

An Interim Evaluation of the BizFizz Pilot Project  
Burslem and Middleport  
Stoke-on-Trent

November 2007

**“what if. . .?”**



### **Consultant's Statement**

Wider Impact Consultancy is pleased to submit a positive report in relation to the overall delivery of the pilot Burslem and Middleport BizFizz project.

Based on research findings and our experience, a number of recommendations are suggested, which if acted on, have the potential to enhance delivery of the project.

Edwin Lewis, Wider Impact Consultancy  
November 2007

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**BizFizz  
Burslem and Middleport, Stoke-on-Trent  
Pilot Project**



**Report Commissioned by the**  
BizFizz Local Management Group

**Delivered by**  
Wider Impact Consultancy  
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## 1.0 Executive Summary

The BizFizz Burslem Local Management Group (LMG) has commissioned Wider Impact Consultancy to carry out an interim evaluation of the pilot BizFizz project covering the Burslem and Middleport areas. Terms of reference are:

1. Is the project fulfilling clients' expectations?
2. How does the approach compare with existing business support offers? What is the added value, if any, over and above the mainstream?
3. Whether the project has been effective in tackling some of the barriers to self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent?

The project is based in a Priority 3 Area, which is suffering serious economic, physical and economic disadvantage. For example, compared to the City of Stoke-on-Trent as a whole, a high proportion of local people are the most likely to be long term unemployed and in receipt of incapacity benefits. The area contains an area of housing major intervention (AMI) and Burslem town centre faces the worst period of economic decline in living memory.

As will be highlighted in this report, a number of reports about Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire paint a bleak picture and highlight an urgency to bring to life the economic and social development, with locally based enterprise being seen as an important jigsaw pieces in its long term, sustained regeneration.

It therefore seems appropriate to pilot projects such as BizFizz, which have apparently played a role in other areas of the country, tackling challenges such as those highlighted above.

The BizFizz approach is based on the concept of business coaching, which supports the needs of **clients**, rather than focusing on 'outputs'. Supported by a Local Management Group, BizFizz Coaches', based in the local area spends the majority of their time meeting and supporting clients to achieve their individual aims and objectives.

A multi-agency BizFizz Panel is formed, which provides advice and support to clients who seek support via the BizFizz Coach. Wider Impacts include the social and economic regeneration of the local area.

We are pleased to report that overall, the BizFizz project appears on course to meet its objectives.

### **Project Outputs**

In terms of outputs required by the principle funders, it appears likely that outputs will be achieved, providing a closer watch is kept by the Local Management Group on delivery of the project in general.

### **Client Expectations**

Based on interviews with BizFizz clients, interviews with partner agency members, research outcomes and observations, there is **significant evidence** that the BizFizz project is currently fulfilling client expectations.

### **Comparison with Existing Business Support**

The BizFizz project appears to be supporting clients that mainstream business support agencies have difficulty in reaching. These include 'pre / pre start' clients who appear not to be ready for the support on offer from mainstream agencies; and clients who value locally based, bespoke, long term one-to-one support from a Business Coach. As a result, a particular group of clients are receiving support they may otherwise not receive.

### **Barriers to Tackling Self-Employment**

Based on findings from the Meridien Pure report <sup>1</sup> (Stakeholder Consultations), the BizFizz project is well placed to help support self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent; with particular emphasis on the long-term unemployed / worklessness agenda in Priority 3 Areas.

As will be highlighted in the body of this report, support given by the BizFizz project to the social enterprise, the *Local Edition* is a model of good practice.

<sup>1</sup> North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study, Meridien Pure, May 2004 (Revised August 2007)

## Recommendations

There are opportunities to enhance delivery of the project, which should not be seen as an indication of criticism of the extremely hard working BizFizz Coach and the teams of committed individuals who support the delivery of such impressive outputs. Recommendations are summarised as follows:

1. Opportunity should be taken to consider enhancing / updating the client database.
2. Opportunity should be taken to target the Middleport area in terms of new businesses based in the area.
3. Consideration should be given to enhancing the role / responsibilities of the Local Management Group.
4. The Local Management Group should be made aware of the aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes agreed with the principle funders.
5. Steps should be taken to lighten the workload of the BizFizz Coach.
6. Steered by the Local Management Group steps should be taken to begin to prepare an exit / succession strategy for the pilot project.
7. At present a great deal of information and knowledge is held solely by the BizFizz Coach. Understanding the need to respect the Coach's contacts, this carries obvious risks. Suggestions such as the creation of a local BizFizz website, set up and managed by the local BizFizz network should be explored.
8. Opportunity should be taken to review membership of the BizFizz Panel.
9. Consideration should be given to the BizFizz Coach gaining SFEDI accreditation.
10. Steps should be taken to break down barriers that exist between the BizFizz project and mainstream providers such as the Business Brokers, Business Initiatives and Business Link.

There are perceived risks of duplication in terms of mainstream business support on offer to clients, which if not coordinated, will do little towards tackling the overall regeneration of the area and ensure that valuable and costly publicly funded resources are not wasted.

We are therefore grateful to North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone representatives for their views, access to the Meridien Pure report<sup>1</sup> and an insight into strategic plans to 'join up' local regeneration; ensuring that strategies such as those linked to enterprise options are coordinated and carefully thought out.

As will be highlighted in this report, it quickly became apparent that the BizFizz project risks operating in a 'silo'. For example, we were surprised to note that during the research period, despite efforts made by the BizFizz Coach, agencies such as Business Link, Business Initiative and the Business Brokers had little knowledge of, or involvement with delivery of the project.

It is therefore a key recommendation of this report that opportunity should be taken to explore opportunities to 'join up' overall business support service delivery, under one 'umbrella' / service provider, similar to the approach adopted in the Bradford area and resolve issues such as potential double counting', which could stand in the way of future roll out of the BizFizz project.

Such strategy would assist with addressing issues raised by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study<sup>1</sup>:

*'However, we also found that there was no single body or mechanism that was taking responsibility for co-ordinating service development and delivery. There were strongly held views that the 'territory' had been divided up into 'patches' each of which had its owner.*

*This has created political tensions between service providers and acts to restrict the extent to which those with particular strengths are able to play an effective role. The consequence is that some segments of the market are underserved. This is illustrated particularly well in relation to enterprise starts in disadvantaged communities'.*

## Conclusion

We believe that the BizFizz approach has a great deal of merit, in that it delivers what **clients** value, with noticeable opportunities to support the long-term unemployed, 'pre / pre start' clients and individuals who have individual needs and challenges, not least, living in and setting up businesses in disadvantaged Priority 3 Areas.

Particular note should be made of the project's potential to support strategies aimed at tackling **worklessness** and supporting the **Sustainable Communities** agenda.

We are pleased to congratulate those involved in delivering this highly successful BizFizz pilot project to North Staffordshire, noting that the project only being in existence for less than 12 months at the time of this interim evaluation.

We recommend consideration is given to roll out of the BizFizz method of delivery in other Priority 3 Areas, providing the issues highlighted above, and covered in more depth in this report are addressed.

## 2.0 Acknowledgements

Wider Impact Consultancy would like to thank the following for their time and effort in making this report possible:

- The BizFizz Clients\* who have directly assisted in the form of frank and honest face to face interviews
- The BizFizz Coach
- Representatives of the following agencies and local businesses:

**Advantage West Midlands**

**Bradford Business Brokers**

**Bradford BizFizz Project**

**Business Initiative North Staffordshire**

**Business Link West Midlands**

**The Civic Trust**

**Jellifish Internet Services**

**Jobcentre Plus**

**Moorcroft**

**Local Neighbourhood Management Team**

**Midland Heart**

**North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone**

**The North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

**RENEW North Staffordshire**

**Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers**

**Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

**Stoke-on-Trent Local Strategic Partnership**

**Joan Walley MP**

\* It is significant, that without exception, clients were keen to meet the researcher, were on time for meetings and there was no requirement to cancel or re-arrange meetings when appointments were confirmed.

### 3.0 Terms of Reference

This research has been tasked to address the following questions:

- Is the project fulfilling clients' expectations?
- How does the approach compare with existing business support offers? What is the added value, if any, over and above the mainstream?
- Whether the project has been effective in tackling some of the barriers to self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent?

## 4.0 Methodology

The brief has been delivered in three sections:

1. Desktop (Secondary) research, linked to major studies commissioned by the City Council and access to:
  - Quarterly returns submitted to funders
  - The BizFizz client database (restricted access)
2. Primary research, which includes:
  - Face to face interviews with the Business Coach
  - A focus group meeting with the Local Management Group
  - A focus group meeting with multi-agency members
  - Participation / observation of a Local Network Panel meeting
  - Face to face meetings with 21 clients (out of 81 engaged on the project at the time of the research)
  - Interviews with agency members and local businesses:
    - Advantage West Midlands
    - Bradford Business Brokers
    - Bradford BizFizz Project
    - Business Initiative North Staffordshire
    - Business Link West Midlands
    - The Civic Trust
    - Jellifish Internet Services
    - Jobcentre Plus
    - Moorcroft
    - The local Neighbourhood Management Team
    - North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone
    - Midland Heart

- The North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry
  - RENEW North Staffordshire
  - Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers
  - Stoke-on-Trent City Council
  - Stoke-on-Trent Local Strategic Partnership
3. Submission of an interim evaluation report drawing together the findings of the above sections.

## 5.0 Introduction

### 5.1 Index of Multiple Deprivation

Measured against the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004, Stoke-on-Trent was the 18th most deprived area out of 354 districts in England at the time. This means that Stoke-on-Trent fell within the top 5% of England's most disadvantaged districts on this basis.

This research will generally refer to three recent reports, which are being used by the City Council, the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), to help shape policy and strategies to tackle deprivation in the area:

1. North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study, Meridian Pure, May 2004 (Revised August 2007)
2. Stoke-on-Trent Entrepreneurship Evaluation, WM Enterprise Consultants, August 2006
3. Local Economic Analysis for Stoke-on-Trent, Local Economic Solutions, January 2007

### 5.2 Economic Situation Stoke-on-Trent

The reports paint a similar picture of the economic situation in Stoke-on-Trent, which are summarised as follows:

The Stoke-on-Trent conurbation faces, perhaps, the greatest economic challenges of any urbanised area of comparable size in England. The Local Economic Analysis report reveals that Stoke-on-Trent district has an economy that is slowly failing, without facing collapse. Employment within Stoke's administrative boundary (whether of residents or in commuters) fell by 8% between 1998 and 2004, at a time of expansion in the UK as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

A wide range of reports into the economy of Stoke-on-Trent have noted a number of structural weaknesses. The main issues highlighted commonly include<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>1</sup>North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study, Meridian Pure, May 2004 (Revised August 2007)

<sup>2</sup>Stoke-on-Trent Entrepreneurship Evaluation, WM Enterprise Consultants, August 2006

- An over reliance on the manufacturing sector
- An underdeveloped service sector
- A disproportionate amount of lower value economic activity
- Limited knowledge based economic activity
- Low levels of business formation and entrepreneurship
- Low levels of educational achievement

Although there are problems of unemployment in Stoke-on-Trent, this is not the issue that sets Stoke apart from other areas in the West Midlands. Unemployment levels in Stoke-on-Trent are broadly in line with the average in the West Midlands. Problems of worklessness in Stoke-on-Trent relate primarily to high levels of economic inactivity, with particularly low employment rates and high levels of those in receipt of Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disability Allowance and Income Support<sup>3</sup>.

### **5.3 Factors Facing Priority 3 Areas / Stoke-on-Trent**

The reports note a number of factors, which seem to be taken into account by those tasked with introducing BizFizz to Stoke-on-Trent and in particular into Priority 3 Ward, Burslem South.

The Local Economic Analysis for Stoke-on-Trent report by Local Economic Solutions has identified issues such as the highest proportions of working age residents in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, being evident in Burslem South, Bentilee and Townsend, Hanley West and Shelton and Burslem South wards, all with more than **4%** of such residents in receipt of the allowance.

Stoke-on-Trent as a whole fair no better, with **21.7%** of all working age residents claiming benefits, compared with 15.7% in the West Midlands; and **12.6%** claiming incapacity benefits, compared with 7.3% in the West Midlands<sup>4</sup>.

In order to highlight those wards in which there are particular concentrations of problems relating to worklessness and skills, a number of indicators were used to compile a composite 'worklessness ranking. Based on this analysis, Burslem South is ranked 2 in terms of the overall worklessness composite ranking and first in relation to two of the seven indicators utilised.

