

Business Networking in the Calder Valley:

Todmorden

15th November, 2017

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1. Executive Summary

- A survey was conducted in October-November 2017 to assess interest in and gather ideas for a revitalised business network or association for the Todmorden area.
- 136 individuals (132 businesses) responded to the questionnaire, representing a broad range of sectors, locations and business types: 52 (38%) responded online, 84 (62%) responded on paper
- 16% (23) of respondents had attended a networking event in the Todmorden area in the previous year. Previous events were valued for the opportunity to meet and connect with other similar businesses, peer support, sharing of information (e.g. other events), and specific pieces of business support.
- 84% of respondents had not attended a networking event in the Todmorden area in the previous year. The most frequent reason given for not attending was: 'not aware of events' (66%).
- When asked to choose three of a list of eight business networking activities that would appeal to them, the top three responses were Informal Networking (58%), Town/Group/Joint Promotions & Events (57%) and a Social Media Group (54%). This was particularly characteristic of town centre businesses, and the retail, arts and community sectors. The need for business support, discussion forums and updates varied across sectors and business types.
- When asked to choose three of a list of nine potential benefits of business networking, the top response was a 'Stronger Business Community' (52%). Other top responses were 'Promotion of my Business' (46%), 'Expanding my Network of Contacts' (44%) and 'New Work/Clients/Leads' (44%).
- Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were found to be the most popular days for meetings/events. Early evening was the most popular time for meetings/events.
- Around 30 respondents either offered specific support to run or lead a business network, or expressed a high degree of interest in attending events and contributing to this research.
- UCVR will use information provided by businesses in Todmorden to facilitate a new business network for the area tailored to local needs and run by local businesses themselves.

2. Background & Method

Background: UCVR has been commissioned by Calderdale Borough Council to support business networks along the Calder Valley, particularly in flood affected areas (Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Luddenden, Sowerby Bridge, Brighouse and Elland). To further understand how local businesses can benefit from business networks or associations, and how UCVR and the borough can best support business networks, UCVR is conducting a series of surveys along the Calder Valley. Todmorden is currently without a local business network and was the first location to be surveyed.

Aims: The aim of the survey was to collect input and contact details from businesses interested in a revitalised business network or association for the Todmorden area. The survey aimed to collect information about preferred activities, anticipated benefits and barriers to participation and to identify individuals willing to offer support or leadership to a new network. UCVR will use information provided by businesses in Todmorden to assess interest in a new network, and then facilitate a new business network for the area tailored to local needs and run by local businesses themselves.

Questionnaire Design: An independent researcher (Dr Cath Dillon) was engaged to design, implement and analyse the Todmorden survey. A questionnaire was designed in collaboration with the UCVR's board, UCVR's lead on business networking and with input from those involved in running current and previous business networks in the Todmorden area. A draft questionnaire was piloted with ten businesses from the Todmorden area.

Distribution: All types of business were included in the target population (e.g. limited companies, partnerships, sole traders, social enterprises and cooperatives). However, participation was not restricted and all those with an interest in networking with the business community in Todmorden were encouraged to participate.

The questionnaire was distributed via email and via social media, to:

- The Todmorden Business Network database (c. 120 people)
- Calderdale Borough's email contact list for businesses (created through flood support and other business support requests, c. 400 businesses in the OL14, HX7 7J, HX7 7P and HX7 7H postcodes)
- Local facebook pages (e.g. Todmorden Free Chat, Cornholme & Porstsmouth, Blackshawhead, Heptonstall, Todmorden Indoor Market, Todmorden Open Studios)
- Twitter (@UCVR_ & @BizNet_UCVR)

