

**MINUTES OF SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD MEETING HELD ON  
24 SEPTEMBER 2009 ( 4.30 – 6.35 PM)**

**Present**

**Businesses**

Mr Trevor Benyon	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd, Market Drayton
Mr Andrew Corbett	PerfectArc Ltd, Ludlow
Dr Geoffrey Davies	McConnel Limited, Ludlow (Chairman)

**Representatives**

Mr Stuart Kelly	Bank of England
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Mr Richard Sheehan

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce &  
Enterprise Ltd  
Lead Member for the Local Environment and  
Economy, Shropshire Council

Cllr David Roberts

**Observers**

Ms Amanda Cunningham	Advantage West Midlands
Cllr Keith Barrow	Leader, Shropshire Council
Ms Kairen Francis	Jobcentre Plus

**Officers**

Ms Jacqui Casey, Mrs Helen Hunter -Hayes, Mrs Jane Lycett, Mr Mark Pembleton, Mr Nick Taylor and Mr David Wise	Shropshire Council
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**1. Apologies and Welcome**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr Roger Belham, Mr Arthur Hill, Mrs Ann Johnson, Mr Tony Bywater and Mr William Jones.

**2. Minutes**

RESOLVED : That the minutes of the last meeting held on 5 May 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

**3. Matters arising**

**3.1 Skills Needs and Provision of Training and Higher Education in Shropshire (Item 4)**

The Chairman reported that the Council were still waiting to hear the outcome of the bid for improved higher education provision in the county. He thanked those members who had provided their own letters of support in addition to the Board's letter of endorsement.

**4. Business Board Business Plan – Update on Actions**

The Chairman reported on responses from members to a questionnaire concerning which areas of the Board's Business Plan they were most interested in being involved in taking forward. This had produced the following priorities:

Procurement  
Raising the Profile of Shropshire  
Mentoring and Sharing Expertise amongst businesses

**RESOLVED:** That the above-mentioned areas of the Board Plan form early delivery priorities for the Board.

Those members who had registered an interest in progressing actions would be contacted in relation to giving input through the appropriate task and finish group

A short update was provided on the progress of the Local Procurement Task and Finish Group, chaired by Ann Johnson. The Group is working closely with Nigel Denton, Head of Procurement, who has provided an insight into Shropshire Council's procurement strategy, procedures and monitoring processes. The Group has agreed the data which should be monitored to provide better understanding of local company engagement in tendering processes and to develop a baseline position against which progress might be monitored over time. The requested data for the last 3 months of County Council procurement activity and the first 3 months of the new Shropshire Council was presented to the second meeting of the Group. The Group has begun to investigate the approaches of other authorities and will receive a presentation on the 'Find it in Sandwell' initiative at its next meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October. Regional expertise and legal advice from Shropshire Council is being sought on the implications of changes to minor contract rules. The Group is gathering intelligence from the current round of procurement training being undertaken across the county to discover perceived barriers to engaging with the local authority and views on the quality of current available training provision

During the ensuing discussion the following points were agreed:

- It was noted that procurement training and awareness workshops e.g. on the completion of tender forms and contract arrangements were being held. However, members felt that two events each year across Shropshire was insufficient.
- It would be advantageous to receive information on the tangible results of such training.
- It was accepted that there were different levels of complexity of tender forms depending on the value of the contract. Members felt the wording should be simplified wherever possible to encourage interest from businesses.

## **5. Sector focus: Tourism - Economic impact and current initiatives**

Mark Pembleton gave a presentation on the tourism industry in Shropshire which, according to the latest published data (2005), was worth £457million. 10% of Shropshire employees work within the tourism and related industries and Shropshire receives over nine million visitors each year.

In giving a breakdown of the tourism business sector and the key players, he explained that the marketing of Shropshire as a tourist destination is provided by Shropshire Tourism UK Ltd on behalf of the Council.

The Shropshire and Telford Destination Management Partnership (DMP) had been established in order to access funding and plan the co-ordination and delivery of the county's tourism activities. It was proposed in the report on the Board's revised terms of reference that a representative of the DMP should join the Board to ensure appropriate links are established to further develop the sector. Most of the Partnership's marketing activity is sub contracted to Shropshire Tourism and work is underway to ensure that the best value for money is being achieved through the current agreement.

Attention was also drawn to Shropshire Council's tourism business grants. It was agreed that business tourism should also be promoted.

