

7 May 2009

## Gateshead Council:

### *The 'Starter for Ten' Programme*

#### Summary of policy/project

The Starter for Ten project will provide temporary workspace for creative businesses.

#### Description

The Starter for Ten project aims to utilise unused properties and underdeveloped land by accommodating a range of temporary uses. The project will transform a redundant building at the heart of the town centre into a thriving creative cluster for small businesses.

Gateshead has a highly successful track record of culture led regeneration. However it recognises that for culture to continue to thrive, creative practitioners need to be supported to produce and develop their work. Currently there is an unmet demand for creative workspace in Gateshead.

The Council has committed funds from its capital budget to refurbish a building in the town centre which is ear-marked for demolition in two years time as part of the town centre redevelopment. A secondment has been arranged with Arts Council England to lead the project. .

The project is aimed at creative businesses that would otherwise have difficulty accessing workspace. The building is being refurbished to a minimum standard which meets health and safety requirements and will be offered to creative practitioners on a rent-free basis.

At the same time the Council is looking at other vacant properties across the borough for further developments based on the Starter for Ten model. A priority is to identify follow-on space for the occupants of the first building at the end of the two years.

#### Has the idea worked elsewhere?

There are many examples of local authorities offering empty shop windows to artists on a temporary basis as display space. There are very few which aim to make productive use of the empty retail space behind and even fewer where the project is part of a long term strategy for supporting sustainable workspace development. Therefore this project functions as an important piece of action research in making the case for the benefits of creative workspace.

#### What problems does the policy/project solve?

It directly links into Gateshead's long-term plan for the redevelopment of the town centre as described in Vision 2030, the Regeneration Development Strategy, and the Cultural Strategy 2005-10. Creativity is at the centre of the vision, one of 6 Big Ideas to establish a creative quarter in the town centre.

The pilot project aims to revitalise a run-down area of the town centre while at the same time it

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functions as a vital piece of action research to inform Gateshead's long term strategy to address the demand for creative workspace and support it in a sustainable way.

This project focuses on the needs of talented creative people. It aims to retain talent by providing a supportive environment which encourages the sharing of skills and ideas, access to networks and opportunities for collaboration. The overarching aim is to make Gateshead a place to which more creative practitioners will be drawn, where they can develop and thrive.

The project has been developed in close partnership with the creative sector which has a very diverse range of needs. The Council recognises that not all needs can be satisfied within a single development. Therefore it is investigating other surplus premises which can also be made available.

There has been a finite budget available for the refurbishment of the building which was in poor condition. A balance had to be achieved whereby the amount of money invested in this project was not disproportionate to the benefits, recognising that many of the benefits may only be seen in the long term.

#### **What were the difficulties of implementation?**

The Council is aware that the temporary nature of the project could be detrimental in terms of securing the support and buy-in of the creative sector. The Council does not wish to be seen as exploiting creative people for short-term gain. It recognises the need for a long term strategy for sustainability to be developed alongside this temporary project and this is the approach it has taken.

As the premises will be offered rent-free the Council is aware of the sensitivities around support for other types of businesses which are required to pay rent. However the project is aimed at practitioners who would otherwise have difficulty affording workspace and the opportunity is only temporary.

#### **What is the cost of implementation?**

There was £175,000 allocated for this project to cover refurbishment of the building and a secondee from Arts Council England. The running costs will be met separately by the users.

#### **What is the evidence of success?**

There is no evidence currently available to demonstrate success of the project. Some success factors are being drawn up so the impact of the success can be measured against these. They include ensuring that there is support and buy-in from the creative sector and that there is a long term strategy in place or in development. As

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a pilot it will be important to evaluate the project to inform the follow on strategy.

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#### Would this work in other Councils?

Councils must be committed to a long term strategy otherwise at the end of the project there is a risk that the creative community which has been established may be forced to move on. It should be outlined in their priorities and money must be made available to enable this to work.

#### What advice would you give any Councils wishing to adopt this idea?

If this project can be implemented the benefits outweigh the potential difficulties that may be faced.

While benefits may be difficult to measure initially and an impact may not be seen straight away it will benefit the area in the future.

Stakeholder support is essential and the project should fit into the long term vision of the Council.

#### For more information

Contact Anne Britton, Head of Economic Development, Development and Enterprise, Gateshead Council.