

It's all about jobs!

Making the business link

Gerard Tucker, Economic Team Leader for South Somerset District Council, explains a brand new initiative designed to help local businesses through the economic downturn and beyond.



Clr Peter Seib, South Somerset Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transport with the Business Link and Yeovil College business packs

A brand new facility designed to support local businesses through the recession and help aspiring businesses to set up has opened in Yeovil this March. Somerset's first 'one-stop-shop' for business support opened on Tuesday (17 March) in the form of the 'Business Solutions' facility at the Yeovil Innovation Centre.

The facility - which has been created in conjunction with Business Link, South Somerset District Council and Yeovil College - is a drop-in resource room open all week for any local business or entrepreneur to use without appointment.

And South Somerset District Council's Economic Development Team, which operates from the Innovation Centre, is offering users of the facility on-call expert advice, making the centre a truly all-inclusive resource to help businesses in all aspects of need.

Representatives from the district council, Yeovil College, Business Link and Yeovil Chamber of Commerce joined several local businesses on the day to celebrate the official opening.

Gerard Tucker, Economic Team Leader for South Somerset District Council explains, "The facility is an important component of the wider Innovation Centre - which is now acting as a central place where businesses can go to get the guidance and information they need.

"We are offering free access to the most up-to-date online information on loans and banking, recession-beating ideas and guidance on HR issues such as redundancies. Businesses can come in, make use of free telephone clinics, access over four hundred toolkits, and then talk to us through unscheduled one-to-one sessions, so we hope it's a hassle free way to get crucial advice."

Information on the range of services provided by Yeovil College is also available - including business support courses, apprenticeship programmes and the Train to Gain scheme.

Mr Tucker added, "This isn't just a 'business library' facility. We are talking about the Innovation Centre as a whole - a centre for all businesses to use, to network from, to join in the business community, to meet potential investors, to find new accommodation, access data, and discover mentoring opportunities. The centre houses our Economic Team and all the services we provide, as well as a whole host of services from the new facility within it.

"It's a facility that we want businesses - or those thinking of starting up a business - to use to its full potential and it's not just to counteract the recession - it's for all aspects of business."

Users can sign up to receive e-alerts and events listings from Business Link - which has a permanent base within the Innovation Centre - and attend monthly business clinics run by Business Link advisors that provide personal business reviews and offer opportunities to discuss issues and identify activities to help improve performance.

Roger Bacon, an experienced Business Link Adviser says "Particularly at times like these, we want to be able to bring business support right into the communities where our clients actually live and work. We know that they're simply too busy to spend too much time coming to see us, so the launch of a one-stop facility like Business Solutions is a vital step forward in our



Scott Roy, Chairman of the Innovation Centre Strategy Board, Cllr Ian Martin, Chairman of South Somerset District Council, Cllr Tim Carroll, Leader of South Somerset District Council, Cllr Peter Seib, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transport and Mark Pollock, Corporate Director for Economic Vitality at South Somerset District Council.

and our partners' mission to provide all the support that local people need in the form that suits them best. We're confident that it's set to become an important 'hub' for the Yeovil and South Somerset business community, and are looking forward to welcoming many people to our clinics."

Ian Thompson, area director at the South West RDA, said, "As businesses across the area square up to the challenges posed by the recession and the credit crunch, access to expert advice and support is vital. This new service builds on the benefits which the Yeovil Innovation Centre is already bringing to the local economy and provides a powerful resource at a time when businesses need it most."

Scott Roy, Chairman of the Innovation Centre Strategy Board said, "The availability of business support will be a critical success factor in the incubation and development of entrepreneurs in the community."

"We have a really enthusiastic team ready to help businesses realise their full potential through mentoring, planning and promotion."

Cllr Peter Seib, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transport at South Somerset District Council added, "South Somerset's economic strategy focuses on creating local jobs by encouraging and supporting new start-ups, growing existing businesses and moving in new businesses from outside the county."

"It's all about jobs, whether you're creating a new company or keeping people on in difficult times. This centre offers everything from books on what you'll need to do to set up a hairdressers to help with finding and licensing premises for storing chemicals. You can get help from experts including other local business people. The partners here can even help you find funding, from rate relief through to 'angel investor' introductions. Just by giving the team a call or just stopping by."

Yeovil Innovation Centre itself was set up by South Somerset District Council, Somerset County Council and the South West RDA and was launched at the end of last year with partners working together for the benefit of the area's economy. It is hoped the one-stop-shop located in the new centre will be of huge importance in benefitting both local businesses and the community and support jobs in the local economy for the longer term.

Contact: Dawn Haydon, Communications Officer, South Somerset District Council

Email: dawn.haydon@southsomerset.gov.uk or see the website at www.southsomerset.gov.uk

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