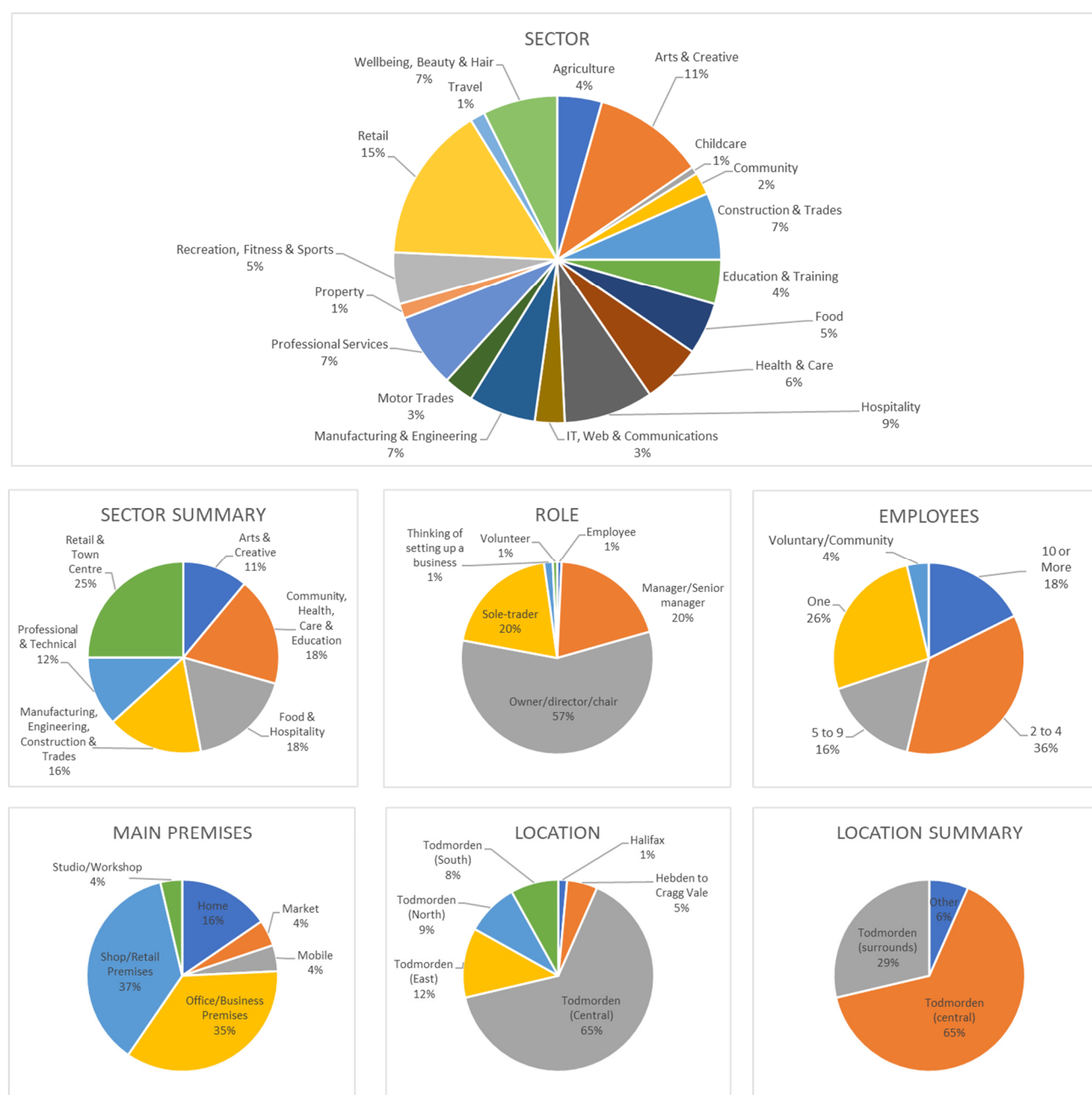
Visible businesses were also visited on foot, with a focus on the town centre, but also including the surrounding areas of Walsden, Shade, Gauxholme, Eastwood, Lydgate, Cornholme and Portsmouth.

The survey was open from 16th November to 3rd November 2017.

3. Participants

136 individuals (132 businesses) responded to the questionnaire, representing a broad range of sectors, locations and business types: 52 (38%) responded online, 84 (62%) responded on paper

- Retail/town centre businesses accounted for a quarter of responses.
- Most respondents were business owners or senior managers of businesses.
- Two thirds of respondents worked in businesses with fewer than five employees (19% were lone workers). However, twenty-four (18%) businesses with 10 or more employees also responded, including some of the largest employers in the area
- Two-thirds of respondents were based in retail/business premises, but a third were in less visible, mobile or less permanent workplaces (e.g. home).
- Two-thirds of respondents were based in central Todmorden. However, all surrounding areas were also represented.