<sup>3</sup> **Local Economic Analysis for Stoke-on-Trent, Local Economic Solutions, January 2007**

<sup>4</sup> **NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics (May 2007)**

The report identifies a number of reinforcing and inter-related factors that are likely to adversely impact of levels of worklessness in Stoke-on-Trent, which include:

- A parochial labour market outlook of many residents, limiting labour market chances
- Low levels of business dynamism, limiting job creation
- Low skill levels and poor educational aspirations
- An industrial legacy that has perpetuated a low skill, low wage economy
- A mismatch between available premises and the needs of modern businesses, limiting job creation

The impact assessment of the Business Start-Up Programme in Stoke-on-Trent highlighted a number of factors that lead to enterprise being especially low in the deprived neighbourhoods within the city<sup>2</sup>:

- An inability to access suitable finance and business support
- A lack of experience, skills or training
- A weak or underdeveloped enterprise culture
- A greater incidence of institutional and administrative barriers

Many of these problems are recognised at citywide level; however they are most severe in the most deprived parts of Stoke-on-Trent.

Indeed the Meridien pure report<sup>1</sup> recognises that, 'Despite that these [North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone and various SRB programmes] interventions, there remains a considerable enterprise deficit within North Staffordshire and the city of Stoke-on-Trent in particular'.

Linked to recognition that there are barriers relating to the supply of business support services in deprived areas, it is noticeable that the Meridien pure report<sup>1</sup> recognises – 'The principal of business support services should be about meeting the needs of customers and delivering business support services that produce tangible economic benefits for the locality and wider areas where they operate.

This implies that both the content of business support should be relevant to the locality (in terms of both existing business and in terms of the future economic development needs) and it should be delivered in a way that is accessible to different segments in the 'market'.

Based on statements such as, 'Many potential entrepreneurs in Priority 3 Wards do not access mainstream business support due to lack of capacity or cultural issues'<sup>4</sup>, it is apparent that applications for funding support for ERDF and Neighbourhood Regeneration funds for the BizFizz project are based on filling 'gaps in the market' in relation to delivering business support to budding entrepreneurs living and setting up businesses in Stoke-on-Trent's most deprived (Priority 3) communities.

The case for project is also based on, 'Another problem is that economic development, as an activity, is seen as being top-down and driven by large agencies and developers'. Communities perceive that they have little role in delivering their own economic development'<sup>5</sup>.

#### 5.4 Local Area Agreements (LAAs)<sup>6</sup>

Linked to **Block 4: Economic Development and Enterprise**, the BizFizz project aims to tackle two key Floor Targets:

1. **Enterprise Society** – to build an enterprise society in which small firms of all kinds thrive and achieve their potential with more enterprise in disadvantaged communities:
  - The number of new business start ups in priority neighbourhoods (Burslem, Middleport / Longport) (2.1.4)
  - The number of businesses surviving in priority neighbourhoods (Burslem, Middleport / Longport) (2.2.1)
2. **Worklessness** – as part of the wider objective of full employment in every region, over three years to Spring 2008 and taking account the economic cycle:
  - The overall employment rate of working adults in Stoke-on-Trent (1.1.1(i))
  - The percentage of working age adults that are employed in priority Neighbourhoods in Stoke-on-Trent (Burslem, Middleport / Longport) (1.1.1(ii))

<sup>5</sup>ERDF (Objective 2) Priority 3 – Staffordshire Sub-Regional Action Plan funding application, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

<sup>6</sup>Transforming Stoke-on-Trent – Local Area Agreement, March 2006

## 5.5 BizFizz Methodology

The methodology for the project outlined within the ERDF funding application<sup>5</sup> is:

- The pilot will be chosen by the City Council based on need in terms of community capacity, and a readiness amongst local people and organisations to deliver the project
- The Community Enterprise facilitator would be a full-time worker based in the local community (and ideally living in the community, although the selection would be based on Fair Recruitment Policies)
- The facilitator would be trained by BizFizz, an arm of the Civic Trust
- The role of the facilitator would be to find potential entrepreneurs in a local community and give them direct support. The facilitator would ensure that local people can access mainstream support, including grants, help them write business plans, and signpost them to the best sources of support
- The facilitator would be managed by a Local Network made up of local residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and agencies. The group would be vital in helping the facilitator find solutions for the potential entrepreneur's problems (e.g. sources of finance, marketing etc.). The Local Network would actually have the ability to 'hire and fire' the facilitator
- The project in Middleport and Burslem would compliment a wider range of community activities being delivered by RENEW North Staffordshire, Midland Heart and others as part of the housing pathfinder Area of Major Intervention. It strengthens this activity by giving it an economic regeneration function, currently lacking at present.

The project is unique within Stoke and indeed the West Midlands; there is no other engagement activity of this kind in the city or the region (although the methodology does have a track record of success elsewhere in the UK).

Finally, the facilitator would also raise the profile of self-employment within their local community.

The beneficiaries will principally be those local residents and businesses that participate in the project; the partnership itself; and an additional outcome, local eligible residents who start their own business.

## 5.6 BizFizz Funding Grants

Funding to support the project has been obtained from two sources:

1. ERDF (Objective2) Priority 3 – Staffordshire Sub-Regional Action Plan	£39,601
2. Stoke-on-Trent LSP Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	£48,604
<b>Total</b>	<b>£88,295</b>

## 5.7 BizFizz Outputs and Results

Table 1 provides a summary of outputs and results agreed with the principle funders.

**Table 1**

Objectives	
ERDF	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build partnership involving tenants, local businesses, voluntary groups, social landlords and agencies</li> <li>2. Recruit and train Community Enterprise Facilitator</li> <li>3. Engage with local community gatekeepers (e.g. Social Landlord / Community Group) to recruit local people; and develop capacity of those people via BizFizz</li> <li>4. Place Coach in heart of community to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach promotes by face to face meetings – local groups / individuals and businesses</li> <li>• Availability of Coach – e.g. no appointments</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Increase business start-ups in P3 areas by enterprise facilitator signposting where advice and support can be secured</li> <li>6. Ensure mainstream agencies – Business Link, NSCCI are involved in the process and participate in the Network Panel</li> <li>7. Sharing / exchanging good practice. Quarterly events</li> </ol>	
Outputs	
ERDF	NRF
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Capacity building initiative</li> <li>1 Networking and exchange activities</li> <li>20 Business start-ups</li> <li>10 CED residents into employment</li> <li>20 Business start ups</li> <li>20 Business start-ups assisted with environmental management</li> <li>20 Business start-ups led by managers from target community</li> <li>8 Community groups engaged</li> <li>100 P3 residents engaged in advice sessions</li> <li>4 Community events</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25 Business start-ups (Priority neighbourhoods)</li> <li>5 Surviving businesses 52 weeks (Priority neighbourhoods)</li> <li>30 Working adults (SOT)</li> <li>30 Working adults (Priority neighbourhoods)</li> </ol>

## 6.0 About Coaching / BizFizz

### 6.1 Introduction

Coaching is ...

*'A process that enables learning and development to occur thus improvement to improve. To be a successful coach requires a knowledge and understanding of a process as well as a variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the coaching takes place'.*

**Source: Eric Parsloe, Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring**

The below lists outline fundamental differences between coaching and traditional business support.

#### Coaching

- Actively un-tap potential
- Fine tune and develops skills
- Development activities are designed to suit client's personal needs and learning styles
- Eliminate specific performance problems
- Development activities are designed to suit client's personal needs and learning styles
- Eliminate performance problems
- Can focus on interpersonal skills, which cannot readily or effectively be transferred in a traditional learning environment
- Provides clients with contacts and networks to assist with furthering their career or life aspirations
- Performed in a 'live' environment
- Coaches transfer the skills to the client, rather than doing the job for them

#### Traditional Business Support

- Programmes are mostly generic and not tailored to individual needs
- Clients generally have to complete standard modules, so there is little room for tailoring the programme to account of existing knowledge, skills or preferences
- Not always sufficiently similar to 'live' working environment to ensure skills transfer
- Best suited to transfer of knowledge and certain skills, rather than the development of personal qualities or competencies

**Source: UK Coaching and Mentoring Network**

## 6.2 The BizFizz Approach to Business Coaching (Source: BizFizz Website [www.bizfizz.org.uk](http://www.bizfizz.org.uk))

BizFizz is a joint project between the **New Economics Foundation (NEF)** and the **Civic Trust**. The project is designed to stimulate economic regeneration from within communities by providing free and flexible support to local entrepreneurs, which actively draws upon local expertise and knowledge.

BizFizz provides free, confidential and professional advice to local entrepreneurs. It works by:

- Employing a **BizFizz Coach**, who provides tailored one-to-one support to individuals who want to start or grow their business
- Establishing a **Local Panel** of people whose background, expertise and local know-how bring a second tier of support to BizFizz clients. The panel can include community activists, head teachers, faith group leaders, councillors, and local business people

## 6.3 The BizFizz Coach

BizFizz places a business advisor and counsellor in the heart of the community. As Coaches, their role is not to do the legwork for local entrepreneurs, but to help people discover their own potential as entrepreneurs. The Coach will usually be an experienced entrepreneur, with some experience of giving advice and support to businesses and a strong commitment to our approach. The Coach gets to know the community thoroughly, through extensive personal introductions as well as visiting local clubs and pubs, societies, schools and faith groups to introduce them, and let everyone know that they are available to support local entrepreneurs.

The Coach's job is not to sit on committees, or provide money, training or premises but simply to support entrepreneurs. The coach does this by helping people to follow their passions.

BizFizz Coaches encourage entrepreneurs to create a 'virtual team' of supporters to help them with those aspects of the business they feel less comfortable with. Coaches provide their services for free, but they are free in another sense. They are not constrained by having to ration the amount of time they give to the entrepreneurs or by notions of 'professional distance'. Within reason, Coaches can do whatever it takes to help the entrepreneur succeed.

## **6.4 The Local Panel**

Key to the local BizFizz operation is a panel of 20-30 people who act as a network for the entrepreneurs, helping them unblock problems and providing key information and contacts. It is not a management committee, but an advice and networking group. It consists of well-connected and experienced people from the community and the wider area who can make a practical contribution. Each panel member introduces the Coach to ten additional contacts, thus helping the coach to widen their contact with potential entrepreneurs, and to gain an overview of local skills and resources available locally.

The panel includes local people with different backgrounds: community leaders and activists, head teachers, faith group leaders, councillors, local entrepreneurs and business people from the wider area, people with expertise in key areas such as IT, marketing, book-keeping, premises, bankers and other finance providers, people from regulatory authorities such as planning, environmental health and the Inland Revenue. What brings them together is a mutual passion for the area where they live and work.

The ability to unleash local and expertise and resources is the main difference between BizFizz and other business support. That is why Panel members are asked to contribute not only in their professional role but using all their personal experience and knowledge. For example Local Panels are very helpful with finding premises, identifying waste materials that can be used by other businesses, and linking entrepreneurs with common interests.

## **6.5 The Local Management Group (LMG)**

This is a group of 4 - 5 people, who will take responsibility for driving the local BizFizz project forward. Membership of the LMG should not be drawn from any one organisation. Suggested LMG composition, based upon our best practice experience, is:

- One representative from the local host organisation
- One or two representatives from other local partners
- One or two other panel members local to the project area

All members of the LMG are also members of the Local Panel. With support from the National Co-ordinator, they will take key decisions about how the programme operates locally. The LMG provides hands-on support to the Coach, particularly in the areas of client referral, panel development, project promotion, and at a strategic level to address barriers affecting BizFizz clients.

The National Co-ordinator will provide an induction for the initial members of the LMG, thereafter the BizFizz Coaches and existing LMG members will induct new members of the LMG during the project.

The LMG provides a reference point for day-to-day issues for the coach, including any employment issues that may arise during the course of the project, the National Co-ordinator and providers of funding the local facilitating organisation will report on budgetary matters to the LMG. The LMG is responsible for the strategic direction of the programme within the framework of the model, and will address issues related to sustainability and performance with reference to the data the coach collects. The LMG will evaluate the impact of the local project. Although they will at times take advice from the Local Panel, the LMG will act to avoid the Local Panel becoming a 'management committee' and help it to focus on finding practical solutions for entrepreneurs.

