

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD

Meeting of 3rd November 2008

MINUTES

1. Attendance and apologies

In attendance

(SBA = Shropshire Business Ambassador)

Mr Geoffrey Davies OBE	McConnel Limited (Chair) (SBA)
Cllr John Hurst-Knight	Shropshire County Council
Mr Andrew Corbett	Perfect Arc Ltd (SBA)
Mr Arthur Hill	CH Hill & Sons (SBA)
Mr Corin Crane	Learning and Skills Council
Mr David Ledbury	Business Link West Midlands
Mr Richard Sheehan	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Mr Robert Bickerton	Shrewsbury Town Football Club (Shropshire Partnership Leadership Board)
Mr Roger Belham	CS Contract Furniture Limited (SBA)
Mr Tony Bywater	Salop Leisure Limited (SBA)
Mr Trevor Benyon	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd (SBA)
Mr William Jones	Greyhound Plant Services (SBA)
Ms Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Business (SBA)
Ms Gill Edmunds	Women in Rural Enterprise
Ms Judith Kirkland	Business Enterprise Support Limited
Ms Kairen Francis	Jobcentre Plus
Ms Karen Davies MBE	Heart of England Fine Foods (SBA)

Advisors

Ms Amanda Cunningham	Advantage West Midlands
Ms Sam Hine	Shropshire County Council
Mr Nick Taylor	Shropshire County Council
Ms Jane Lycett	Shropshire County Council (Minutes)

Apologies were received from

Mr Colin Spicer	Shropshire Newspapers Ltd (SBA)
Ms Fay Easton	Shropshire Enterprise Partnership

1. Welcome and apologies

Geoffrey Davies (GD) welcomed everyone and passed on apologies from Colin Spicer and Fay Easton.

1. Minutes of meeting held 4th August 2008

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

**3. Matters Arising not elsewhere on the agenda
- A New University Challenge**

GD presented a paper (tabled at the meeting) summarising the discussion that took place at a special meeting of the Business Board, held on 20th October 2008, to consider the future of higher education provision in Shropshire.

Cllr John Hurst-Knight reiterated the importance of business engagement in shaping the bid that will be put to the Higher Education Funding Council for England in Spring 2009.

Charles Leventon and Clare Keegan are gathering evidence on behalf of the Partnership and are currently seeking businesses' views on current and future anticipated skills needs. Board members are encouraged to engage with this piece of work to provide their views prior to its completion at the end of the November 2008.

ACTION: Board members to note timescales for input into bid development process and to request a meeting to discuss these issues or provide any comments before the end of November 2008 via the following contacts:

Charles Leventon: tel: 01952 815478, mobile 07870 562789, e-mail clevanton@harper-adams.ac.uk

Clare Keegan tel: 01785 353738, mobile 07766 520349, e-mail clare.keegan@staffs.ac.uk

4. Feedback from the Business Plan Working Group

GD thanked the Working Group for their input into development of the draft Board Business Plan which had been circulated to Board members prior to the meeting for their consideration.

GD announced that Sam Hine was leaving her current role to take up the position of Head of Community Working within Shropshire Council and thanked Sam for the support she has given the Board and with the development of the Business Plan.

As Carolyn Downs is leaving her post as Chief Executive of Shropshire County Council at the end of the year, GD reiterated his intention to finalise the Plan and present it to Carolyn Downs and the Leader of the County Council, Malcolm Pate, by mid-December 2008.

A paper outlining the process for presenting the Plan to the Shropshire Council Implementation Executive and others was tabled at the meeting. The process will seek endorsement by the Members of the new Shropshire Council shortly after it is established in June 2009.

Sam Hine presented an overview of the draft Business Plan. GD invited Board members to comment on each section throughout the presentation. The draft will be updated in light of the comments received at the meeting and those received from Board members by the end of the week.

Below is a brief summary of the comments received at the meeting:

A flexible skilled pool of labour:

- Local Employment Partnerships are relevant to graduates as well as the unemployed, as they are disadvantaged due to their lack of experience.
- Dual degrees are important to increase business experience amongst graduates.
- Graduate schemes are beneficial in keeping graduates in the county and matching skills gaps. They must be relevant to the requirements of Shropshire businesses.
- Economic recession will lead to more long-term unemployed, therefore the actions are particularly relevant.
- Investment is necessary in the county's training organisations.
- Shropshire County Council's latest Citizen's Panel report highlights that people in work have difficulty accessing information on training, demonstrating the need for a single point of contact.

Local Procurement, Supply Chains and Developing Export Markets

- The Food and Drink sector - and potentially other sectors - requires more support to identify and take advantage of export opportunities.
- UKTI dual role (inward investment and exporting) may not have sufficient emphasis on supporting exporting.
- "UK Ltd" requires better branding, rather than Regional Development Agencies potentially competing at export and trade events.
- Local food procurement opportunities within Shropshire's MoD bases should be considered.
- The Board needs to engage with procurement officers within relevant organisations to influence change in procedures.
- The relevance of the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce procurement initiative was highlighted, with SCC and Telford & Wreking Council signed up as partners.
- Networking amongst small businesses aids collaboration and potential for them to bid together for contracts.
- The actions under this theme were agreed as being a top priority for the Board and should be taken forward as an "early win".

