

Mentoring – How can a council develop an effective business mentoring programme?

Having engaged with many start-ups and fledgling businesses we have the benefit of knowing what these businesses want in terms of support from launch to ongoing support, mentoring and guidance.

What type of support might small businesses be looking for guidance with?

Small businesses and startups are looking for guidance with:

- Setting up a pipeline of customers and understanding the best ways to find more customers
- Knowing the best ways to stay ahead of their competition
- Critical reviews of their digital offering and help around what they should be spending money on in terms of marketing

What do you need to be doing?

To run an effective mentoring scheme, startups and fledgling businesses want to be able to meet regularly with a mentor. They are looking for someone who can give them advice and support around their current business activities and to make recommendations on how they can improve. They may also be looking for advice on scaling up and when this may be appropriate. We know that over 70% of start ups fail because they have opted to scale up too quickly.

What makes a good mentoring scheme?

- A good mentoring scheme will involve engaged mentors who are there to give an honest opinion on the business and to inspire change or new direction. They will also be able to provide support and guidance on the common pitfalls of business.
- Giving people the ability to meet face to face with their mentor from time to time, as well as understanding the digital world and the demands of running your own business. The mentoring scheme should be able to provide mentoring support via remote online calls
- Supplying mentors who have a significant amount of experience in either running their own business, or launching start up businesses which they have delivered from scratch as well as a track record in the digital environment as it is today.
- Offering a drop in service as well as a meeting by appointment mentoring scheme
- Examples of what has worked and what hasn't from the mentor's business background with real life examples, not text book.
- Delivering an impartial or independent mentoring scheme. Where by mentors are only offering advice to these businesses.

- It is also important to make sure that the mentee does not become overly dependent on the mentor and that the relation can be wound down at a suitable time in the future. The mentor is not meant or intended to become a part of their business. They are only to offer guidance, to inspire and encourage change where necessary.
- Compliment the mentoring offer with a networking service. This is a valuable tool for business owners to meet with local business owners, that in the future can provide encouragement to each other. It may also offer up opportunities for collaborations in business.

If you are looking for some examples of good mentoring schemes in operation, take a look at our articles on **Harrow's startup provision** and the **Royal Borough Of Kensington and Chelsea's Portobello House**.

Get in contact with us today to see how Smarter Society can help you support your local businesses to become sustainable businesses of the future. Fill out our online form **here** to arrange for us to call you back.