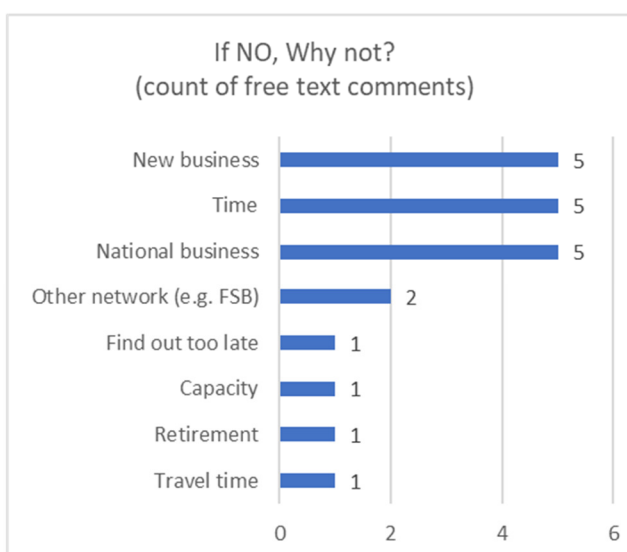
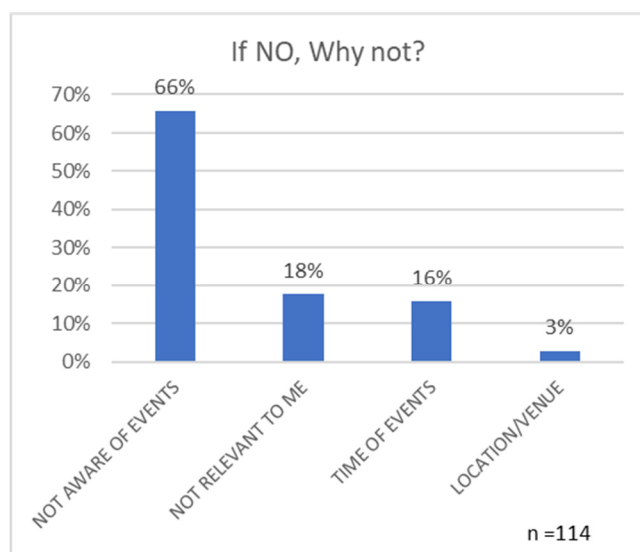
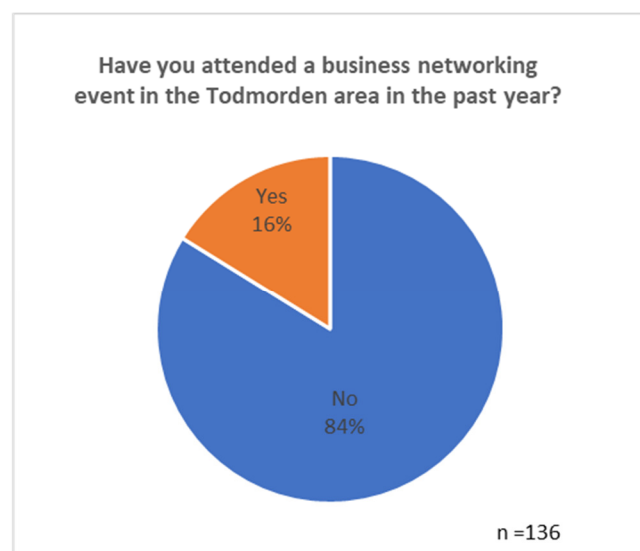
4. Experiences of Business Networking in Todmorden

16% of respondents attended a networking event in the Todmorden area in the previous year (23 in total)

- This suggests that many members of the Todmorden Business Network are interested in continuing their participation in local networking activities.
- Previous events were valued for the opportunity to meet and connect with other similar businesses, peer support, sharing of information (e.g. other events), and specific pieces of business support.

84% of respondents had not attended a networking event in the Todmorden area in the previous year.