## **6.6 The National Team**

The Civic Trust and the NEF have set up a national team to work on BizFizz. It consists of staff who are experienced in harnessing community capacity, providing small business support, and project management. The National Team helps the local projects with:

- Policy role
- Promoting the BizFizz idea to the community
- Recruiting and selecting the local panel
- Induction for the local panel to get them working effectively
- Recruitment and selection of the Coach
- Induction for the Coach
- Specialised residential training for the Coach
- Providing information for the Coach to help them support entrepreneurs
- Support for the Coach and the local partners throughout the project
- Organising regular meetings where Coaches from different projects can exchange good practice
- Supporting the panel meetings
- Monitoring and evaluation

## **7.0 Local and Regional Business Support**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The principal aims of business support services should be about meeting the needs of customers and delivering business support services that produce tangible economic benefits for the locality and wider areas in which they operate. This implies that both the content of business support should be relevant to the locality (in terms of both existing businesses and in terms of the future economic development needs) and it should be delivered in a way that is accessible to different segments within the 'market'<sup>1</sup>.

Support for enterprise development in North Staffordshire is available from a number of different sources and comes in a number of different forms. Rather than simply providing a list of all support services from the vast number that exist, the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study, by Meridien Pure<sup>1</sup> sought to focus its review of support on those areas of business support that are likely to be most relevant to the development of enterprise options in North Staffordshire:

### **7.2 Business Initiative (accredited DTI Enterprise Agency)**

Business Initiative (part of the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry) provides free business advice to start-up businesses and micro-businesses, offering support from a team of experienced business advisors e.g. short courses covering all aspects of running a business; NVQ qualifications including Business Start-up Level 3 and Management NVQs.

### **7.3 North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

The North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry undertakes a wide range of activities in support of its members, including the organisation of seminars, briefings and representing the interests of business in partnership working arrangements. The Chamber's Policy Unit campaigns on behalf of members, exerting influence on decision making to create a more favourable business environment in North Staffordshire.

The Chamber's International Trade Team delivers a wide range of export services including the complete range of services on offer from Trade Partners UK. Specialist help is available to exporters through the 'Passport to Export' scheme which offers consultancy, training, market visits and research at greatly subsidised rates.

#### **7.4 Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

The role of the City Council in providing business support services is mainly one of signposting enquirers to other agencies. The City Council also provides managed workspace at its Enterprise Centres and The Hothouse, as well as providing space at nursery units on industrial estates.

#### **7.5 The Minority Business Association (MBA)**

The MBA offers outreach support to businesses and those seeking to establish a business from ethnic minority communities. The Association works pro-actively to engage with businesses and with potential businesses before signposting them into mainstream business support service providers. The Association also undertakes a range of research and development projects intended to better represent the opportunities that minority businesses could contribute to the regeneration of North Staffordshire.

#### **7.6 Staffordshire University**

Staffordshire University provides a range of services to support businesses, including, consultancy services, research, access to specialist equipment, access to finance and grants for SME's, undergraduate and graduate placements, website design and hosting, video conferencing facilities, staff development programmes, on-site broadband communications, hire of meeting rooms, specialist intellectual property and patenting advice. The University has also taken a lead role in recent years in developing incubation space to support the development of new businesses in North Staffordshire and, in particular, businesses with potential to grow in high value adding sectors. These developments combined with post graduate business diplomas are intended to help retain graduates in North Staffordshire.

#### **7.7 The Prince's Trust**

The Prince's Trust is a charitable trust that offers funding to young unemployed people who want to set up their own business. In addition to funding support, the Trust aims to help young people build confidence, establish effective working relationships and overcome other barriers that might be obstacles to both their personal development and the development of their businesses.

#### **7.8 Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers**

The Business Brokers project, one of a number operating nationally, was originally created to help facilitate the engagement of business in the City's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. Unlike other projects of its kind the Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers project takes a direct role in supporting businesses through a proactive 'outreach' approach to identifying company needs and then 'packaging' around the company

appropriate support services so that needs can be addressed. The Brokers also deliver a range of business to business support projects including '*Lets Do Business*' mentoring and networking.

### **7.9 Staffordshire Business & Environment Network**

The Staffordshire Business and Environment Network provide subsidised environmental training, awareness and improve the ability of companies to improve their environmental performance.

### **7.10 Business Innovation Centre (BIC)**

The BIC provides advice on all aspects of innovation including new product development, prototyping, intellectual property, funding and marketing. It also operates a seed corn grant fund to support new companies in developing products and services and in getting products and services to market. The BIC also provides business incubation space through a variety of sites across Staffordshire. These are designed to provide low cost, easy in easy out business premises within an environment of high quality business support.

### **7.11 InStaffs UK**

InStaffs (UK) Ltd is a partnership of Staffordshire Local Authorities and Chambers of Commerce providing a single point of contact for businesses wishing to move to, or expand within, the county of Staffordshire.

The company promotes Staffordshire as a business location and provides a service to business including a wide range of information, site visits, assistance with planning applications, help with training, recruitment and grant advice.

### **7.12 Advantage West Midlands**

Advantage West Midlands (the Regional Development Agency) has a direct role providing investment to support inward investment, business growth and skills development programmes in the region. The Agency has its own website designed to help small growing companies and start-ups to find the most suitable finance for them. It provides information and advice on obtaining the different types of finance, as well as a searchable database of grants, asset finance and cash flow finance providers, venture capitalists, Business Angel network, banks, cash awards and soft loans available to SME's in the West Midlands.

### 7.13 Business Link West Midlands

Primary funded by the Department for Business and Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, the quality and delivery of the Business Link service is the responsibility of the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands. Objectives include delivering a comprehensive business support service to the West Midlands region.

Business Link West Midlands aims to help businesses and individuals take the right steps to business success by offering to:

- Give everyone in the region who is serious about starting a business the chance to do so
- Ensure that anyone who has started a business through Business Link has a 75% chance of survival
- Increase the bottom line performance for every business that works with the agency
- Give every business or entrepreneur who works with the agency the necessary skills to achieve their goals
- Provide a service that is focused on the needs of business
- Provide easy access to the help businesses needs
- Provide advice and advisors

### 7.14 Comment

We feel it is useful to reproduce an analysis of business support services in North Staffordshire, provided by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone Enterprise Options Study<sup>1</sup>:

Clearly, from this brief analysis of 'who does what' we can see that the business support arsenal in North Staffordshire potentially provides a capability to respond effectively to the area's economic challenges. However, from our discussions with partners, we believe that there are a number of areas of weakness that are not being effectively addressed, specifically:

- The development of support services in relation to 'market' intelligence and policy priorities
- Prioritisation in resource allocation decisions
- Competition and limited coordination amongst service providers
- Quality standards in delivering business support need improvement

In relation to the use of market intelligence and in responding to policy priorities we have found that the recent LEGI bids served to create a body of intelligence around which to construct a bid for resources. However, we found the extent of engagement by partners in the preparation of the bid was limited.

A number of partners felt that they had been consulted on parts of the bid and not been involved in contributing to the development of the 'big picture.' Partners also felt that the work being done in preparing the bid and the intelligence gathering that took place is now largely unused in developing business support services and new approaches to the development of enterprise.

We also found that there was evidence of individual organisations undertaking evaluations of their own work and their own services in an effort to improve delivery, but there was no coordinated approach across services that sought to identify on a regular basis what the needs of businesses were from a 'customers' perspective. Neither could we identify any evidence of work being done proactively at the neighbourhood level to effectively develop a better understanding of the barriers to enterprise as an employment option for residents in the most disadvantaged communities.

Finally, in relation to the extent to which service design and delivery responds to 'market' intelligence and policy priorities we found that the business community effectively has no collective voice in the city or any means of engaging with the policy making process. The business community and business support service providers are no longer engaged to any great extent with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which has the key policy making and coordinating role in relation to economic development and worklessness. Partners typically commented that the LSP had no obvious direction and was a bureaucratic body that had no appeal to the business community.

In relation to the process for prioritising the allocation of resources to support business and enterprise, we found that the process was neither clear nor transparent.

Partners typically commented that they did not understand the process through which resources were allocated, they felt that the process through which the LEGI bid was developed was dominated by the Council and that the Regeneration Zone was not an inclusive body that adequately brought partners together in determining priorities. This combined with the dislocation of engagement from the LSP effectively means that there is no collective process for the interpretation of information leading to clear priorities being set for the use of resources.

In relation to the extent to which there is effective coordination of support services between service providers in relation to the economic and enterprise challenges that exist in North Staffordshire, we found that there was evidence of collaboration between some agencies and that there was a good understanding of where each provider was positioned in relation to the market.

However, we also found that there was no single body or mechanism that was taking responsibility for co-ordinating service development and delivery. There were strongly held views that the 'territory' had been divided up into 'patches' each of which had its owner. This has created political tensions between service providers and acts to restrict the extent to which those with particular strengths are able to play an effective role. The consequence is that some segments of the market are underserved. This is illustrated particularly well in relation to enterprise starts in disadvantaged communities.

Finally, in relation to the quality of service delivery, we found that there was evidence of some very good quality services being delivered but there was also a body of opinion that the quality of advice services to businesses needed to be improved.

This was being addressed to a large extent through the SFEDI accreditation process in North Staffordshire for business advisers. The extent to which this acts to reduce the overall number of business advisers remains to be seen, but there is likelihood that there will remain in North Staffordshire a shortage of high quality business advisers.

In addition, the SFEDI process will do nothing to improve the capacity and capability of service providers to work in disadvantaged communities and with disadvantaged residents. In these areas it is imperative to acquire the resources (LEGI round 3 etc) that will allow new methods to be tried and tested among those at a distance from the enterprise agenda.

## 8.0 Research Findings

### 8.1 ERDF / NRF Outputs

Table 2 highlights ERDF / NRF returns up to Quarter 2 2007/08

Table 2

Output Description	ERDF Overall Target Jan 07 to Dec 2008		NRF 2007 / 08	
	Forecast	Actual (To Date)	Forecast	Actual (To Date)
Capacity building initiatives	1	1		
Networking / Exchange initiatives	1	1		
Business start ups	20	10		
Businesses assisted with environmental management	20	0		
Business start ups led by managers from target community	20	7		
CED residents into employment	10	2		
Community groups engaged	8	6		
P3 residents engaged / participate in advice sessions	100	16		
Community events held	4	1		
The overall employment rate of working age adults in the City			25	2
The number of working age adults that are employed in priority neighbourhoods			25	2
The number of businesses surviving in priority neighbourhoods			24	9
The number of businesses surviving in priority neighbourhoods			5	5

Source: Stoke-on-Trent City Council (September 2007)

### 8.2 Client Database

Wider Impact Consultancy was given restricted access to the BizFizz client database. All references to client names had been removed to ensure client anonymity, which is guaranteed to clients who make links with the project.

Unfortunately, the database was not complete at the time of access, with a number of fields, which would have been useful to the research not completed. It has not proved feasible to provide the research with a complete data base. Where appropriate, the lack of complete data and information will be referred to.

### 8.3 Summary

The following is a summary of available client data base information:

### 8.4 Demographics (All)

81 clients

Male **61 (75%)**

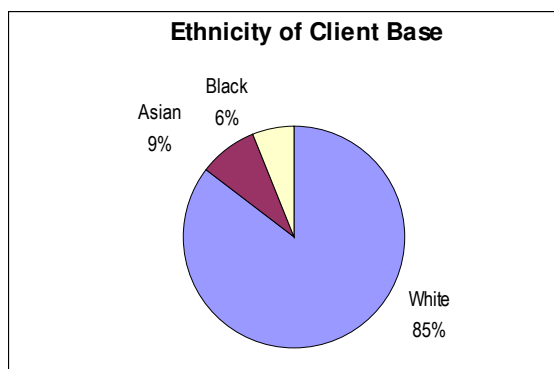
Female **20 (25%)**

Average Age **41**

#### Ethnicity

Figure 1 highlights the ethnicity of clients.

Figure 1



White **69 (85%)**

Black **5 (6%)**

Asian **7 (9%)**

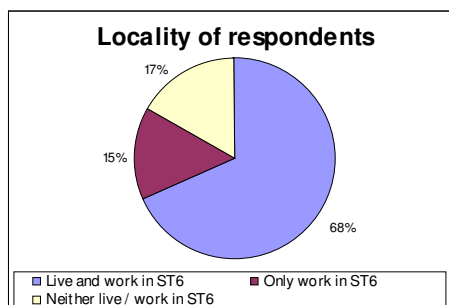
**NB:** Percentage Asian / Asian British: Pakistani populations in Burslem South / Burslem North are **7.9% / 1.1%** Source: 2001 Census ONS

For this section of the analysis, unless otherwise indicated, 28 records were incomplete and have been excluded from the analysis, resulting in a total of **53** client records being included.

