was identified which appeared to fit the criteria identified by the client. The property was actually owned by SBC and a viewing was arranged with the client. Following numerous discussions and further meetings, the client indicated that they wanted to purchase the building. The property was advertised on the open market to enable a transparent purchase of the building and disposal of SBC Stock. The client was kept fully up to date and advised about timescales procedures throughout.

**Outcome:** The client was successful in purchasing the building and continuation of support was given throughout the refurbishment with coordination of support from planning, building regs etc. to assist with change of use and eventual opening of the building. SBC was also able to provide a small retail grant to assist with associated works.

**Post:** continue to meet with the business and work alongside Stockton BID to help the business grow and develop.

#### 4.5 Enquiries received: Top Ten Types of Support in 2018/19



#### 4.6 CASE STUDY: PROPERTY DEVELOPER

**Initial Enquiry** – Re- Development of a high profile building located in Stockton Town Centre.

**Initial Meeting** – The building had previously been a magnet for anti-social behaviour and licensing problems, we were keen to work with the new owners to see an enhanced offer and ways to reduce anti-social behaviour. Approach taken was one of a collaborative across council departments in order to offer a single point of contact and cohesive service.

**Ongoing:** B & E Team pulled together a site meeting at short notice, which included Planning, Building Control and Licensing Team Leader's, who were each able to offer practical, face-to-face advice and address any issues, prior to work starting. The developer was delighted with the service and was also able to get individual contacts for each element of the scheme, so the process was able to run smoothly, throughout the re-development process.

**Outcome:** Building opened on time and to a very high standard.

**Post:** B&E Team continue to work with the developer on other sites and offer a gateway to other council services.

#### 4.7 CASE STUDY: APPRENTICESHIP

**Initial Enquiry:** contact received via a Child in Care Personal Adviser who were working with a young person who had the potential of a job as an apprentice chef in a local hotel.

**Initial Meeting:** Principal Employability Officer approached the employer to discuss the options open to them and the different type of support and funding that was available. The business had not employed an apprentice previously and did not know where to start. They did not know who could deliver the training and were unclear of their responsibilities , obligations and the current level of

financial support available. In addition, the young person was reluctant to attend college due to some insecurities.

**Ongoing:** The Officer investigated which local training providers could deliver the Professional Cookery apprenticeship and provided a short list of providers for the consideration of the employer, which included details of one provider that could deliver the apprenticeship on the employer's premises. Details of the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Apprenticeship Grant for Employers and other local funding was provided.

**Outcome:** As a result of the support offered and the ability to access the cocktail of funding the employer agreed to employ the young person as an apprentice chef. The employer selected the training provider that could deliver on their premises, benefitting both the business and the young person. The Officer also arranged through other funding streams to secure a set of 'kitchen whites' and a starter set of knives for the young person.

## **5.0 What types of support does the Council provide to businesses (including the mediums used); feedback from business?**

The Council undertakes a number of business support activities across the Borough, from advice and guidance, to direct financial support. In recent years, the focus of this activity has changed, with a greater emphasis placed on creating a single point of contact ('one conversation') policy for businesses liaising with the Council.

Some of the business related services provided by the Council include: -

- Specialist business support and advice for start-up and existing independent retail businesses (currently supplied by B-Supplied)
- Retail incubation units in Stockton Enterprise Arcade (now renamed as Fountain Shopping Mall)
- Business support and Information
- Economic growth services
- Learning and skills
- Office space for new and existing digital businesses at Fusion hive and Digital House
- Stockton Business Centre
- Enterprise Zone at Northshore
- Planning
- Building control
- Health and safety
- Trading standards
- Environmental health
- Licensing

### **5.1 Stockton Enterprise Arcade**

Over recent years there has been significant public and private sector investment in our Town Centres with the aim of creating more competitive and attractive places where people want to live work and visit.

A decision was taken in 2011 to further investigate and develop the setting up of a retail incubation units (test trading facilities) within Stockton High Street and after an initial trading period, it was



evident that additional space was needed and the original building was not fit for purpose. So in early 2014, after an evaluation of available properties within Stockton Town Centre, the Council acquired the freehold of a large, four storey, vacant building in the heart of the High Street. The refurbishment (ground and part 1<sup>st</sup> floor only), repair and fit out of the building was part funded by a Heritage Lottery Grant.

The newly acquired and refurbished building opened in November 2014 with a mix of single (12m<sup>2</sup>) and double (24m<sup>2</sup>) units at a cost of £50 and £75 per week respectively. Since its opening there has been a wide range of retailers including; baby clothes, handmade wool garments, fine art, cosmetics and handmade cakes, along with a café specialising in milkshakes and smoothies, that have traded under the banner of the Enterprise Arcade before it was renamed as the Fountains Shopping Mall in 2017.

## **5.2 CASE STUDY: PRE START / TEST TRADING**

**Initial Enquiry:** Pre Start retail business.

**Referral** – after initial consultation with the applicant, B Supplied where engaged to support Test Trading within Fountain Shopping Mall.

**Initial Meeting** – 1:1 meeting between B Supplied and the client to discuss the viability and potential for the business to trade. B Supplied completed an assessment which reviewed the business idea, agreed some initial goals and confirmed how the business would be funded and gained an understanding of client’s personal circumstances.

