

CABINET STATEMENT

CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY – COUNCILLOR DEREK PRETTY

It's been a busy year for Economy as the business community has recovered from two years of pandemic. However, 2023 looks as though it will be even more challenging as they struggle with rising costs and staff shortages resulting from the downturn in the Economy.

The business support offered by the team is changing noticeably. For most of the year, around ten companies per month have been seeking help and most of those were looking for employment space to satisfy their expansion plans. However, this is changing with the number of businesses seeking help rising to 26 with the emphasis moving to funding and survival. We have even been asked for help with selling their business.

With the challenges that the Council face the team is conscious of the need to attract income to the borough by accelerating the arrival of investors who will increase the Council's business rates revenue among other benefits. We are therefore developing an investment policy and investor brochure which will promote the borough and in particular the employment spaces of One Horton Heath and Navigator Quarter.

Navigator Quarter has been granted tax status within the proposed Freeport. We are now awaiting formal approval of the Freeport Business plan which we hope will be announced shortly.

Income this year has been generated through external funding as projects have concluded and been reimbursed by the European Union and Central Government:

- £132,000 from the Welcome Back Fund
- £120,000 from PONToon

Even with the current moratorium on filling vacant offices and the closure of its meeting rooms, Wessex House has continued to contribute approximately £500,000 so the centre has continued to pay for itself and has a growing list of potential tenants interested in flexible workspace.

I am able to report that 18 businesses were eligible for energy efficiency grants from the Covid Discretionary funding. Between them, they received £415,000 and have spent it on solar panelling, insulation, and LED lighting. We have just started a series of articles highlighting their emissions savings on EBC's LinkedIn page and on the website:

<https://www.eastleigh.gov.uk/business/support-for-businesses/businesses-becoming-more-energy-efficient>

On the downside I have to report that the Youth Employment Hub is now closed as a result of the DWP withdrawing funding. A project closure report is available with lessons learned and a summary of outcomes:

- 556 individuals attended hub sessions

- 371 individuals increased their skills and employability
- 172 individuals had work experience or volunteered
- 82 individuals enrolled in training or education

Clearly this scheme was benefitting many people and it is sad that funding was withdrawn

We are working with the BID to boost sales of the Borough Gift Card. Around 70 have now been bought and the number of outlets across the borough where they can be spent now stands at 80 and rising. The back page of the winter Borough News is encouraging residents to support their local shops by buying the gift card and this encouragement is extended to Cabinet and all Members.