### 8.5 Locality of Clients (All)

Figure 2 highlights the locality of clients; linked to home and business address post codes. Due to incomplete client data base information, it has not proved feasible to indicate other than ST6 postcode areas.

Figure 2



**36 (100%)** who live in the ST6 postcode area have their business based in the ST6 postcode area

**36 (68%)** living in the ST6 postcode area

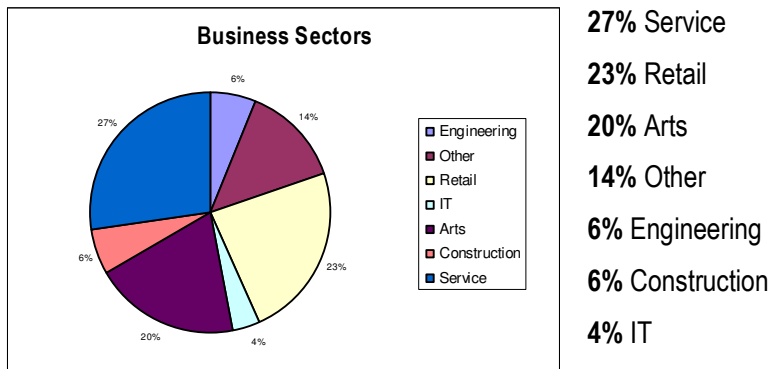
**8 (15%)** businesses based in the ST6 postcode area – living outside ST6 area

**9 (17%)** with no ST6 link

## 8.6 Business Descriptions (All)

Figure 3 highlights businesses descriptions by sector.

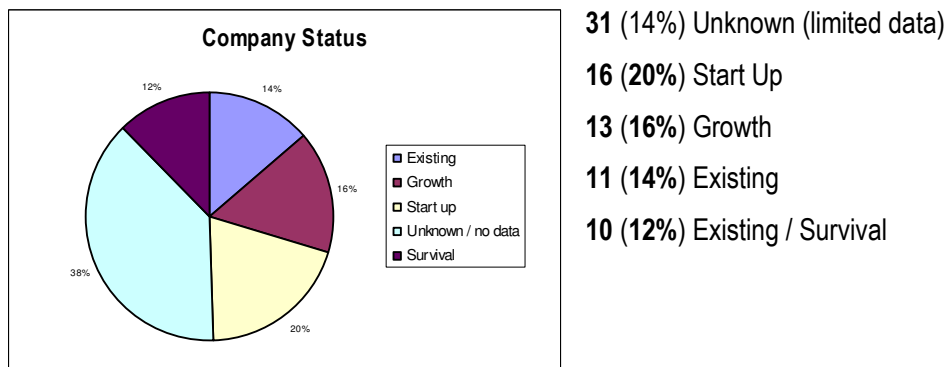
Figure 3



## 8.7 Company Status (Limited Data)

Figure 4 highlights company status. It will be noted, based on information available from the client database, it is apparent that **20% (16)** of the 81 clients have been supporting in setting up a new business. The status of 31 clients is unknown due to incomplete records.

Figure 4



## 8.8 Client Interviews

A total of 21 clients, representing 20 businesses were interviewed face to face. Interviews were structured, with all clients being asked the same prepared questions, outlined within **Appendix E**.

The research had a free hand to select a representative group from a client data base of 81 clients at the time the commission commenced. We feel that interviews of just over **25%** of the total client base will provide a useful indication of current outcomes of the project. No pressure was placed on clients to answer any of the questions and anonymity was agreed in all cases.

In one case, three clients were interviewed as a group. In one case two clients from the same business were interviewed together. In view of their personal circumstances and with their consent, this interview took place in the presence of the BizFizz Coach. No other interview took place in the presence of the BizFizz Coach.

## 8.9 Demographics

Male <b>14 (67%)</b>	Female <b>7 (33%)</b>	Average Age <b>40</b>
White <b>19</b>	Black <b>1</b>	Asian <b>1</b>

Number previously on benefits **3 (14%)** Previous benefit grants per year **£17,300** - average claim **£3,460**

## 8.10 Locality of Clients Interviewed

**10 (48%)** living within ST6 postcode area

**100% (10)** of the candidates who live in the ST6 postcode area, have based their business in the ST6 area

**16 (76%)** businesses operating within ST6 postcode area

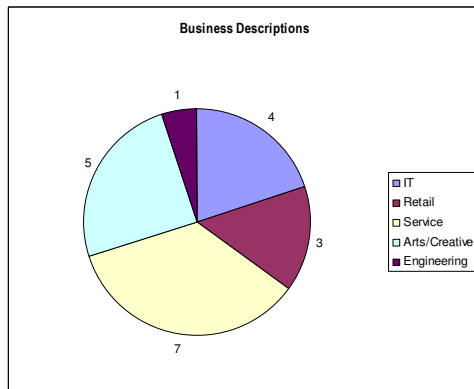
**4** with no ST6 link **4 (19%)**

**1** with no Stoke-on-Trent link **1**

### 8.11 Business Descriptions

Figure 5 highlights businesses descriptions

Figure 5



- Service / incl. hotel / public house **35%**
- Service / incl. hotel / public house **35%**
- IT **20%**
- Service **15%**
- Engineering **5%**

### 8.12 Business Turnover / Staffing Levels

Average current annual turnover of 13 businesses (8 declined to indicate) **£39.9K**

Anticipated next years turnover of 13 businesses (8 declined to indicate) **£68.6K**

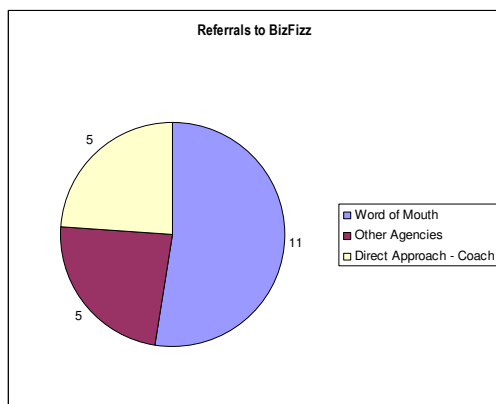
Total paid staff (all businesses) **60** (includes hotel **19** / public house **15**)

Total unpaid staff (all businesses) **11**

### 8.13 How Referred to BizFizz

Figure 6 highlights how clients were referred to BizFizz

Figure 6

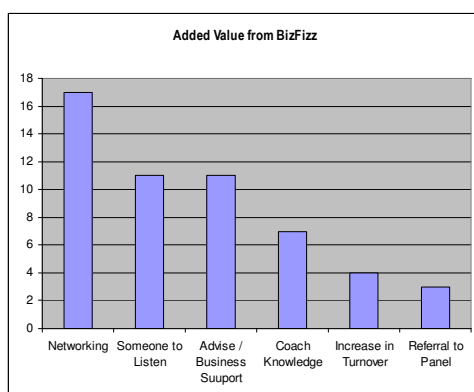


- Word of mouth **52%**
- Other agencies **24%**
- Direct approach by BizFizz Coach **24%**

### 8.14 Added Value from Contact with BizFizz

Figure 7 highlights the added value clients have / are receiving from contact with the BizFizz project

Figure 7



- Networking **81%**
- Someone to listen **52%**
- Advise / Business support **52%**
- Coach knowledge **33%**
- Increased turnover **19%**
- Referral to Panel **14%**

### 8.15 Referrals to Other Agencies (All)

Of all clients interviewed, **7 (33%)** stated they had received a referral to another agency by the BizFizz Coach.

Of the 7, two have received what they referred to as a 'specialist referral'.

### 8.16 Awareness of Business Support

Table 3 highlights client's awareness, use and satisfaction levels of other business support agencies before and since receiving support from BizFizz.

Table 3 Client Awareness / Use of Business Support Services (Other than BizFizz)

Agency	Clients Aware of Service	Used Anytime	Average Satisfaction (1 to 5 - 5 High)
Chamber of Commerce	2	1	1
LEAP	1	1	5
Jobcentre Plus	2	1	3
Business Initiative	16	6	3.5
Business Link	8	8	1.4
Business Brokers	3	3	2.7
Guardian Angels	3	2	3
BIC	6	5	2.2
Sure Start	1	1	1
Prince's Trust	5	5	3.9
Michelin Development	1	0	N/A

**NB:** It should be noted that this table reflects the perceptions of the clients interviewed, rather than an indication of a particular agencies actual support for the project.

## 8.17 Highlights

Of the 21 BizFizz clients interviewed:

### Business Initiative

- **76%** of clients are aware of Business Initiative
- **29%** have used Business Initiative
- Satisfaction in relation to Business Initiative is scored at **3.5**

### Business Link

- **38%** of clients are aware of Business Link
- **38%** have used Business Link
- Satisfaction in relation to Business Link is scored at **1.4**

### Business Brokers

- **14%** of clients are aware of the Business Brokers
- **14%** have used the Business Brokers
- Satisfaction in relation to Business Initiative is scored at **2.7**

### 8.18 Client Satisfaction with BizFizz

Of the 21 clients interviewed the average satisfaction score out of 5 (5 high) is **4.4**. This is clearly an impressive outcome, particularly when compared with the data outlined at section 8.17.

### 8.19 Support Provided to Other BizFizz Clients

- 11 clients (52%) have / are providing direct support / business links to other BizFizz clients
- 7 clients (33%) have / are attending Panel meetings in support of other BizFizz clients.

### 8.20 Case Studies

The researcher was impressed with the honesty of those interviewed, who in many cases offered intimate details of their personal lives. As outlined above, anonymity was agreed in all cases and the research is careful not to compromise the trust of the clients. The following is a summary of interviews. Where appropriate, individual comments/ observations have been highlighted.

Overall, all clients were extremely supportive of the BizFizz Coach. Statements such as *'inspiring, motivational, energetic and hard working'* were common.

As the statistics reveal, the most important benefits are **business networking / someone to listen / business advice / support**.

Whilst a number of clients have and are utilising other business support services, it is noted, that overall, clients have little regard for mainstream support provided by agencies such as Business Link and Business Initiative. This apparently is based on bad experiences of the agencies, which failed to meet their personal requirements.

The following comments were noted from BizFizz clients:

- Promises are not met
- They did not understand my personal / learning needs / difficulties
- They don't seem to care
- They never follow up once they have ticked their boxes

It is apparent that the BizFizz Coach is much more popular, based on comments such as:

- Affinity with Burslem
- Has taken time to know my business
- Has local knowledge
- Is there 24/7
- You can contact her anytime – even Sundays
- Provides moral support
- Understands my needs
- Gives me the answers I need to know.
- Others don't seem to care
- Is a friend
- Bends over backwards to help me
- Is a good listener
- Puts you in a position where work is coming in

It is apparent that **9 (43%)** of the clients interviewed, saw the BizFizz Coach as their sole source of business support, with no apparent plans to take advantage of mainstream business support services. Two of these clients had concerns about tax related issues that apparently were not being met. The following comments were noted:

- I have no occasion to go elsewhere
- She gives me everything I want
- I am too busy to go elsewhere

The majority of clients believe they are part of a local '*BizFizz network*', which is managed / controlled by the BizFizz Coach, '*at the centre*'.

A number of clients expressed concern that the Business Coach was the sole holder of '*useful networking links*'; and are concerned that their network could collapse in the event of the BizFizz Coach leaving. It was their view that a priority should be planning an exit strategy in preparation for the BizFizz Coach leaving as funding inevitably runs out. We noted a suggestion to create a local BizFizz website, set up and managed by the BizFizz network.

There was also some concern about the capacity of the BizFizz Coach to maintain such a high quality service to clients. One client mentioned that lately, a number of promises had not been met and felt the Coach risked, '*over stretching herself*' (providing evidence of the project being client led and the Coach being victim of her own success).

It is particularly noticeable and worthy that the BizFizz Coach provides almost 'intimate' one to one support to clients with individual personal needs. This includes clients with learning difficulties, reading difficulties and personal / family based issues. A high level of trust and understanding has clearly developed, which is gratefully acknowledged by the clients concerned. In the words of clients:

- The mainstream agencies cannot support me in this way
- How can you tell someone in a suit you cannot read?
- Whilst my benefits have fallen from £1,000 a month to only £440, I have my independence back and a life for myself. My little business is keeping me sane and helping to keep my family together. I would be lost without the support of BizFizz
- This is the first time I have been treated as an equal and people are not judging because of my disabilities

### 8.21 Social Enterprise Case Study – Good Practice

We were particularly impressed with the **Local Edition** newspaper and the role BizFizz; in particular the role the BizFizz Coach has had, in its launch and ongoing development. During the research period we noted contact with other BizFizz clients / businesses closely involved in day to day tasks such as photography, art work, news reports and distribution.