**RESOLVED** : That Katie Foster, Chairman, Shropshire and Telford Destination Management Partnership, be invited to join the Board.

## **6. Tackling the recession through enterprise support**

Nick Taylor presented a confidential briefing note on the Council's proposed package of enterprise support. No formal decisions had been taken by the Council and the Board's views were invited on the proposals. In discussing the main types of support put forward for consideration the following points emerged.

1. Start-up grants were supported by members provided applicants had good business plans.
2. Booster grants to give a further injection of funds were also required and it was noted that most company failures were in their early years.
3. The proposal for Town Centre rental grants was received with more concern by members, especially if it was possible for large national companies to take advantage of rent free periods. It was felt that any scheme should be restricted to small businesses, possibly determined by number of employees.
4. A Loan Scheme, which could potentially be matched with European funding, should be considered. The Board strongly advised that SMEs' business plans should be very carefully vetted if finance had been refused by banks before any loan was approved.

The Chairman suggested that a redundant person with relevant skills and experience could be matched with a graduate at university to establish a business that utilised the knowledge and expertise of both parties. It was noted that a scheme of this nature had been operated at the University of Wolverhampton to help students create their own businesses whilst they were studying. The Chairman said that he would have pleasure in sponsoring one redundant person and hoped that it could be used as a case study that could raise wider business interest.

Nick Taylor thanked members for their comments which would be taken into account in drawing up a costed scheme which would be presented to Shropshire Council's Cabinet in due course.

### **1. Shropshire Council Economic Development initiatives in Shrewsbury**

Nick Taylor gave a presentation on the progress of a range of current and longer term economic development and regeneration initiatives in Shrewsbury. He drew attention to the integration of individual schemes with the Local Development Framework, Shrewsbury Vision, the North West Relief Road, Health 2020 Vision and the University Challenge.

In addition to activity in Shrewsbury, Nick explained that the Council was also committed to regenerating the county's market towns and a proposal for a package of support would be put before the Council's Cabinet in November for consideration. Further updates would be provided at future meetings of the Business Board

## **8. Business Board Terms of Reference and Membership**

Draft revised terms of reference were received, following changes suggested by members on the make-up and function of the Board.

The Chairman pointed out that, in addition to the ten Business Ambassadors, it was suggested that up to two representatives of key strategic business networks should be invited to join the Board. In that regard interest had been expressed from the Shropshire Environmental Technologies Network.

RESOLVED :

- a) That the revised Shropshire Business Board Terms of Reference be approved, subject to the inclusion of declarations of interest in the code of conduct.
- b) That a representative from the Shropshire Environmental Technologies Network be invited to become a member of the Board.

#### **9. Appointment of Vice- Chairman and Business Board representative on the Local Strategic Partnership Leadership Board**

RESOLVED :

- a) That Roger Belham be invited to be Vice-Chairman of the Board
- b) That Geoffrey Davies be appointed to serve on the Local Strategic Partnership Leadership Board

#### **10. State of the economy and the Local Economic Assessment**

Mark Pembleton submitted a detailed report on the state of the economy and economic statistics for information.

Stuart Kelly, Bank of England Deputy Agent for the West Midlands and Oxfordshire, commented on the country's economic outlook and explained how monetary policy was applied by the Bank of England. He pointed out that 80% of demand was being driven by public sector spending and the private sector was currently not filling the gap. While there had been a slight improvement in business confidence, recovery was slow and a big shortage of orders remained.

#### **11. Discussion items from Board Members**

No items were put forward.

#### **12. Any other business and future agenda items**

The Chairman asked that, in future, when putting forward topics, members should be specific with their suggestions so that the Board could be clear about the purpose of the proposed agenda item and how they could consider it and engage appropriately.

RESOLVED:

- a) That affordable housing be considered at the next meeting, at the request of Arthur Hill.
- b) That the Board's engagement with the tourism sector and Shropshire Council's assistance to business be considered further at a future meeting.
- c) That updates, led by the business representatives on the Board, should be received on different sectors of the economy e.g. agriculture, construction, manufacturing, in order

that members can be aware of the different issues they are facing and respond appropriately.

d) Local Economic Assessment update at the next meeting

e) An issues paper on the analysis of the economy to be produced at the next meeting

### **13. Dates of future meetings**

RESOLVED:

a) That meetings be held on 2 November 2009, 25 January 2010, 26 April 2010, 12 July 2010 and 18 October 2010.

b) That all meetings shall continue to start at 4.30 p.m.