**Initial outcome:** initially offered a “pop-up” shop for up to 4 weeks, to provide the client with the opportunity to “test trade”

**Current position** – After Initial ‘test trade’ period the Tenant has taken on a full time tenancy and has now been trading for over 6 months and continues to access support from B Supplied with identification of continued growth and next steps.

## **5.3 Retail Business Support**

Retail as a sector has continued to face many challenges with an increasing number of national chains closing branches not just throughout the Borough, but across the UK. It therefore continues to be evident that we can no longer rely on national retailers alone to occupy units within our Town Centres and it has been widely recognised that there continues to be a need to enhance the retail offer and continue to support our independent businesses across all of our Town Centres.

There are many ways in which retail business support services can be delivered, research undertaken in the borough suggested that the retail sector is a very niche market and one which requires an innovative approach and specialist skills. A Retail Support Programme was devised /developed to support Stockton Town Centres independent retailers to equip them with the necessary skills and opportunities to start and grow a sustainable business. The Council has been able to provide specialist retail support since early 2013 which is now available across all Town Centres.

## 5.4 CASE STUDY: SPECIALIST RETAIL SUPPORT

**Initial Enquiry:** Town Centre Retailer, A variety of business related concerns relating to specific retail issues.

**Initial Meeting:** Following assessment of needs and meeting the business owner, B&E Team quickly became the single point of contact within the Council and coordination of council matters. A referral was made to access specialist retail support from providers B-Supplied.

**Support:** B-Supplied undertook a review of business concerns and action plan devised. B-Supplied were able to support on the following: financial reporting systems, review of profit margins and a rationalisation of stock. B&E Team continued to act as the single point of contact for council matters and liaison with other departments.

**Outcome:** The business has been able to continue trading and is now operating on a much more secure footing.

**Post:** B-Supplied have remained in contact, on an ongoing mentoring basis.

## 6.0 Business Feedback relating to Business and Enterprise Engagement Activities

Due the nature of our business engagement activities, feedback mainly comes through comments and compliments from the businesses we work with. Examples of this include the following: -

I'd just like to bring to your attention the thanks of gratitude that the team from Stockton Borough Council are owed following the amazing way you all looked after a key investor when they came to look at setting up their facility in Stockton. I can tell you that the welcome the investor received was overwhelming and ultimately this got the project over the line.

### **CEO - Local Engineering Company**

Just wanted to drop a brief email to express my thanks to the team for helping me to re locate my Stockton Branch onto the High Street, from the initial contact as to the potential availability of a High Street property through to financial assistance in the refurbishment the team enabled us to move forward and expand into larger premises and bring an empty unit back into life again. Must admit I have branches across Teesside and within other Local Authority control – none of which provide the help and support that comes anywhere near to that of SBC.

### **Senior Partner - Local Estate Agents**

I've worked with the Business and Enterprise Team for a number of years, sharing knowledge on projects effecting the town and addressing issues faced by businesses. The B+E Team have often been my go to Team who will endeavour to solve any query no matter how obscure! Their friendly and approachable manner along with a great problem solving skills mean we work well together and get stuff done!

### **Senior Manager - Shopping Centre Owners**

Just dropping you a quick line to say how much I have valued the collaboration and assistance given to me by the Business and Enterprise team over the last calendar year.

I spent the first half of the year working as Partnership Manager for DIT and more latterly in a similar role for the Entrepreneurs' Forum. The team are always approachable and helpful in providing support and guiding us to Stockton based businesses.

We are all partners in the business support sector with a common goal to help business thrive & to increase employment for local people and economic output. Stockton Council are amongst the best at this partnership approach and full credit for the culture which is fostered by your Business & Enterprise Team.

**Partnership /Event Manager Membership Organisation**

## **7.0 How does the Council link in with the TVCA and wider partners?**

We continue to work with Tees Valley Combined Authority to ensure that local business needs are reflected in sub-regional priorities and plans. We also work with a number of business support providers to help businesses make the most of support available and the opportunities that emerge.

As well as promoting business-to-business opportunities, there are important forums for identifying the local concerns and needs of businesses and fostering public-private collaboration.

We will continue to support in the promotion of appropriate business networks in order to harness the expertise and networks of our business community to promote economic development across Stockton.

Our role is not to replicate the support services of other agencies but rather to:

- raise awareness of the business support available
- provide advice and guidance
- raise awareness of opportunities for businesses
- identify the need for different forms of support to meet the needs of different businesses
- improve connections between support providers, with the intention of improving the service received by businesses, regardless of who they receive it from

A draft team activity plan for 2020 is attached Appendix 1

## **8.0 SBC Peer Review feedback – what can we learn from this recent Council review in terms of support for local business.**

The Council underwent a Peer Review in September 2019 of which a workshop took place covering inclusive growth. Feedback has been provided and an action plan has been developed. Currently a shared action for Economic Growth and Development Services has been identified. However, no specific actions relating to Business Engagement have been identified.

**Peer Review Action:** Establish a shared understanding of inclusive growth across the council and partners and enable greater dialogue both between them and within the authority.