Streamlining Regulatory Services Affecting Business

- There is a need for consistency amongst councils/agencies in their approach to businesses to enable a positive relationship and consistent communication channels.
- These actions will be helped by Shropshire Council's new integrated Trading Standard and Environmental Health Service. The single service will agree shared protocols, encourage a "lighter touch" and use enforcement as a last resort. Encouraging a sector-focused approach by the service may be something the Board should consider.
- Agriculture is heavily regulated, therefore the Board should have a lobbying role with relevant agencies and government departments.
- Key question that councils/agencies should consider before contacting businesses is "Is this helping business?"

Encouraging Collaboration

- The importance of collaboration amongst small businesses in bidding for larger contracts should be mentioned

Maximising Investment in Shropshire

- The issue of companies outgrowing their premises in market towns and associated planning issues was raised.
- Shropshire Council's economic development and planning services will work closely in addressing planning issues.
- Public sector role in bringing forward land and influencing Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Framework.
- Issue of competition from Welsh Development Agency and Wales's Assisted Area Status which Shropshire cannot influence. Shropshire's response to such close competition needs to be clear in the offer it promotes to businesses.

SH reiterated the lobbying role of the Business Board, on issues such as Broadband connectivity and speed, and in "business proofing" policy documents and strategies. The actions in the Business Plan, however, focus on the issues that the Board can directly influence. Additional actions relating to diversification should be considered for inclusion in the Plan.

The Board discussed whether all of the actions in the Business Plan are achievable. GD stated that the Board needs to remain engaged on influencing all of the priorities identified in the Plan, engage delivery partners and hold decision-makers to account in relation to progressing the actions.

The Government's national Business Support Simplification Process needs to be considered in delivering the actions in the Business Plan.

The emphasis of the Business Plan was discussed in light of the current economic situation. It was agreed that the Business Plan should focus on the medium-term future and that the Board should not be deflected from the Plan due to current circumstances. There is, however, potential to add in new actions to the Plan to respond to the economic downturn.

GD advised the Board that they now need to consider delivery arrangements for the Plan.

ACTION: All Board members to review the draft Business Plan and send any further comments to Jane Lycett by Monday 10th November 2008. E-mail: jane.lycett@shropshire.gov.uk

5. Management Information and Economic Statistics

SH presented the paper that was circulated prior to the meeting.

The Board agreed that the data presented was useful and improved their understanding of the economy of Shropshire.

The question was raised as to whether ethnicity data is available.

ACTION: Jane Lycett to identify any sources of relevant economic data which can be disaggregated by ethnicity

6. Discussion Items from Board Members

Arthur Hill raised the issue of the economic downturn and the role the Business Board should play in supporting struggling small businesses. This was followed by a discussion amongst members.

David Ledbury circulated details of Business Link West Midlands's workshop sessions aimed at advising businesses on how to survive the recession. Further details of the workshops and the "Credit Crunch Hotline" are available via the BLWM website.

Richard Sheehan reported that Shropshire Chamber's recent survey highlighted a change in attitude within the banking sector towards businesses.

Ann Johnson reported that the Federation of Small Businesses are lobbying Government on the issue of a VAT holiday and tax reduction for businesses and are undertaking a survey of the main impacts of the recession amongst FSB members.

Press coverage for the Board's activities, particularly in supporting businesses during the recession, should be sought.

7. Any Other Business and Future Agenda Items

Following discussion relating to an issue raised by Arthur Hill, the Board agreed that an invitation should be sent to relevant contacts within the banking industry to attend a special meeting of the Board in January 2009 to discuss their policies with regard to the services they offer to businesses.

At the next meeting of the Board in March 2009, Corin Crane (LSC) will give a presentation on the county's skills needs and outline what training providers are currently delivering in Shropshire.

GD asked for the Board's opinion as to whether the views of the land-based sector is adequately represented on the Board.

Nick Taylor reported that a meeting of the National Farmers Union and Shropshire County Council is scheduled to take place in November and engagement with the Board would be included as an agenda item. The suggestion of a one-off joint meeting between the NFU and the Business Board will be discussed.

ACTION: SCC officers to draft a letter to invite representatives from the banking sector to a special meeting of the Board and circulate to Board members for comment.

Date and venue for special meeting to be agreed and circulated to Board members.

ACTION: Corin Crane to identify relevant representatives from training organisations to be involved in presentation to the next Board meeting.

ACTION: Nick Taylor to discuss NFU's engagement with the Business Board at SCC/NFU meeting and report back to Board.

8. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board will take place at 4:30 p.m. on Monday 2nd March 2009 at the Shirehall, Sherwsbury.