- Of four choices, the most frequent reason given for not attending was 'not aware of events' (66%). 'Time of events' (18%) and 'not relevant to me' (13%), were also frequent reasons for not attending, whereas location/venue (3%) was a concern for only a small number of people.
- Larger businesses with national and international reach, and those who do not do local business to business work, commented that local networks were not relevant unless they were concerned with promoting and showcasing Todmorden as a whole.
- Business owners approaching retirement (and business closure), or who linked in to alternative networks (e.g. FSB, art groups) also felt that a business network was less relevant to them.
- A number of new businesses were not aware of events or had not had a chance to link in yet.
- Just having time to attend, and making networking a priority, was a barrier for some respondents



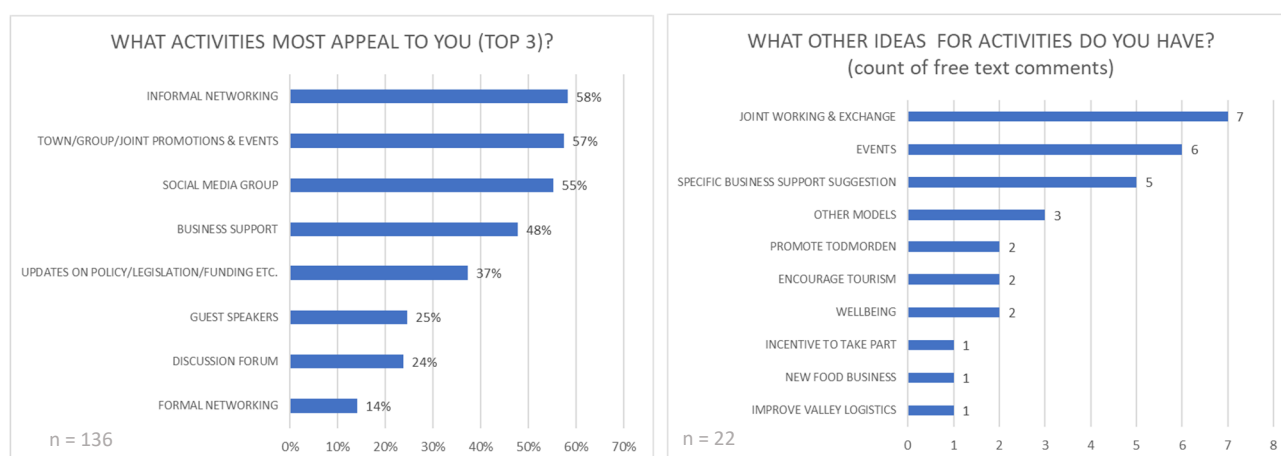
5. Business Networking Activities

When asked to choose three of a list of eight business networking activities that would appeal to them, the top three responses were Informal Networking (58%), Town/Group/Joint Promotions & Events (57%) and a Social Media Group (54%).

- This was particularly characteristic of town centre businesses, and the retail, arts and community sector groups.
- Less frequently chosen were Guest Speakers (23%), Discussion Forums (22%) and Formal Networking (13%).
- Business Support (48% overall) and Updates on Policy/Legislation/Funding (37% overall) were more appealing to some businesses than others. They were the top choices for larger businesses and those in the Manufacturing sector group (see Appendix 1).
- Business Support was also chosen relatively frequently by lone workers and home workers.

When asked for other ideas for activities, respondents reiterated their support for joint promotions and events, but also referred to joint working and exchange (e.g. skill shares and bulk buying).

- Joint promotions, events and working were often linked to the need to encourage visitors and tourism, but also the need to promote Todmorden itself (to increase awareness and visibility of its expertise and diverse offers).
- While previous networks have provided useful activities for their memberships, there may be other types of activities (particularly joint working and promotion of Todmorden) that would appeal to a wider membership.



How we can work together to support the community and town. Visibility.

Promoting activities/trips online with 2-3 local businesses

This business has grown rapidly; it would have been good to know what the council does, what they can offer.

