

## Appendix 6 – Recommendation 3

### Business/Network Forums

BNI Stockton - [https://bni-dt.co.uk/durham-&-teesside-harald-bni-\(stockton\)/en-GB/index](https://bni-dt.co.uk/durham-&-teesside-harald-bni-(stockton)/en-GB/index)  
Supporting all business sectors

Boho Breakfast Networking - <https://www.investmiddlesbrough.co.uk/key-sectors/digital/>  
Supporting businesses within the digital sector in Middlesbrough

Cluster Connect NEPIC - <https://www.nepic.co.uk/clusterconnect/>  
Supporting businesses within the chemical process sector and supply chain

Chamber Local: South NECC - <https://www.neechamber.co.uk/>  
Supporting all business sectors

FSB Federation of Small Businesses - <https://www.fsb.org.uk/event-calendar.html>  
Supporting all business sectors

RTC North - <https://www.rtcnorth.co.uk/events/>  
Supporting all business sectors

Stockton MET - <https://www.stocktonbid.co.uk/>  
Supporting all businesses within Stockton town centre

TEN - <https://www.teesengineeringnetwork.co.uk/>  
Supporting engineering businesses throughout Tees Valley

Tees Valley Business Club - <https://www.teesvalleybusinessclub.co.uk/>  
Supporting all business sectors

TS18 Breakfast Club (Jacksons Law) - <https://www.jacksons-law.com/events/>  
Supporting all business sectors

Women in Collaboration - <http://womenincollaboration.com/>  
Supporting businesses led by women

Plus, multiple one-off events hosted by Teesside Uni, TVCA, British Business Bank, FW Capital, Local Authorities and other private organisations.

### How did they operate during Covid?

Most networks quickly adapted to online formats during Covid, offering support to businesses and the opportunity to continue networking and sharing information, experience and advice during a difficult and challenging period. Networks did see some reduction in attendance for online networking, however most were encouraged and surprised by the

strength of support and soon became comfortable with the format, using breakout rooms for interaction and activities and attracting guests and speakers via remote access.

Online networking events became more information led during covid, with less opportunity for networking given the format. These events did evolve over time with online breakout sessions but the approach was focussed on a guest speakers and clear outcomes.

Some networks have continued to offer a hybrid model of online and face to face delivery to accommodate those who are uncomfortable with face to face or unable to attend in person, however most networks have now reverted to face to face events within venues.

Successful networking events tend to focus on quality of information with up-to-date local relevance, interesting and informative guest speakers and the opportunity to meet like-minded businesses and support services.

### **Other examples of Networking**

The Economic Development Team has other examples of where personal business networking has had positives outcomes, where connections have been identified:

- Connecting MCE Group Ltd, a Stockton based valve specialist with Tomlinson Hall, Billingham based pump specialists for future collaborative work. Neither company were aware of each other prior to the introduction.
- Connecting Olumo Foods, a Darlington based food manufacturer, with Tees Valley Community Church for use of their commercial kitchen and food processing work experience and job opportunities for Academy Three13 learners.
- Introduction of Sapere Software (Fusion Hive) to RTC North for collaboration on a digitisation project within the construction industry.

Sometimes the actions don't relate directly to the events but without the networking we would not be aware of some of the businesses within the borough, their activities and specialist areas which then lead to other opportunities. This is quite often organic and difficult to plan or quantify.

### **Next Steps**

Businesses are now seeing an influx in invites to networking and business events and with many of these events 'in person' it is increasing challenging for businesses to find the time to attend. It's also recognised that it is often the same businesses that attend these events and the information shared can be repetitive.

Stockton Council are working in partnership with TVCA and the Local Authorities to evaluate the impact of business information/networking events in a bid to determine the best approach to how these are delivered moving forward and how they ensure a wider reach in terms of attendees.