

Digital Centre of Excellence - Incubator Support Service Overview

1 Background

We want Woking to be globally recognised as the centre for Green Tech innovation and invention. It is important to the Council and the local economy to support growth and success, as well as encourage further business into the borough. The borough currently has 850 technology organisations. Creating a Digital Centre of Excellence around these organisations and expanding this number will further support its residents, businesses, and wider community, by providing jobs, wealth, and a reputation that Woking (recently voted the greenest Council in Surrey) takes the environment and climate change seriously.

Currently Woking doesn't have a business support function that incorporates an incubator function.

2 Introduction

"Woking will be the region's leading economic hub, driving prosperity and growth and attracting national and international investment. With super-high connectivity, it will lead the way on smart, sustainable growth and will be a great place for people to live, work and play."

Our aim is for Woking to be a premier global business location and an excellent place to live and to work with first class leisure and cultural amenities. Woking has many advantages; its location at the heart of one of the fastest growing economic areas outside London, entrepreneurial businesses, highly qualified and skilled people, exceptional communications, and business-friendly reputation have driven outstanding economic performance in recent years.

A Digital Centre of Excellence (DCoE) incorporating a business support incubator and accelerator service at its core is seen as crucial to establishing Woking as a technology hub which will assist in meeting the challenges climate change has brought to the planet. The Council's Woking 2050 Climate Change Strategy, the [Economic Development Action Plan](#), and its [Digital Strategy](#) provides the overarching vision to putting Woking on the map as providing a sustainable environment supporting "green technology" (technology whose use is intended to mitigate or reverse the effects of human activity on the environment), cleantech, net zero/ neutral carbon companies.

This would encompass organisations that are developing technologies in the net zero carbon/ reusable and clean/ sustainable energy sectors as well as technology that is environmentally friendly based on its production and supply chains

3 Objective

To provide a sustainable business support service – incubator and accelerator in Woking that will support start-ups, micro and established businesses to grow and thrive.

4 Funding

£400,000 has been identified in the Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary) that allows the Council to award a grant to an organisation to provide wider business support.

An additional £400,000 is required to fund the fit out of the proposed space.

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5 The Service

The DCoE will provide “wrap around” support to high tech/ high growth innovators, entrepreneurs, and businesses. A suitable service provider is required to manage, support, and assist in the growth of eligible start-ups and businesses which will include an incubator and accelerator service. Discussions are ongoing with a suitable partner organisation.

6 What is an incubator?

The basic purposes of an incubator are to develop new entrepreneurs and to contribute to the economic and social development of a town or borough. Many highly successful and well-known companies began as start-ups that used incubators. Incubators are growing in popularity in recent years due to the many benefits that they provide to start-ups and businesses with a growth mindset.

It provides an entrepreneur with support and skills, so the focus remains with developing ideas into products and products into profit.

6.1 Accelerate Growth

An incubator offers the resources and benefits to start-ups that help them avoid common mistakes and pitfalls. Incubators provide many benefits to a business.

6.1.2 Access to resources

An incubator provides a wrap around support service, low cost resources that will not hinder a start-ups development.

Structured strategic advice

- Business strategy and plans
- Sales/ Pitching
- Marketing
- Accountancy and Finance
- ICT & Digital support
- Legal services
- Product development

6.1.3 Access to funding

Funding is crucial for a start-up. It gives them the capability of developing the product ready for market. An incubator develops funding streams for eligible businesses. They nurture a network of partners, angel investors, venture capitalists and crowd funding organisations.

6.1.4 Exposure to Industry Leaders and Mentors

Being provided with free advice from industry leaders and experts who have built successful businesses can be as valuable as funding for a business. Learning from them helps a start-up avoid many of the common mistakes a start-up makes.

Mentors challenge start-ups in a manner that assists a start-up in refining business goals, vision, and the future roadmap. It makes it much simpler if advice is given at this stage.

It would be beneficial for the DCoE to establish relationships with Woking’s technological business community, to provide mentorship and sponsorship of the DCoE or the start-up themselves.

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6.1.5 Low cost for a start-up

A start-up has generally no or very little in the way of capital. It is certainly not going to be generating any revenue. Therefore, an incubator can offer a low-cost office solution and extremely low-cost consultancy solutions. Incubators are flexible. There are many options available to accommodate needs and budgets.

6.1.6 Events

Incubators will host a varied number of events. These typically will include networking and presentations by Industry Leaders. All of which are designed to aid in development.

6.1.7 Partnerships/ Collaboration

A key aspect to any growing business is the formation of partnerships. Creating a partnership with an incubator or another entrepreneur within the incubator can create new opportunities and raise the exposure of the start-up. Working and being supported in an incubator offers start-ups the opportunity which is seldom realised elsewhere.

An incubator will also develop relationships with local businesses, the public sector (Surrey County Council, Enterprise M3, and other local authorities).

6.1.8 Affiliation to a University

An incubator's value can be increased with a university affiliation. This normally can offer access to research, education and even product development and testing opportunities.

6.1.9 Access to National and Local Government

Incubators will require support from WBC to help sustain the service over a period. It is not common for an incubator to make an immediate profit, as start-ups are limited in funds.

6.1.20 Access to local business networks

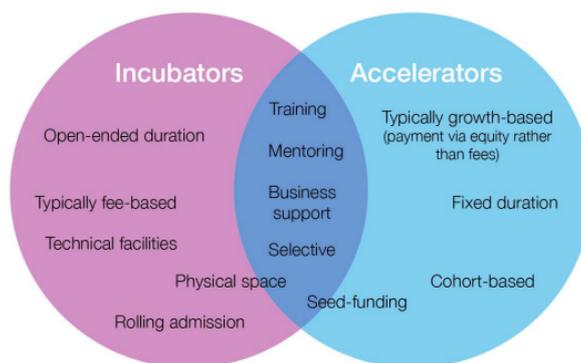
An affiliation with Woking and Surrey Chambers of Commerce, the FSB, The Woking Asian Business Forum will be sought to further enhance the reach and support the incubator will provide.

7 An accelerator program

In contrast with incubators, accelerators typically provide services through a highly selective, cohort-based programme of limited duration (usually 3-12 months). Services often include assistance in developing the business plan, investor pitch deck, prototypes, and initial market testing.

Increasingly, accelerators are providing support designed for more established and high growth companies looking to scale up their business. Support for the pre-start-up stage is offered in the form of pre-accelerator programmes, directed at entrepreneurs or start-ups with the aim of joining an accelerator programme in the future.

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8 Sector focus

The focus will be on green technologies, but it will not be restrictive. According to a government study of incubators and accelerators in 2017, 45% of incubators do not have a sector focus and 11% of incubators have been focussing on Energy and the Environment.

9 The Premises

An incubator traditionally requires a flexible mix of office space.

It is proposed to convert floor 3 of Export House. This will involve a fit-out that will take approximately 1 year from design stage to completion. It will consist of a reception area, a refreshment area, a mixture of offices and open plan co-working space, meeting rooms and break-out spaces.

10 Benefits to the Borough

- To realise the ambition of tackling the challenges associated with climate change.
- To put Woking on the map as providing a sustainable environment supporting “green technology”.
- To support existing start-up businesses, to help them grow and prosper.
- Job creation
- Business retention
- To grow Woking’s reputation as a great place to do business.
- To attract like-minded businesses to the borough and increase the number of tech businesses in the borough.
- Growing the local economy, increasing GVA