Shows, opportunities to showcase work

Promote Todmorden

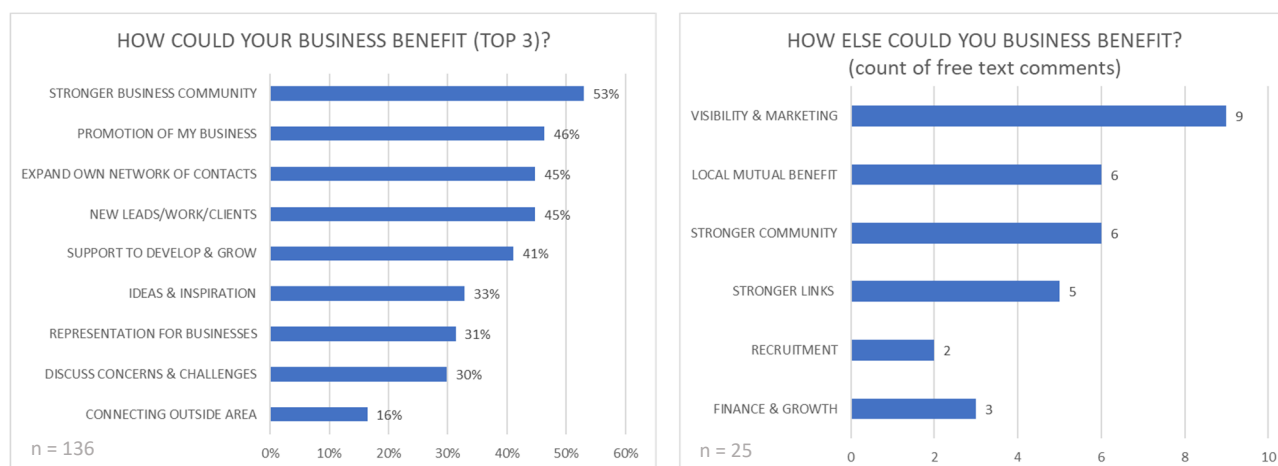
6. Business Networking Benefits

When asked to choose three of a list of nine potential benefits of business networking, the top response was a 'Stronger Business Community' (52%).

- Other top responses were 'Promotion of my Business' (46%), 'Expanding my Network of Contacts' (44%) and 'New Work/Clients/Leads' (44%).
- While new business opportunities were an important part of the appeal of a new business network, there were indications that some sectors or business types could also benefit in other ways.
- In particular, the extent to which 'Representation for Businesses', 'Ideas & Inspiration' and 'Opportunities to Discuss Concerns & Challenges' were favoured varied across sectors and business types. For example, 'Opportunities to Discuss Concerns & Challenges' was mentioned relatively more frequently by the Community... and Manufacturing... groups of sectors (see Appendix 2).

When asked how else businesses could benefit, visibility, marketing and promotion were re-iterated, as was the desire to build stronger links between organisations and a stronger community.

- Potential for local mutual benefit was also highlighted (e.g. businesses selling to each other).
- Connecting with businesses outside the area was the benefit least likely to be chosen (16%). While the focus for most respondents was the local business community, there may be a minority of respondents who are interested in wider geographical connections.



