

Overview and Scrutiny

7th July 2025

Member questions

Agenda item 7: Minster Exchange

1. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

Many thanks for the excellent update which is very uplifting. As the O&S committee were particularly interested in seeing the impact of the first year of operation against the original objectives, it would be helpful to get a snapshot of, for example, how some of the activities, occupancy, take-up of services, visitors, etc. have played out with regard to any of the original KPIs (as appropriate).

Occupancy: We're slightly behind the ambitious target that we set but we're now close to full occupation on our key offers including our private offices. The reason for being slightly behind is that we forecasted that we would be open for nearly the full year, yet opened in July and therefore have had less runway to deliver upon. Our budget for this fiscal year has us exceeding our forecast by March 2026.

We've overachieved on our commitment to supporting the community through hosting events free of charge; social value is at the heart of the MX and it is demonstrating itself to be a valuable asset to help foster a thriving, inclusive community. We're looking forward to continuing this support into the next year but also host more commercial events too.

We've hit our quantitative and qualitative targets for businesses supported via our Growth Hub and Grown in Cheltenham programmes and in terms of the number of visitors we've welcomed at the MX too.

Let us talk you through some of these stories:

Zest, Alice, Head On, Growm, Nomadic

2. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

At what point does a business grow too large to be accommodated in the MX and where does it go from there (to the Golden Valley)?

What an excellent problem to encounter!

The fundamental point though is that the MX is here to stay, and will be a vital asset for the economic growth plan for Cheltenham as we host companies on their scaling journey.

The MX's sister facility, Hub8 GC that we deliver in partnership with Gloucestershire College, plays an important role in supporting our companies as they grow in Cheltenham too. For many having the option for staff to use both facilities, one in the town, and one adjacent to where GVD will be, is incredibly valuable and helps them to scale in the town. The combined size of the MX and Hub8 GC is approx. 30,000sqft which makes us the largest operator of coworking space in the town.

We expect that some businesses will outgrow the MX and when they do we see this a very healthy signal for our community as it shows that companies are growing and creating new jobs for the region (and hopefully we've played an important role in enabling this growth) – we anticipate that GVD will be the location for them to grow onto. We also expect to be present at GVD to ensure the MX and GVD are very connected.

The MX also provides the town with the opportunity to accommodate more growing businesses. We've also seen businesses that outgrew our previous locations return to us thanks to the MX.

3. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

Possibly related to the above is the mention, on page 4 (Inclusive Economic Growth), of the “pipeline” of talent, innovation and investment. I wondered whether you could say more about this and how it is currently looking in terms of the skills and new people? Indeed, what is the balance of incoming businesses compared with existing local ones using the MX?

We're very proud to say that we've played a prominent role to enable academia to work with industry in new and different ways in the region. Through this commitment we're supporting job creation, local skills development and supporting local businesses.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- since launching Hub8 GC in partnership with Gloucestershire College at its Cheltenham location in 2021, the College has seen an uplift in students enrolling in its IT apprenticeship courses, with many of our industry members taking on new apprentices. The College was crowned Digital Apprenticeship Provider of the Year in 2024 with over 200 apprentices on digital courses, working with over 100 companies including a number of our members such as AWS and CACI. We're playing an active role in fostering a diverse talent pool, and creating employment opportunities that cater to different levels of expertise.*

- *Our work with the University of Gloucestershire which is now one of CyNam's strategic partners. Future Park, a new part of the University's Park Campus, is playing an important role in bringing academia together with industry through activities such as last month's Tech Bootcamp where future founders turned their ideas into viable start-ups - all in just five days. Out of this initiative the university has seen the creation of its first start-up that we are looking to support through our Growth Hub and Grown in Cheltenham programmes.*

A large number of small businesses support a high proportion of jobs and turnover in the region. Through The Growth Hub and Grown in Cheltenham programmes that we deliver in partnership with the Council at the MX, we provide tailored support to our small businesses, including fundraising, growth strategy, product development, new market entry, brand awareness and customer acquisition.

4. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

Once the demand outstrips the supply of space available to accommodate businesses within the MX, what criteria will be used to decide how to prioritise who gets access to the space, in future?

Although we're close to full occupation on some of our offers, we will always do our best to accommodate new businesses. This could include changing the layout of the MX or creating a bespoke membership for a business that makes full use of the many different work and innovation spaces that the MX provides.

Flexible workspace always presents the likelihood of churn as companies grow and need different solutions, as a result we are confident the community will remain active and engaged.

Our event programme is also very inclusive so will seek to engage many companies who are not based at MX to participate in the enticing subject matter that the event space hosts.

5. Question from Margaret Cheung (Independent Member of the committee)

Since the launch of the MX in July 2024, how many businesses have exited the project, and what were the reasons? What mechanisms are currently in place to monitor and confirm the business retention rate?

We report on a quarterly basis which includes new members that have joined and any members that may have left. For example, in our last quarterly report 1 company left and 5 companies joined.

6. Question from Margaret Cheung (Independent Member of the committee)

In light of Cheltenham's strategic ambition to become a national cyber hub, what measures are being taken to ensure high-quality, resilient digital infrastructure across the town? As a resident, I have occasionally experienced limited mobile coverage, including 3G signal levels in some central areas, and I wonder whether such issues are being addressed as part of the broader connectivity strategy.

The good news about buildings like the MX is that we have invested in leading edge wifi infrastructure that allows companies access to super fast broadband speeds and wifi calling. We hope this will encourage more residents to work from MX rather than work from home, as an oasis of connectivity!