### 8.22 Partnership Support

As previously outlined, BizFizz is supported by a **Local Management Group (LMG)** and a **BizFizz Panel**.

### 8.23 Local Management Group (LMG)

The **LMG** currently consists of members of:

- 1 member of Midland Heart (Line management / support services)
- 2 local businesses representatives – Moorcroft Pottery / Jellifish Internet Services Ltd
- 1 local school representative

- 1 Stoke-on-Trent City Council representative
- 1 Neighbourhood Management representative (Stoke-on-Trent City Council)
- 1 Neighbourhood Renewal Team Representative (Stoke-on-Trent City Council)
- 1 Civic Trust Representative

Notes of meetings are maintained, rather than traditional minutes. A review of recent notes indicates that generally meetings are well attended, with few apologies recorded.

Two members of the LMG have been interviewed and it is of note that:

- A local business representative was not aware of the ERDF / NRF objectives / outcomes highlighted at table 1, commenting, *'I thought BizFizz was not about numbers and targets'*
- The Midland Heart representative was not fully aware of the ERDF / NRF objectives / outcomes highlighted at table 1

## 8.24 BizFizz Panel

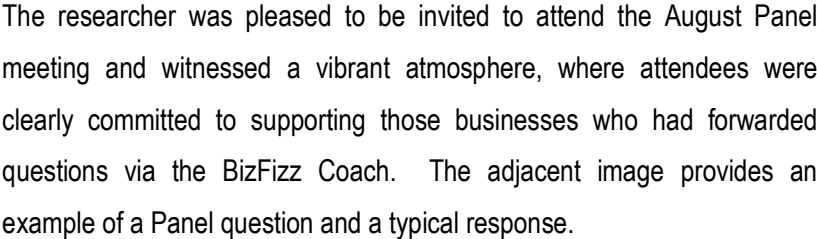
The BizFizz Panel currently consists of representatives of:

- Stoke-on-Trent Council
- Beth Johnson Foundation
- Start Up
- BIC
- Local Primary School
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- UAACO
- Jobcentre Plus
- Total People
- Staffordshire University
- Voluntary / Community Sector Representatives
- Business People
- Local Residents

A review of 6 Panel meetings indicates an average attendance of **21** Panel members – maximum **27** / minimum **15**. Table 4 highlights attendance by sector.

Table 4 BizFizz Panel Attendance

Month (2007)	Business	Residents	Council / Other Support Agencies	Totals
January	8	2	14	24
February	9	2	16	27
March	7	2	11	20
May	9	2	10	21
June	4	4	7	15
August	8	1	8	17



A review of **16** active (i.e. attend Panel meetings) **business members** of the Panel indicates **7 (44%)** are also BizFizz clients / members of the LMG.

Wider Impact Consultancy took the opportunity to host a 'breakfast meeting' with **14** individuals / agency members, who are / have links with the BizFizz project.

## Comments

Whilst the majority of observations are predictable, comments such as *'politics: envy that it was not their idea / baby, so don't support; no support from partner organisations e.g. BIC Chamber, other support agencies may see as threat – be suspicious'*, are worthy of note.

There is also worth in noting 'wider impacts', particularly those relating to developing business communities, an innovative social enterprise and wider community regeneration.

## 9.0 Multi-Agency Feedback

### 9.1 Introduction

Opportunity has been taken to consult with representatives from the following agencies:

- Bradford Business Brokers
- Bradford BizFizz project
- Business Initiative North Staffordshire
- Business Link West Midlands
- The Civic Trust
- Jellifish Internet Services
- Jobcentre Plus
- Moorcroft
- Local Neighbourhood Management Team
- North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone
- Middleport Residents Ass'
- RENEW North Staffordshire
- Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers
- Stoke-on-Trent Council
- Midland Heart
- Start Up City Wide
- Advantage West Midlands

### 9.2 Interviews

Interviews were carried out during September / October and **Appendix C** highlights a summary of findings from a selection of agency representatives interviewed.

### 9.3 Comments

It is noticeable that at the time of the research, Business Initiative North Staffordshire, the Stoke-on-Trent Business Brokers and Business Link had little knowledge, or direct involvement / linkage with the BizFizz project. In view of such, they are clearly unable to provide positive / knowledge based feedback about the project.

It is also noticeable that agencies / companies such as Jellifish Internet Services, Jobcentre Plus, Local Neighbourhood Management Team, Middleport, Longport, Dalehall Community Association, Midland Heart and Start Up City Wide are directly involved in supporting the project and are understandably able to provide useful feedback about the project.

### 9.4 North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone

A meeting with the **North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone** was productive. A useful understanding was gained of developing strategic objectives of the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership. In relation to the Enterprise and Innovation Strategic Commissioning Group, draft purposes are:

- The overall aim of the group will be to develop and deliver an integrated business and enterprise strategy for North Staffordshire

- To provide a single framework for the coordination of enterprise, business development, support to new and existing businesses, and inward investment which will deliver the priorities identified in the Integrated Economic Development Strategy and will support the following:
  - Increased levels of GVA
  - Increased income (average gross pay of people in employment)
  - Increased levels of business - VAT business registration; VAT stocks; self-employment; start-ups
  - Diversification of the economy
  - Attract new business
- To shape and commission enterprise, business and inward investment initiatives on behalf of the NSRP.

### Terms of Reference

- Provide leadership on conurbation wide issues relating to enterprise, business and inward investment
- Ensure there is a consistent approach to enterprise, business and inward investment working towards excellence
- Ensure co-ordination of activities in conjunction with the Business Link Model, which add value and remove duplication
- Provide the sole means to determine, commission and coordinate business support services in the sub-region, additional to the Business Link offer
- Identify and commission initiatives to fulfil the purpose of the group

## 9.5 Advantage West Midlands

**Advantage West Midlands** referred the researcher to the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone

## 9.6 Local Strategic Partnership

The **Local Strategic Partnership** has no issues in relation to the BizFizz project, as returns are being submitted on time and progress appears satisfactory.

## 9.7 BizFizz Bradford

At the request of commissioners, the research took opportunity to meet with the Bradford Business Broker and a local BizFizz Coach.

Linked to a successful LEGI bid, it is apparent that there is a close **client centred** working relationship between agencies tasked with delivering business support services. Under an umbrella of a single funding source clients, who are seen as outcomes, not outputs, are offered 'layers' of support dependent on their personal circumstances:

- Start Up Support
- Identifying Entrepreneurs
- Enterprise Culture
- Development & Sustainability
- High Level Support

There is an apparent interdependency between agencies and it was noticeable that the BizFizz Coach, who has a hot desk in the Business Broker's office stated, *'I could not do my job as well as I do without the support of Anthony [Business Broker]*.

The Business Broker stated, *'There is no competition for clients and agencies are more willing to let go when it is time for the client to move on to another service provider. We are concerned about the ongoing needs of the client, rather than treating them as an output and worried about potential double counting. I get on with my job – brokerage, not delivery of business support services'*.

## 9.8 Joan Walley MP

We were grateful for the opportunity to interview Joan Walley MP and gained a great deal from her frank and informed knowledge and views about the challenges the Burslem South Priority 3 Area faces. Mrs Walley points out that the area has faced years of economic downturn brought about by the demise of tradition industries and consequences that include unemployment and loss of trade to areas such as the town centre.

Mrs Walley is upbeat about the role of the BizFizz project, as it *'Out there where the people are'*. She acknowledges that special measures are required in the area, which includes *'nurturing and the incubation of entrepreneurs'*.

Mrs Walley believes that in addition to improving the economic stability of the area and assisting with community cohesion, the BizFizz project has the potential to tackle important issues such as unemployment and the benefit trap.

Most significantly, she believes it will take up to **10 years** to put right what has happened to the area and sees a need for the BizFizz project to continue well beyond its current period of funding.

## 10.0 Research Outcomes

### 10.1 Is the Project Fulfilling Client Expectations?

Whilst it is too early to confirm if the BizFizz project will deliver all agreed outcomes (some having been met), based on interviews with clients, there is no doubt that the BizFizz project is on the whole, meeting the current needs of its client group. Noticeably the group as whole delivered an impressive high average mark of **4.4**, based on a 1 to 5 scoring system (5 being high).

### 10.2 BizFizz

Within the BizFizz network, there is a positive recognition of the BizFizz project and the objective to provide support to clients interested in setting up their own businesses. There is also recognition of the objective to support the regeneration of the Burslem South Priority 3 Area. As will be highlighted below, clients have a degree of 'ownership of the project, as members of the BizFizz network.

### 10.3 The BizFizz Coach

The BizFizz Coach is accessing an impressive number of clients. An additional indicator that the project is meeting client expectations is the number of 'word of mouth' referrals (**52%**). It is doubtful that dissatisfied clients would refer others to the project.

There is noticeable loyalty of clients to the Coach, linked to an appreciation of the time, energy and commitment the Coach provides to their individual and group needs. The service is apparently available almost '24/7', with unlimited week day, weekend and evening access to the Coach.

The Coach treats each client as an individual and is clearly aware of their personal circumstances and challenges. The majority of clients interviewed saw the Coach as a '*fountain of knowledge*' and value outcomes such as, networking (**81%**), someone to listen (**52%**), advise / business support (**52%**), coach knowledge (**33%**).

The Coach provides impressive support to clients with particular needs, such as learning difficulties / reading difficulties and personal / family based issues. There is no doubt that without such valued support, a significant number of clients would not be in their current position. In short, it is possible they would be contributing to worklessness statistics, claiming benefits, suffering from related problems such as depression, poor health and family break ups.

#### 10.4 The BizFizz Panel

The support offered by the BizFizz Panel is without doubt valued by those clients who have had a question taken to the multi-agency group.

The process of multi-agency representatives, who clearly care about the clients; writing their comments on the flip charts, which are shown to the clients at a later date, is effective and highly valued by those interviewed.

It is noticeable that a significant number of clients go onto to join the Panel, supporting their peers and developing their own networking links.

Panel meetings are clearly enjoyed by those multi-agency members who apparently also see it as an opportunity to network, develop knowledge bases and enjoy a relaxed atmosphere after a days work.

It is noticeable that **community representatives** on the Panel give and receive a great deal. They are the 'on the ground eyes and ears' of the local community and are well placed to provide advice on issues such as vacant business premises and local community needs and requirements.

They are clearly motivated by attending the BizFizz Panel. As will be noted from the interview with Rose Peacock (**Appendix C**), there is evidence that, as a direct result of her membership of the BizFizz Panel, she and other local community members have been motivated to re-launch a Residents Association located in the heart of a RENEW North Staffordshire Area of Major Intervention (AMI).

Another example of good practice is identified by the Panel member who represents a local school. Comments highlighted within **Appendix A** (Wider Impacts) are worthy of note:

- Established networks and contacts that will be useful to the school
- Shows parents of our school that we do genuinely care about the area
- Raised profile of self and school by being involved good for CV
- Links to school to tapping in future potential

It is noticeable that traditional local 'business support' companies such as solicitors and accountants are currently not members of the Panel. Indeed close examination of Panel membership, highlights opportunities to further develop a diverse, representative, knowledgeable multi-agency group, who can provide 'all round' business support clients and play a significant role in the regeneration of local Priority 3 communities.

### 10.5 Networking

As highlighted above, networking is most valued by the majority of clients interviewed (81%). A significant number of clients have benefited from referrals / networking opportunities directly provided by the Coach. It is apparent that BizFizz has in itself become a network, with clients providing mutual support in the form of trade, referral and encouragement.

### 10.6 Areas of Concern

It is noticeable that a number of clients have recognised that the 'BizFizz network' is apparently dependent on the role / availability of the BizFizz Coach and expressed concern about its sustainability in the event of the Coach leaving. Whilst only a small number, it is significant that a number of clients also expressed concern that the Coach does not always deliver what is promised. Whilst not a criticism of the Coach's commitment, they wonder if the Coach is becoming stretched due to an understandable work load as client numbers increase and of course her becoming a victim of her own success.

In a number of cases, we noted an apparent dependency by a number of clients on the Coach, supported by statements such as, *'I have no occasion to go elsewhere'*, *'She gives me everything I want'*, *'I am too busy to go elsewhere'*.

