

MINUTES OF SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD
MEETING HELD ON 5TH MAY 2009 AT 4.30 PM

Present

Members

Roger Belham	CS Contract Furniture
Tony Bywater	Salop Leisure Limited
Andrew Corbett	PerfectArc Ltd
Julie Cosgrove	Learning and Skills Council
Dr Geoffrey Davies	McConnel Limited (Chairman)
Fay Easton	Shropshire Enterprise Partnership
Gill Edmunds	Women in Rural Enterprise
Arthur Hill	CH Hill & Sons
Cllr John Hurst-Knight	Shropshire Council
Judith Jamieson	Jobcentre Plus
Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Businesses
David Ledbury	Business Link West Midlands
William Jones	Greyhound Plant Services
	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Richard Sheenan	

Officers

Jacqui Casey, Jane Lycett, Tom McCabe, Liz Nicholson, Mark Pembleton, Nick Taylor, Emma Smith, Melanie Cousins and David Wise	Shropshire Council
Amanda Cunningham	Advantage West Midlands
Gail Tipper	Learning and Skills Council

1. Apologies and Welcome

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Graeme Chaplin, Bank of England, Kairen Francis, Jobcentre Plus, Karen Davies, Heart of England Fine Foods Group Ltd, Gill Edmunds, Women in Rural Enterprise and Colin Spicer, Shropshire Newspapers Ltd, Rob Bickerton, Shrewbury Town Football club.

The Chairman welcomed Mark Pembleton, Shropshire Council's new Head of Economic Development and members of the Council's new Policy and Research Team (Emma Smith and Melanie Cousins) who would support the work of the Board and the delivery of their Business Plan.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED : That the minutes of the last meeting held on 9 March 2009 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of a reference in Item 6 to the website www.supportwm.co.uk which was accessible by businesses and employees.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Presentation on current business support initiatives (Item 6)

The Chairman reported that copies of a letter from the Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform outlining Government assistance to business during the economic downturn, in response to his letter of 13 November 2008, had been circulated.

3.2 Prioritisation of Business Board Plan actions (Item 7)

The Chairman reminded members that at the last meeting there had been broad agreement that the most appropriate actions for prioritisation had been selected and actions should be brought forward which aimed to mitigate the impact of the recession in particular. He asked members to express their interest in relation to actions they could assist in developing further and delivering. The next meeting would discuss taking the plan forward into practical action and receive an update on the activities already underway.

3.3 2018 World Cup – team hosting opportunities in county and Board support for bid (Item 8)

The Chairman referred to Mr Bickerton's statement that the bid for England to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup would include a proposal for the West Midlands region to host a visiting national team at the Prostar Stadium, Shrewsbury. He had suggested the Board should have a full discussion on how to support the process at the next meeting.

4. Skills Needs and Provision of Training and Higher Education in Shropshire

Presentations were made to the Board concerning various issues surrounding the skills agenda to enable members to better understand how the Board could assist in the up-skilling of the county workforce.

Julie Cosgrove gave a power point presentation and circulated paper copies. This provided an analysis by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) of national targets, qualifications, national priorities of employers, the latest employment trends in the West Midlands, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin and skills gaps and vacancies in the workforce.

Members asked why the LSC did not identify skills shortages on an individual company basis as employers needed this information in order to take action, and she agreed to take the matter back for consideration.

An update on the delivery of the Train to Gain brokerage service was given by Gail Tipper, Skills Development Director. She explained that the original core offer to assist organisations develop their employees' basic skills and work towards achieving Level 2 qualifications remained the same, but this had been extended and enhanced with Level 3 qualifications and skills for life qualifications at all levels. An enhanced flexibilities offer was also available to small and medium sized businesses which would be available in the summer. The North West and the West Midlands had been the two top performing

regions in accessing advice on business support. Members asked for data on the sub region to be circulated.

ACTION: Gail Tipper to provide sub-regional data for circulation

Jill Barcroft gave examples of the local delivery of training and employability support to businesses undertaken by County Training in partnership with the LSC and other agencies. These included comprehensive training packages for under 19s school leavers, working with employers over skills shortages vacancies, employment skills brokerage, supporting business improvement and redundancy support. She agreed to provide contact details.

ACTION: Jill Barcroft to provide contact details for circulation

The Chairman reported that the Board had been consulted on workforce skills needs in October 2008 and their views had been used in developing the New University Challenge bid for Shropshire. He had drafted a letter of support for the Shropshire bid, which was within the circulated papers. He also asked all Board members to consider providing individual letters of support for the proposals on their company headed note paper.