We are in a period of decline and need ideas and support to help us grow

Ensuring local people and businesses are aware of our services

Vibrancy of Todmorden

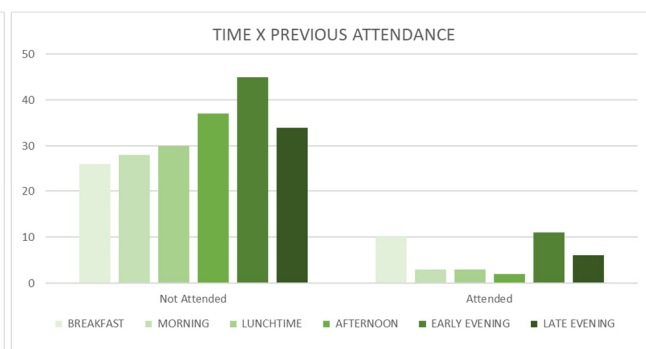
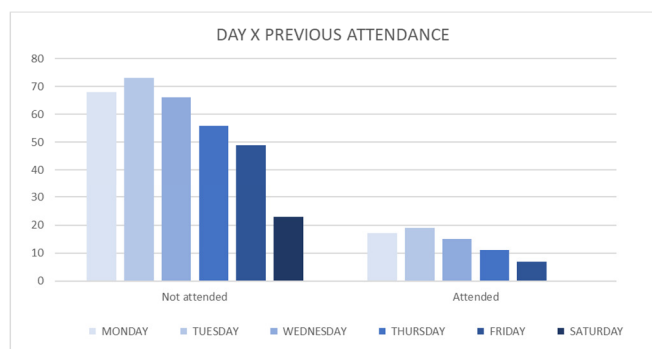
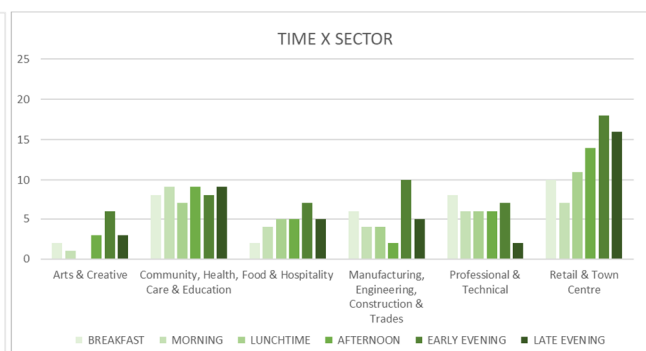
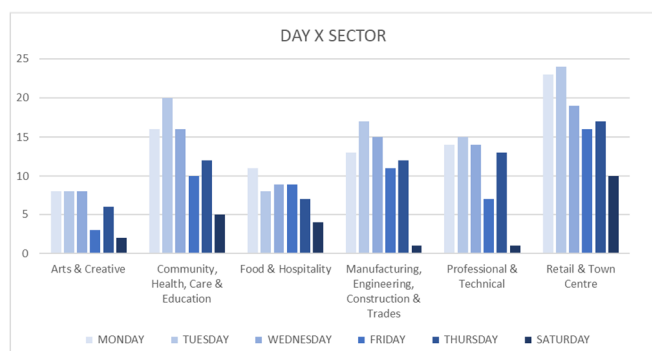
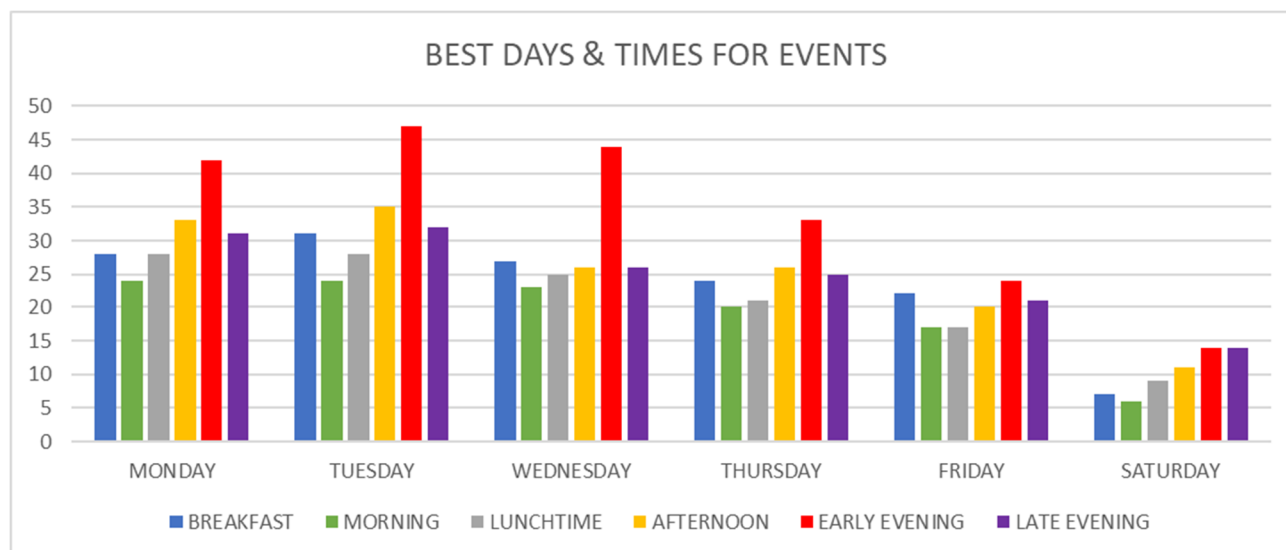
We are interested in promoting Todmorden: as a National organisation what can we do for Todmorden, e.g. visibility, what Todmorden is doing that people don't know about

Other businesses in Todmorden could be making money out of us, e.g. by offering employee/business benefits, businesses linking up etc.

7. Preferred Days and Time

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are the most popular days for meetings/events. Early evening is the most popular time for meetings/events.

- However, even the most popular time slots represent only a third of respondents.
- Different sectors differed slightly in their preferred times, with later in the week and earlier in the day working better for some in the Professional... sector group.
- In comparison to recent networkers (who prefer early morning or early evening equally), those who have not attended local networking events in the previous year favour events later in the day.