There is a noticeable lack of awareness of the support available from mainstream agencies (see table 3). For example, whilst clearly not representative of the group as a whole, the research noted that two clients had been concerned for a while about tax related issues. Apparently neither client had plans to approach a mainstream agency to help resolve such concerns.

Whilst we are aware that the BizFizz Coach is aware and mindful of individual client needs and requirements at a given time, we question if reluctance to go elsewhere is linked to a noticeable undercurrent amongst the clients interviewed, of dissatisfaction and a lack of knowledge / awareness of the support mainstream business support services provide. This will be explored in more depth in section 10.9.

## 10.7 Summary

There is no doubt that based on interviews with BizFizz clients; the BizFizz project is currently fulfilling their expectations. This could clearly change as clients' needs and expectations change as their businesses and personal requirements develop and will be dependent on the BizFizz Coach recognising / responding to this and / or their seeking / receiving support from alternative sources of business support.

There are opportunities to ensure that appropriate business support is maintained and ensure that client needs are fulfilled long after the BizFizz project has achieved its agreed objectives. These will be explored in **section 12**.

## 10.8 How Does The Approach Compare With The Existing Business Support Offer? What Is The Added Value, If Any, Over And Above The Mainstream?

### 10.9 Feedback from BizFizz Clients

It quickly became apparent during the research period that on the whole, those BizFizz clients interviewed had little knowledge of mainstream support services; and of those that did, value the BizFizz approach over other business support services such as Business Link and Business Initiative. It became our view during the research that apparent apathy and negativity is based on three theories:

1. Lack of knowledge of mainstream support agencies
2. Bad experiences of mainstream support agencies
3. Current mainstream support is not appropriate for all; in particular those clients who are the 'pre / pre' start up phase of self-employment / launching a business

It will prove useful to highlight a number of research findings. For example, based on client interviews, apart from those clients who had received welcomed grants from agencies such as **BIC** and the **Prince's Trust**, there is an apparent overall lack of knowledge / use of mainstream business support services (see table 3). Only **Business Link** rates significantly, in relation to client's awareness of mainstream services.

Those clients, who have used mainstream services, significantly score satisfaction levels low, compared to the BizFizz project (see table 3). When questioned about such scoring, typical responses included:

- *Promises are not met*
- *They did not understand my personal / learning needs / difficulties*
- *They don't seem to care*
- *They never follow up once they have ticked their boxes*

It is apparent that a significant number of BizFizz clients are developing 'start up' businesses, with an average (based on 13 businesses) first year turnover of just under **£40,000**. It should be noted that current annual turnover of **9** out of the **13** clients is below **£30,000**; and **5** of the **13** clients have an annual turnover below **£10,000**.

Whilst the BizFizz client database is unfortunately not complete, it is apparent that a significant number of BizFizz clients will recently have been out of work / unemployed / in receipt of benefits.

As highlighted at **section 8.20**, BizFizz clients generally rate the BizFizz project higher than mainstream services. When questioned, clients responded with statements such as '*The Coach has an affinity with the Burslem area; she has more time to respond to my personal requirements, compared to representatives of mainstream providers*'.

#### **10.10 Job Centre Plus**

A letter provided to the research by **Annette Summerscales, Jobcentre Plus (Appendix D)**, provides a useful insight into feedback from clients referred to the BizFizz project by Job Centre Plus.

In summary: '*The feedback we have received from our clients is very positive. BizFizz provides them with*'.

- *Flexibility that the conventional Business Advise services cannot offer*
- *Clients can be seen in the location where they feel comfortable*
- *The service is personal and client driven*
- *Support is provided unconditionally by the Coach and Panel members*
- *No pressure is felt until the client is ready.*

- *Some of our customers have been claiming Incapacity Benefits for some time and are considering a business idea for the first time. They value the opportunity to discuss their idea without committing to the more structured approach offered by Business Initiative.*
- *It provides the first step into business that can provide the individuals with the confidence to build on their plans with the support of more structured organisations such as Business Link.*

It is noticeable that such feedback is reflected by the views of **Liz Porter, Start Up City Wide (Appendix C)**.

### 10.11 The BizFizz Network

We noted an undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the BizFizz network, of a number of agencies / individuals, external to the project (see **Appendix A** - SWOT analysis, Weaknesses / Threats). This is clearly unfortunate and risks the BizFizz project / network operating within its own 'silo', which, if not checked, **could** 'rub off' onto clients, with outcomes that could include a reluctance to utilise support available from mainstream providers.

### 10.12 Mainstream Business Support

As highlighted within **section 7**, support for enterprise development in North Staffordshire is available from a number of different sources and comes in a number of different forms<sup>1</sup>. We were surprised to note that at the time of interviews for this research (September / October), locally based Business Brokers and Business Initiative and regionally based Business Initiative, had little knowledge, or involvement with the BizFizz project.

We were however encouraged that during the interviews, during which issues such as BizFizz aims, objectives, client base and project outcomes were outlined, all three agencies expressed a positive interest in the project and in particular, noted potential access to 'pre / pre start' clients, of whom they have difficulties in reaching / supporting.

It was noticeable that the 'door is open' to the BizFizz project and encouraging to note that since the above interviews carried out by Wider Impact Consultancy, a direct link has been made with the Business Brokers, who have since attended a BizFizz Panel meeting. We also understand that a meeting is planned with Business Link and a City Council representative / BizFizz LMG member to explore potential links between BizFizz and the agency.

### 10.13 Summary

BizFizz is **client led** and delivers a **flexible, locally based multi-agency** approach that mainstream business support agencies are understandably unable to deliver. Whilst the BizFizz project as whole has aims and objectives, the BizFizz Coach treats every client uniquely and is aware of their abilities, aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. On the whole, the Coach has the **time** and [multi-agency] **resources** to meet clients' needs and ensure they are treated as individuals, rather than statistical outcomes.

BizFizz objectives include the **wider regeneration of the local Priority 3 Area**. A multi-agency approach, which includes local groups such as businesses, residents and local schools, ensures best use is made of local support services for clients and wider community members. The project supports a local BizFizz network, which enables clients to provide mutual support in the form of trade, referral and encouragement.

The BizFizz project has the potential to support the objectives of mainstream business support providers, in that it can **add value** to services on offer to existing / new mainstream clients from Priority 3 Areas, who may have particular learning / development needs, in preparation for the higher level business support available from the agencies. Most significantly the BizFizz project has the potential to assist mainstream business support services accessing 'pre / pre' start Priority 3 clients, a significant number of whom are currently, apparently out of reach of mainstream business support agencies.

### 10.14 Has the project been effective in tackling some of the barriers to self-employment in the city of Stoke-on-Trent?

Whilst it is clearly too early to make an informed judgement in relation to long term outcomes, there are indicators that the project has the potential to achieve such an objective, based on findings highlighted within the Meridien Pure report <sup>1</sup> (Stakeholder Consultations – *'What do you consider to be the key barriers to enterprise development in North Staffordshire?'*).

### 10.15 Development of an Enterprise Culture – linked to low aspirations and a lack of self confidence

There is no doubt that BizFizz clients are generally confident in relation to their individual business survival, demonstrated by a relatively high average score of **4.1** (based on a 1 to 5 scoring system - 5 being high), in relation to their business's future potential; and forecasts that average turnover of the 13 businesses surveyed that turnover is likely to increase by **42%** over the coming year.

It is apparent that clients as a whole have been motivated by the BizFizz approach and the BizFizz Coach in particular. It is also clear they have become self-motivated as group and have a belief they are a part of the regeneration of the Burslem Priority 3 Area.

It is noticeable that an innovative social enterprise company has been supported (**Local Edition**), which is a model of good practice, worthy of consideration in other Priority 3 Areas.

#### **10.16 Reducing the Impact of the Benefits Trap - a major barrier to enterprise development amongst a resident population in some communities where there is heavy benefit dependency**

As highlighted in the report, there is significant evidence that the BizFizz project is reaching clients who have had a long-term dependence on benefits.

The link with Jobcentre Plus is strong and we have met with clients who have the confidence to 'let go' of their benefits.

Due note must be made of the skills and experience of the BizFizz Coach in relation to the one-to-one support she offers and provides such clients. There is strong evidence of client and inter-agency mutual respect and understanding of roles and responsibilities. The BizFizz Coach currently has the time and [multi-agency] resources to deliver the specialist support such clients require and demand on a regular and ad-hoc basis and is able to respond at times of inevitable personal / family crisis.

#### **10.17 Increasing Capacity and Quality of Business Advice - a lack of capacity in business support service providers, particularly in relation to the support that needs to be provided for non-traditional entrepreneurs. The lack of capacity is further compounded by a perceived lack of quality in business advice support**

As highlighted at section 8.18, BizFizz clients place high value on the capacity and quality of the support provided by the BizFizz project, with particular reference to the BizFizz Coach and BizFizz Panel. It has been noticeable that a significant number of those interviewed have doubts about the quality of advice provided by mainstream business support providers.

It is apparent that a significant number of BizFizz clients could be classified as 'non-traditional', in that a number are described as 'pre / pre' start and a number face individual challenges, linked to learning difficulties, reading difficulties and personal / family based issues.

Based on such knowledge and an understanding that agencies such as the Business Brokers, Business Initiative and Business Link would welcome support in general and with 'non-traditional entrepreneurs in particular, it appears that the project has an opportunity to have a roll to play in tackling this particular barrier to self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

#### **10.18 Increase Access to Finance**

Whilst there is BizFizz client based evidence of BIC and the Prince's Trust providing valued financial support, this remains a problem for enterprise development within the Burslem Priority 3 Area.

There remains a need for the access to finance issue to be taken up at a strategic level with new approaches to providing finance being developed and then promoted.

**10.19 Provision of Suitable Accommodation** - Accommodation is needed to support the latent demand that comes from people operating businesses within their homes and to provide appropriate grow on space for companies outgrowing existing premises.

There is evidence that linked to the Midland Heart 'Live Work' units / shops in Queen Street Burslem, local advice / information coming out of BizFizz Panel meetings and the knowledge base possessed by the BizFizz Coach, clients are generally locating appropriate accommodation.

It is also of noted that, linked to the BizFizz network, BizFizz clients are innovatively working together to share premises and provide opportunities for others to take advantage of facilities. For example, artists are invited to sell their work from one of the Queen Street 'Live Work' shops, in exchange for their time in covering periods when others need to be away from the shop.

**10.20 More Proactive Business Support** - Business support organisations need to be more proactive in leading the enterprise agenda. Businesses tend to be suspicious of the public sector and are, therefore, more likely to engage with a business support organisation and, specifically, one that is focused on the particular needs of their sectors.

As previously highlighted, it has been noticeable that a significant number of the BizFizz clients currently have little regard for mainstream support services available to them. Generally rather than being 'suspicious' of the agencies (although a small number did indicate this), opinions appear to be based on the three theories highlighted at section 8.20:

1. Lack of knowledge of mainstream support agencies
2. Bad experiences of mainstream support agencies
3. Current mainstream support is not appropriate for all; in particular those clients who are the 'pre / pre' start up phase of self-employment / launching a business

It is apparent the BizFizz clients interviewed feel that the BizFizz project is focussed on their particular needs.

#### **10.21 Stronger Policy Emphasis on the Sub Region - Political considerations still favour a towns based approach rather than a city and sub region approach.**

As highlighted in section 6, a key feature of the BizFizz approach is to 'stimulate economic regeneration from within communities by providing free and flexible support to local entrepreneurs, which actively draws upon local expertise and knowledge'. It is apparent that BizFizz has been embraced by those local people / businesses / support agencies; and has received positive feedback and support from the local MP, **Joan Walley**. There is evidence of local ownership with endorsement and support from the **Burslem Regeneration Company**.

It is also worthy of note that **100%** of BizFizz clients who reside in the Burslem South Priority 3 Area have based their businesses in the area.

#### **10.22 Physical and Knowledge Based Regeneration – It is seen by some stakeholders that the sub-region has had many false dawns and that it is imperative, almost above all else, that the city centre regeneration, the University/College quarter and investment at Keele in the knowledge economy are achieved. Nothing should be allowed to distract attention from this.**

Whilst the regeneration of the city centre, the University Quarter and investment at Keele is important, representatives such as **Joan Walley MP** make a strong case for the importance of regenerating Priority 3 Areas such as Burslem South. This is also linked to the area containing an Area of Major Intervention (AMI).