ACTION: All to provide letters of support as appropriate

Liz Nicholson, Shropshire Council's Director of Children & Young People's Services, reported that it was hoped to submit a high quality bid for funds for a new higher education centre in Shropshire by the 30 June deadline. If successful, this would be a hub and spokes model or network where students would be able to access a number of centres across Shropshire to enhance their learning and give opportunities for research. The proposal would have an economic impact as it would assist in providing better employment opportunities for local people who would possess the skills required by the business community.

The criteria asked for collaboration and the strong support of local businesses would assist in providing a compelling case for Shropshire. Ian Nixon would be contacting some Board members to obtain information on what they considered to be their workforce training and development needs over the next five years, as the proposals needed to be supported by evidence of demand.

RESOLVED: That the bid be endorsed and the draft letter be approved.

5. Feedback from Shropshire Business Summit – Roger Belham

Roger Belham offered his congratulations on the organisation of the Shropshire Business Summit on 21 April, which had been a great success overall. His only criticisms were that the presentations had been too long, which gave insufficient time for audience participation. He suggested that there should be a break at future summits to give each table the time to come up with questions to ask the panel. Also time and space should be given to enable people to converse with the speakers informally.

Mr Taylor thanked members for their support and comments and stated that the need to balance speeches and question and answer sessions would be addressed. Feedback information forms had also been collected from delegates at the summit.

6. Membership of Business Board – Geoffrey Davies

The Chairman reported that, following the discussion and question and answer session at the Business Summit, several approaches had been made by local business people wishing to join the Board.

The Board also needed to appoint a new representative of the banking sector as a consequence of Simon Warriner's resignation following his appointment to a new role within HSBC that meant he no longer covered Shropshire.

In inviting views on what the criteria or process should be for electing new members on to the Board he suggested that new members should represent the interests of the broad range of Shropshire businesses or have a particular knowledge of issues that were of ongoing relevance to the Board. However, it was also important that the Board did not become too large and unwieldy.

In the ensuing discussion comments were made that there was a strong feeling of disconnection from the Board and the rest of the business community, and the seeking of membership was part of a deeper issue as the Board is not communicating adequately.

The Chairman responded to these comments, stating that press releases had been issued and a working group had come up with a three-year business plan which had been publicised.

The Chairman proposed that a panel of three or four Board members should consider applicants and establish a rationale for selecting new members to the Board.

ACTION: All those interested in joining a selection panel to appoint new members of the Board please pass their details to Jane Lycett /Jacqui Casey at Shropshire Council.

Cllr Hurst-Knight suggested that in order to achieve more communication the Board should produce a newsletter in the quarterly "Shropshire" magazine.

1. Recession Reporting & Standing Committee update - Nick Taylor

Nick Taylor reported that Shropshire Council's Economic Recession Committee had cross party membership and was chaired by Cllr Pate. At their first meeting in April members had received a report and presentation on the take up of benefits and money advice service. The next meeting on 7 May would discuss an increase in budget allocations to Citizens Advice Shropshire which received over half a million pounds in funding, but were finding that this was not sufficient funds to meet the increased demand placed on their service. That meeting would also be considering a report and updated action plan identifying long and short-term measures on mitigating the impact of the recession which linked with the priorities of the Board's business plan. The subsequent meeting in June would be considering measures to deal with affordable housing.

All public committee reports could be viewed on the Shropshire Council website www.shropshire.gov.uk/committee.nsf

8. Discussion Items from Board Members

Attention was drawn to the fifth year of the Enterprising Britain competition. (Since the meeting Shropshire have won the West Midlands title and now represent the region in the national finals to find the most enterprising place in the country).

Amanda Cunningham pointed out that there were member vacancies on the Advantage West Midlands Board. Information had previously been circulated to Business Board members.

9. Any Other Business and Future Agenda Items

The Chairman reported that The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform had released two guidance booklets: 'Crimes against Business: What businesses need to know' and 'Crimes against Business: What partnerships need to know.' If crime was a particular issue Shropshire businesses faced, the guidance could be examined at a future meeting. (www.berr.gov.uk/files/file50441.PDF)

Work was ongoing to refine the actions to deliver the Board's plan which would be considered in more detail at the next meeting, but Board members were welcome to suggest other agenda items.

ACTION: Members wishing to join working groups to take forward elements of the Business Board Business Plan to contact Jane Lycett/Jacqui Casey, expressing their specific areas of interest.

Following discussion amongst the Board it was agreed that the next meeting be deferred to 24th September 2009 at 4.30pm at Shirehall.

The meeting closed at 6.40pm