All charts show frequency of responses ($n = 136$; multiple responses)

8. Supporters

From the questionnaire respondents a pool of around 30 individuals were identified who either offered specific support or showed a high degree of interest in business networking in Todmorden. Support offered included venues, design, printing, meeting support, admin, organisation, project work to attract tourists to the area, expertise in specific areas of business support, promotion and social media.

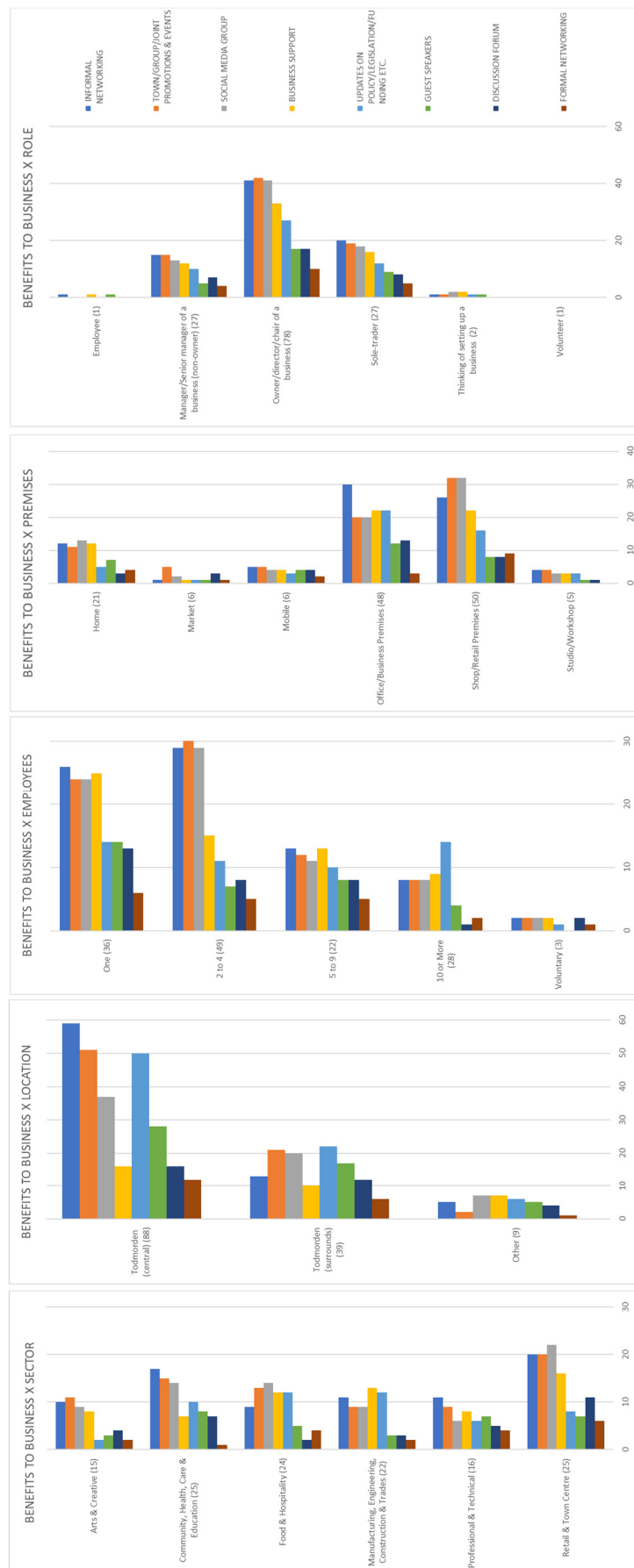
9. Acknowledgements

This report was prepared for UCVR by Dr Cath Dillon, an independent research consultant based in Calderdale. Cath is a certified member of the Market Research Society and a member of the Social Research Association, and works within the guidelines of these organisations.

Thanks to the UCVR board, Sarah Moss, Frank Roper and Adrian Ashton for sharing their thoughts on business networking in Todmorden and contributing to the design and distribution of the questionnaire. Thanks also to the Great Rock Coop for allowing the questionnaire to be tested during their AGM, to Sweet Aimee James for helping to promote the questionnaire and to Janet Battye for her assistance distributing the questionnaire.

With thanks to the many businesses and organisations in Todmorden who took time out to express their interest and contribute their ideas.

Appendix 1: Preferred Activities by Subgroup



Appendix 2: Perceived Benefits by Subgroup