#### **10.23 Summary**

Based on research findings that a significant number of BizFizz clients face barriers to employment and appear to be making positive progress in their business ventures, as a result of support received from the BizFizz project, there is **significant evidence** that project has the potential to be effective in tackling some of the barriers to self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

It is noticeable that it appears that few new businesses are based in the Middleport area.

## **11.0 Summary of Research Findings**

### **11.1 Client Expectations**

Based on interviews with BizFizz clients, interviews with partner agency members, research outcomes and observations, there is significant evidence that the BizFizz project is currently fulfilling client expectations.

### **11.2 Observations**

1. There is a risk of the BizFizz Coach not meeting future client expectations due to workload, as new clients are identified and current client demands increase.
2. A number of clients and partner agency members are concerned about the vulnerability of the project; particularly if the BizFizz Coach leaves at short notice.

### **11.3 Comparison with Existing Business Support**

The BizFizz project appears to be supporting clients that mainstream business support agencies have difficulty in reaching. These include 'pre / pre start' clients who appear not to be ready for the support on offer from mainstream agencies; and clients who value locally based, bespoke, long term one-to-one support from a Business Coach. . As a result, a particular group of clients are receiving support they may otherwise not receive.

### **11.4 Observations**

1. There is evidence that during the research period, the BizFizz project is operating in a 'silo'; and there is a risk that clients may be missing out on support available from mainstream agencies.
2. There appear to be opportunities for the BizFizz project to develop closer links with mainstream support agencies.
3. Development / roll out of the BizFizz project may depend on opportunities to counter issues related to potential 'double counting'; learning lessons from the Bradford area e.g. situating the project 'closer' in a delivery sense (i.e. with projects referring clients to each other) to a mainstream business support provider.

### 11.5 Barriers to Tackling Self-Employment

Based on findings from the Meridien Pure report <sup>1</sup> (Stakeholder Consultations), the BizFizz project is well placed to help support self-employment in the City of Stoke-on-Trent; with particular emphasis on the long-term unemployed / worklessness agenda in Priority 3 Areas. It would strengthen the case for BizFizz if more businesses were based in the Middleport area.

Support given by the BizFizz to the social enterprise, the *Local Edition* is a model of good practice.

### 11.6 Project Outputs

In terms of outputs required by the principle funders, it appears likely that outputs will be achieved, providing a close watch is kept on delivery of the project in general.

Particular note should be made of the project's potential to support challenges such as **worklessness** and **sustainable communities**.

### 11.7 Observations

1. It is apparent that members of the LMG are not fully aware of project outcomes highlighted at **table 1**
2. It is noticeable, during the research period that there is opportunity to address objectives and outcomes such as 'Ensure mainstream agencies – Business Links, NSCCI are involved in the process and participate in the Network Panel' and 'Business start-ups assisted with environmental management'

## 12.0 Recommendations

There is no doubt that the BizFizz project has the potential to achieve objectives and is valued by those concerned with its delivery.

All those involved in delivery of the project, in particular BizFizz clients, the BizFizz Coach, the LMG and Panel members should be congratulated for their hard work and clear commitment to the regeneration of a Priority 3 Area.

The following recommendations are suggested, which are based on research findings / observations, linked to the views and opinions of clients and partner agency members:

1. Opportunity should be taken to consider enhancing / updating the client data base. Whilst there is understanding BizFizz is 'not about numbers', opportunities have been missed during this research to gain an in-depth understanding of the project, which may have had the potential to influence / enhance future project delivery and support future potential development / funding.
2. Opportunity should be taken to target the Middleport area in terms of new businesses based in the area.
3. Consideration should be given to enhancing the role / responsibilities of the LMG. At present, a great deal of responsibility is placed on the BizFizz Coach, which includes delivery of outcomes that members of the LMG are apparently not fully aware of. It is apparent the LMG has the experience and abilities to support delivery of the BizFizz project as a whole.
4. The Local Management Group should be made aware of the aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes agreed with the principle funders. This will enable outputs such as the ERDF output – *the number of business start-ups assisted with environment management*, to be addressed by the project.
5. Steps should be taken to lighten the workload of the BizFizz Coach. This could involve enhancing administrative support (e.g. updating / maintenance of the Client Data Base); enhancing the role / responsibilities of the LMG, to ensure task prioritisation; reducing the requirement of the Coach

attend meetings other than those directly linked to client support; consideration of appointing a second Coach as client numbers / demands inevitably increase.

6. Steered by the Local Management Group steps should be taken to begin to prepare an exit / succession strategy for the pilot project.
7. At present a great deal of information and knowledge is held solely by the BizFizz Coach. Understanding the need to respect the Coach's contacts, this carries obvious risks. Suggestions such as the creation of a local BizFizz website, set up and managed by the local BizFizz network should be explored.
8. Opportunity should be taken to review membership of the BizFizz Panel, Whilst it appears 'large in number', there appear to be opportunities to 'add value' to the Panel in terms of wider local business involvement / support and enhancing membership linked to multi-agency / community representations.
9. Consideration should be given to the BizFizz Coach gaining SFEDI accreditation. Potential benefits include an improved service for clients, the Coach gaining a more in depth understanding of other business support services and an 'acceptance' of the project from other business support service providers.
10. Steps should be taken to break down barriers that exist between the BizFizz project and mainstream providers such as the Business Brokers, Business Initiatives and Business Link.

Such barriers include a lack of knowledge about the project and possible missed opportunities to work collaboratively for the benefit of **clients**.

This could include exploring opportunities to 'join up' overall business support service delivery, under one 'umbrella' / service provider, similar to the approach adopted in the Bradford area and resolving issues such as potential 'double counting'.

### 13.0 Conclusions

Wider Impact Consultancy is pleased to report that the BizFizz project operating within a Priority 3 Area appears to be on course to achieve objectives and outcomes agreed with its principle funders.

In relation to terms of reference for the research, we are satisfied that overall:

1. The project is fulfilling clients' expectations.
2. The BizFizz approach brings 'added value' to mainstream business support, particularly in relation to 'pre / pre start' support to clients, who may have been out of the workplace for lengthy periods and may not be ready for the type of support offered by current mainstream business support providers.
3. The project has the potential to be effective in tackling some of the barriers to self-employment on the City of Stoke-on-Trent; in particular those people living / developing businesses in Priority 3 Areas.

It was noticeable at the outset of the research that the project risks operating within its own 'silo'. For example, there was little contact / links with local mainstream support agencies such as Business Initiative and the Business Brokers, virtually no contact / links with Business Link and apparent opportunities to bring on board traditional business support, such as local solicitors and accountants. It was also noted during the 'SWOT' session that there was evidence of an internal / external 'gulf' appearing, based on mistrust and suspicion of agencies / individuals who may not appear to support the BizFizz project.

It is interesting to note that since meetings with the mainstream providers, 'doors appear to be opening', with the Business Brokers having attended a BizFizz Panel meeting and suggesting ways of mutual support and the potential of a meeting with Business Link West Midlands. This is clearly a positive development.

It was also apparent that BizFizz client's views of mainstream support agencies appeared, to say the least, be less than positive. As outlined, this appears to be based on a number of factors including lack of knowledge of mainstream support agencies, bad experiences of mainstream support agencies and current mainstream support is not appropriate for all; in particular those clients who are the 'pre / pre' start up phase of self-employment / launching a business.

The above is clearly not productive in terms of clients' receiving appropriate business support and making best use of public funded services. We therefore suggest there is value in exploring recommendation **10** above, in particular - exploring opportunities to 'join up' overall service delivery, under one 'umbrella' / service provider, similar to the approach adopted in the Bradford area and resolving issues such as potential 'double counting'.

Referring to the Meridien Pure report <sup>1</sup>, the North Staffordshire economy is failing, there is property market failure, a weak external image, a wide 'enterprise gap' that shows no sign of closing and a business support system of questionable value (at least according to stakeholders). Change is needed and cannot come soon enough. Three priorities are recommended:

1. Leadership
2. Promoting an enterprise culture
3. Overcoming property market failure

Providing issues such as ensuring the BizFizz project adapts where necessary to meet local needs and opportunities; and is delivered in **collaboration** with mainstream business support providers, we have every confidence in the project playing a significant role in the **social** (i.e. sustainable communities) and **economic** regeneration of Stoke-on-Trent / North Staffordshire, with particular emphasis on 'kick starting' local Priority 3 Areas.

## Appendix A

### SWOT Analysis

#### Strengths

- Targeted, flexible, ground up approach
- Pride in local area – raises aspirations
- Local knowledge
- Cross cutting themes – wider perspective
- Local Panel – wider range of members
- Local, unrestricted approach
- Centre point of contact, information resource
- Belief in small businesses as economic regeneration drivers
- Supports other economic projects
- Client led – flexible community support
- Community involvement
- New networking opportunities
- Local cohesion – local trading
- Re-Building Burslem – focus on Burslem
- Outcome, not target driven
- Commitment and dedication of all involved
- Non-threatening opportunity to try self-employment reaches the disadvantaged
- Fills gap for people not covered by other services
- Everyone is welcome – open doors
- Real person provides positive constructive advice
- Jobcentre Plus referrals
- Challenges existing policies – need to work differently
- Small regeneration projects lead to wider regeneration of area – start small and grow

#### Weaknesses

- Potentially too much for one person – how many people can it reach?
- Could get too big for one person
- Coach too stretched – dependence of clients
- Clients reluctant to move forward independently
- Project does not turn people away versus focus on Burslem
- Information overload
- Level of information and networking capacity
- Lack of public information
- Measurable outcomes
- Would be nice to get some figures about how many people helped and how many people started a business
- People centred approach versus needs of funders
- No buy in from funders at NSRZ Employment Group
- Lack of buy in from Chamber and Business Brokers
- Not enough influential like minded people
- Lack of understanding as how the project is different to other business support projects
- Only covers Burslem
- Time running out – needs funding

#### Opportunities

- Put Burslem back on the map – renew and raise profile
- Grow and develop networks
- Networking - develop into continuing business support group
- Opportunity for local people to feel they make difference - to get involved
- To link into wider regeneration initiatives – Enterprise Centres, RENEW etc.
- Seen as 'sexy' – encouraging buy in
- For unknown entrepreneurs to shine – even when they have only thought about it
- Information resource is 'GOLDEN' for Burslem to share
- Influence mainstream – client led coaching networks
- Accessible to local community
- Getting message to refugees, migrants and BME
- Chance to be springboard for new Chamber of Trade
- Creates community participation for other projects
- FREE advertising for business
- Expansion into other regeneration areas – more Coaches across the City

#### Threats

- Funding support for Coach – needs to be longer term
- Excellent Coach may leave – will project collapse?
- Coach gets pulled into future, current is her role
- Sustainability – how can it continue?
- Dependence of clients on Coach
- Duplication
- RDA lack of understanding of needs of small businesses
- Business support being focussed on high growth business
- 'Simplification' of business support threatens local solutions
- Government obsessed with targets - £60K business being seen as a 'life style'
- Politics: National agenda may not support the Project
- Politics: envy that it was not their idea/ baby, so don't support
- Disappointment / Burslem / Stoke politics
- No support from partner organisations e.g. BIC, Chamber
- Other business support agencies may see as threat – be suspicious

## Appendix B

### Wider Impacts / 'Wish List'

Wider Impacts	Wish List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building up a business community, rather than just a community of businesses</li> <li>• Increased business to business trading within Burslem area</li> <li>• Brings local service providers together</li> <li>• Learning how to do business – growing up together creates bonding – friendships made</li> <li>• Develop networks / community - involvement of skills and knowledge for those involved</li> <li>• Supporting development of a deprived area and LAA targets</li> <li>• Supports wider regeneration projects</li> <li>• Links economic development with other community based Council services e.g. Neighbourhood Management</li> <li>• Burslem BNI started this week</li> <li>• Targets pre clients – bridges client journey gap</li> <li>• Attracting trade – previously passing through</li> <li>• Shifting attitude to being positive</li> <li>• Increases health welfare</li> <li>• Established networks and contacts that will be useful to the school</li> <li>• Shows parents of our school that we do genuinely care about the area</li> <li>• Raised profile of self and school by being involved</li> <li>• Involvement good for CV</li> <li>• Links to school to tapping in future potential</li> <li>• Local opportunity to work instead of long-distance commuting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Wide – 1 local Coach each town (6!)</li> <li>• Roll out to other high worklessness areas</li> <li>• More Coaches – aids growth / legacy tools to maintain activity between clients / partners etc.</li> <li>• One stop shop</li> <li>• Training centre or manager would be of value: how to market your business; how to keep accounts; time management</li> <li>• Small business fund / grants</li> <li>• Small seed corn grants</li> <li>• Change of national policy – need to support retail starters</li> <li>• Direct funding i.e. grants to support kick start of Business</li> <li>• Further funding – project continuation</li> <li>• Greater links with mainstream support</li> <li>• AWM support</li> <li>• RZ support to this and to expand</li> <li>• Plan if funding does not happen with buy in from all to continue</li> </ul>

### Delegate List

Name	Organisation
Ian Picken Louise Fallows Karen Dulson John Webbe Paul Squires Carolyn Powell Jackie Grant Jan Simpson Amanda Bromley Elaine Burgess Annette Summerscales Lynne Jones Kevin Thompson Clare White Jonathan Phipps	John Baskeyfield VC Primary School SOT City Council Neighbourhood Renewal Team SOT City Council Neighbourhood Renewal Team Midland Heart Civic Trust BizFizz Coach Midland Heart Neighbourhood Manager, Western Jellyfish Internet Services Ltd Newcastle Borough Council Staffordshire Jobcentre Plus Civic Trust Moorcroft Pottery Local Edition / Social Media CIC Stoke-on-Trent City Council

## Appendix C

### Multi-Agency Feedback

#### Jill Levens, Business Initiative

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	No direct links
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	Low
What do you bring to BizFizz?	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
How does project support your objectives?	No apparent link at present
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Potential for project to support clients in the future	Potential for 'pre / pre' start clients
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Potential if supporting 'pre / pre' start clients
<b>Comments</b> It is apparent Business Initiative has little knowledge and no direct contact with the project, but sees potential in the project supporting 'pre / pre' start clients, who are not ready for the support available from Business Initiative / Business Link. Would be interested in learning more about the project and exploring such links.	

#### Adele Cope, Business Brokers

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	No direct links – a number of clients use service
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	Low / Medium
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Networking opportunities in the area / referrals / contacts / promotion of project
How does project support your objectives?	Links to priority groups e.g. incapacity benefits. Links to clients who lack confidence
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Lack of information to 'score', but aware of the potential to support clients out of work for lengthy periods. 'Hand hold' and support until perhaps appropriate for support such as Business Link / Business Initiative
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	2 – feeds into LAA targets / Priority wards
Potential for project to support clients in the future	5
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Insufficient information about project to score
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Potential to link into / add value to the role of other services such as Business Initiative / Business Link. Support LAA Floor Targets
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Potential to do so
<b>Comments</b> Concern that project risks targeting clients of mainstream agencies i.e. duplication of effort / potential double counting. Unaware that it is an objective of the project to involve the Business Brokers in delivery of project e.g. involvement in Panel meetings. It is noted that 'contact' has since been made with the BizFizz project and the Business Brokers have attended a Panel meeting / forwarded suggestions to work together.	

**Carol Slater, Business Link**

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	No direct contact
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	Low
What do you bring to BizFizz?	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
How does project support your objectives?	Potential for 'pre / pre' start clients
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Potential for project to support clients in the future	Potential for 'pre / pre' start clients
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	No views due to lack of knowledge about project
<b>Comments</b> It is apparent Business Link has little knowledge and no direct contact with the project, but sees potential in the project supporting 'pre / pre' start clients, who are not ready for the support available from Business Link / Business Initiative. Would be interested in learning more about the project and exploring such links.	

**Annette Summerscales, Jobcentre Plus**

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Strong links – refers clients, attends Panel meetings and staff actively support the project
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Client referrals, knowledge about client base, attendance at Panel meetings, support to BizFizz team
How does project support your objectives?	Flexible support to clients, reduces number of clients claiming benefits
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	4
Potential for project to support clients in the future	High – provides what clients are looking for
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Unable to comment in depth, due to lack of information / data coming from the project. However aware that there will be opportunities to reduce client benefit claims
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Need to develop stronger links with mainstream providers of business support to clients. No one agency, including BizFizz knows / has all the answers
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – JCP would be willing to assist with the process
<b>Comments</b> Clearly very supportive of the project, as it is, 'flexibility that conventional business advice services cannot offer' (See letter of support Appendix D). Notes potential for supporting 'pre / pre' start clients considering starting business. Would value more access to data / information from project e.g. evidence of 'value for money'.	

## Liz Porter, Start Up City Wide

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Strong links – refers clients. Both based at the Middleport Hub Site
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Client referrals, knowledge about client base, attendance at Panel meetings, support to BizFizz team
How does project support your objectives?	Provides an important referral points for clients who are ready to take the step into self-employment
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5 – providing a unique one-to-one support for clients – delivering what they want and value. A 'human' touch.
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	4 – helping to build the confidence of the whole community, which has been suffering a lack of esteem
Potential for project to support clients in the future	5 – there will never be a shortage of clients for BizFizz in this area
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5 – in addition to supporting business start ups, the project is reducing client benefit dependence and improving the 'health' of clients, who are prone to anxiety / depression etc. Increasing wealth opportunities in the area
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Need to consider another Coach, as there is a risk of over stretching the current Coach as new clients come forward. Important not to let clients down.
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – providing 'need' and 'opportunity' are established
<b>Comment</b> Clearly supporting of the 'BizFizz approach' based on the professionalism and ethics of the Coach and the opportunity to offer and provide what clients really need and value.	

## Kim Thompson, Director Moorcroft

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Panel member
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	Medium / High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Business acumen / know how to project, advice / support to clients via Panel meetings, contracts / work for BizFizz clients, useful contacts / networks
How does project support your objectives?	Not just Moorcroft – whole area. Evidence we are 'on the up' and things are happening. Installing confidence, a CAN CAN ! Approach.
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Unable to score, due to lack of knowledge about individual client progress
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	3 – work still to be done
Potential for project to support clients in the future	High – providing funding is secured
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Unable to comment, due to lack of information / data coming from the project
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	No views
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes, if areas are selectively chosen. The area must not be too large or too small.
<b>Comment</b> Very supportive of the project, as it is clearly seen as contributing to the economic regeneration of the Burslem area. Praising of the commitment, energy, commitment and knowledge of the BizFizz Coach.	

**Amanda Bromley, Jellyfish Internet Services Ltd**

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Member of the LMG, Panel member, client
Awareness of project - High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Business acumen / local knowledge, know how to project, advice / support to clients via Panel meetings, useful contacts / networks
How does project support your objectives?	Supporting the economic regeneration of Burslem and surrounding areas. Bringing in work / income
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
Potential for project to support clients in the future	High – providing continuation funding can be secured.
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	3 – unable to score higher due to lack of information / data coming from the project
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Opportunity to develop networking - suggests an innovative website, where everyone can have access and develop their own networks / links
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – provided there are opportunities to promote a wide variation of businesses
<b>Comment</b> Extremely supportive of Midland Heart and the Business Coach. Concern that established business groups in the area are not totally 'embracing' the concept of BizFizz. Concern that the network could collapse in the event of the Business Coach leaving – one reason for suggesting website.	

**Jan Simpson / Karon Dulson, Neighbourhood Management Team / Neighbourhood Renewal Team**

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Membership of the LMG, Panel members
Awareness of project - High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Local knowledge, networks, access to local community / groups, RENEW North Staffordshire linkage, help to overcome obstacles / barriers
How does project support your objectives?	Positive opportunities to raise the aspirations of local communities. Helps people to raise aspirations / employment opportunities in the areas where they live / work. Helping to re-build sustainable communities
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5 / 5 Raising confidence / training / personal development / literacy skills / abilities
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Too early to make precise judgements. Clear opportunities in an area of major intervention (AMI)
Potential for project to support clients in the future	Opportunities to raise the confidence and aspirations of local people who need a 'lift' as their communities pass through a period of major disruption
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	Unable to comment, due to lack of information / data coming from the project
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Need to improve information flow out of project to justify inputs
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – particularly where there are issues linked to social / economic deprivation
<b>Comment</b> Extremely supportive of the project, in particular opportunities to support the objective of <b>sustainable communities</b> . Evidence of a resident / panel member (Rose Peacock) being inspired to re-form a local Residents Association.	

### Rose Peacock, Middleport, Longport, Dalehall Community Association

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Resident Panel member
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Community awareness / networks
How does project support your objectives?	Providing us with the confidence and inspiration to re-form our local Residents Association
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	3 – there is a need to support the development of businesses in the Middleport, Longport, Dalehall areas
Potential for project to support clients in the future	5 – this is just what local people need and value
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	4 – in addition to supporting business people, we have gained the confidence / networks to motivate wider community members to become involved in the regeneration of our local area
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Yes – there is a real need to re-establish business units / local employment in the Middleport, Longport, Dalehall areas
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – provided local people are consulted and support
<b>Comment</b> Praising of the energy and commitment of the Coach, who clearly works hard and is well regarded by all involved in the project. Motivated by 'people who have taken the risk to start their businesses in our area. If they are willing to take such a risk, we should be willing to put our time and energy in'. Directly associates the community decision to re-form the Residents Association with her contact with the Biz Fizz project. 'It is inspiring and you make useful contacts and links that can help and advise us. Most importantly it is fun and we enjoy being involved'. This is just the lift we needed'.	

### John Webbe, Midland Heart

Question	Response
Links to BizFizz	Line management / support services, LMG. Panel member
Awareness of project High / Medium / Low	High
What do you bring to BizFizz?	Line management / support services, LMG. Panel member, links to wider community/ network links
How does project support your objectives?	Supports Midland Heart Community Investment Strategy
How effective is BizFizz in supporting its clients? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
How effective is BizFizz in supporting the economic regeneration of local Priority 3 communities? Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
Potential for project to support clients in the future	Wide – in particular tenants/ beneficiaries of 'Live Work' Units
'Value for Money' Score 1 to 5 (5 high)	5
Could / should BizFizz be improved / changed / updated	Waiting for outcome of mid-term evaluation
Should BizFizz be rolled out to other areas?	Yes – providing project meets the needs of potential clients and wider community
<b>Comment</b> The Housing Association generously provides line management / support services at no cost to the project. Aware the project has the potential to support the delivery of Sustainable Communities strategies, as well as playing an integral role in the economic regeneration of Burslem town centre / surrounding areas.	

## Appendix D

## Letter Annette Summerscales



## Appendix E

### Client Questionnaire

#### BizFizz – Client Survey

**Name** (Reference **ONLY** – **NOT** to be disclosed within reports, unless with specific permission – i.e. Case Study)

**M / F**

**Age**

**Ethnic Details**

**Home Post Code**

**Business Post Code**

**Business Description**

**Current Turnover**

**Anticipated First Year Turnover**

**Number of Paid Staff / Employed**

**Number of Un-Paid Staff**

- Q1.** *Tell me a little about yourself.*
- Q2.** *How did you find out about the BizFizz project / BizFizz Coach? (If referred – who?)*
- Q3.** *What do you get from the project / BizFizz Coach? (Examples)*
- Q4.** *What are the most important areas of support you receive from project / BizFizz Coach? (Rate these **1 to 5**)*
- Q5.** *How has the project / BizFizz Coach supported you / your business (Examples)*
- Q6.** *How do you rate overall the support you receive from the project / BizFizz Coach (1 to 5)?*

- Q7.** Have you visited any other Business Support Agency? (**Yes / No**)
- Q8.** *If no - why not / do you know they exist / what do you know about them / has anyone referred you / made you aware of them?*
- Q9.** *If yes – before came across BizFizz / or referred by BizFizz?*
- Q10.** *What sort of support received from other agencies (List) (Rate*
- Q11.** *Were you aware of the other agencies before linking with the project / meeting BizFizz Coach? (**Yes / No**)*
- Q12.** *If No - why not?*
- Q13.** *If appropriate, how would you rate the support you received from **each** agency **before** you linked with the project / met BizFizz Coach? (Rate each agency **1 to 5**).*
- Q14.** *If appropriate, how do rate the support from each agency **since** linking with the project / meeting BizFizz Coach? (Rate each agency **1 to 5**)*
- Q15.** *If appropriate – will you be utilizing the support of other agencies? (Yes / NO)*
- Q16.** *If No – why not?*
- Q17.** *Have you proved any support to others within / outside the BizFizz project? (Specify)*
- Q18.** *What role (if any) has the project / BizFizz Coach played in this?*
- Q19.** *How do you rate your future in relation to employment / self-employment? (**Rate 1-5**)*

**Q20. Current Status**

Self-Employed / Employed / Unemployed

Details of previous benefits

Details of current benefits

Details of grants / loans/ other financial support received

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to help avoid expensive mistakes.

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