

**MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY 20 JANUARY 2014 4.30 PM - 6.35 PM
AT SHIREHALL, SHREWSBURY**

Present:

Businesses

Shaun Carvill	Clickingmad Ltd
Nick Chavasse MBE	NRG Direct Mail Ltd
Karen Davies MBE	Heart of England Fine Foods
Tudor Griffiths	Tudor Griffiths Group Ltd
Mandy Stoker	Chair of METNET, E4 Environment
Mandy Thorn (Chair)	Marches Care Ltd

Representatives

Kairen Francis	Jobcentre Plus
Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Business
Will Morris	Utilities Representative
Richard Sheehan	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Steve Wain	Shropshire Learning Network

Officers

Andy Evans	Group Manager, Business Growth and Prosperity
Mark Pembleton	Service Manager for Business and Enterprise
Michael Hyatt	Corporate Head of Strategic Planning
Julie Macrae	Business Engagement Officer
Chris Taylor	Broadband Manager

In Attendance

Cllr Mike Owen	Portfolio Holder, Resources, Finance and Support
Amanda Holyoak	Committee Officer

1. Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received from Tony Bywater, Councillor Steve Charmley, Katie Foster, Duncan Gray, Arthur Hill, Rob Hudson and Simon MacVicker.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Four Members with outstanding interest forms were asked to forward them to Julie Macrae as soon as possible.

3. Minutes

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Composition of Board

The Chair proposed inviting Dr Catherine Baxter from Harper Adams University onto the Board to represent the Agri-Tech sector. This was approved and a letter will be sent inviting her to join the Board.

4. Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy – Action Plan Achievements, Priority Projects and Next Steps

4.1 University

Michael Hyatt, Shropshire Council's Lead Officer for the University Project, gave a presentation on developing a new University for Shropshire, (slides will be circulated to members). It covered background and key research findings in terms of Shropshire's economic situation, demographics and current Higher Education provision.

He particularly referred to the opportunity for a University to reflect the needs of the economy now and to help stimulate and create opportunities for economic growth in the future, with a culture of 'enterprise' focused and relevant to local economic demands and needs. He saw it complementing other existing institutions, including Harper Adams University, Further Education colleges and the limited and specific range of HE courses currently on offer, predominantly in the education training area.

Board Members asked questions including:

- What evidence of success or otherwise comes from other attempts at starting new universities?
- What is the timescale?
- Is it to be called University of Shrewsbury or Shropshire?
- What is the role of IP&E?
- Any lessons to learn from the University of Wolverhampton campus at Telford?

In response, Mike reported on the experience of creating and improving the Higher Education offer in places such as Brighton, Cornwall, Lincolnshire and Cumbria. The main lessons identified included the need to be clear about the distinctiveness of the offer, and to focus on effective targeting and marketing this.

In terms of timescale, Mike explained that pace was key to the project and it was intended that postgraduates would be recruited in 2014. Research suggested that the Shrewsbury 'brand' rather than Shropshire could have more market recognition, particularly given the town's high-quality visitor experience, history and the existing identification with high quality schools.

Quality of offer would be key for the university and all aspects of its curriculum, research and wider offer. It would be delivered through a three way relationship between the Council, Chester University and ip&e – the wholly owned company of the Council and there would be a range of services transferring into it, including back office support that could be utilised by a University. He did not have any specific data to hand on the Wolverhampton University campus at Priorslee.

Steve Wain reported that one outcome of developments to date was other HE providers showing interest in Shropshire, particularly Staffordshire University, Glyndower University and Harper Adams University. The University of Chester was not seeking to 'own' provision in the county but to kick start activity and the Board Level commitment to this from Chester was commendable.

Other initiatives planned were linked to the LEP agenda and funding and relationships would need to be handled sensitively.

Andy Evans reported that Michael Hyatt would be working full time on the HE Project and a substantive update would follow at future meetings of the Board.

Board Members agreed that would like to see an action plan as soon as possible and hoped that there would be some substantive progress to report at the meeting after next; with an opportunity to submit questions in advance. It was also agreed that the Board request regular updates on progress. Potential weaknesses needed to be identified and solutions found, for example relating to transport issues.

Julie Macrae
(note for
agenda)

Mike Hyatt

The Chair invited anyone with further comments or thoughts to contact her directly.

4.2 *Broadband*

Chris Taylor, Shropshire Council's Broadband Manager, provided an update on achievements to date. In response to questions asked by Nick Chavasse, the Broadband Champion, he explained:

- There was significant Scrutiny of BT and spending to ensure value for money was being achieved. Shropshire Council was able to challenge and ask for justification of costs.
- Technology was driven from the main exchanges in Ludlow, Oswestry, Market Drayton and Shrewsbury. Once an area was announced then Cabinets would be installed. Unfortunately exchange areas did not always align with community areas.
- A balance between business and consumers in rural and urban areas was struck through an optimised business model. Attempts were being made to prioritise Cabinets that would significantly help businesses.
- Percentage take up of Superfast Broadband was low in the UK overall. All stakeholders in Shropshire were being asked to articulate the benefits, with a focus on areas where there was likely to be good take up. The contract did not require BT to undertake demand stimulation.
- Attempts were made to address criticisms of the programme by clear explanations of the limitations of the technology and working closely with communities. It had been difficult to do this to date because it was not clear where any gaps might be.

Nick advised the Council to capitalise on the broadband success story.

Shaun Carvill commented on the massive skills and understanding gap regarding the benefits of superfast broadband, particularly as there was a significant cost increase to go superfast. Chris confirmed that there was no requirement for BT to help with demand stimulation but it was an open network and businesses would be able to search for the best deal.

4.3 *Business Hub – Will Morris*

Will Morris reported that it had been agreed to set up a virtual hub whilst awaiting HE premises developments. It was intended to bring all parties together on business support and activity on a website which could provide a one stop shop for all advice and support for all businesses in Shropshire. Thanks to help from Shaun Carvill, the Shropshire Council website was now appearing higher up on google searches. It was fast moving towards a proto-type business hub. The Chair commented how much it had been improved and how quickly this has been done.

It was suggested that on line seminars/webinars would be useful and that a working group take this forward. A webinar on procurement had already been suggested, and small business in the most remote parts of Shropshire would be able to access these.

4.4 *Procurement*

Ann Johnson reported on the successful installation of all technology, the next action was to ensure people were able to use it. An event was planned for February to bring procurement officers to the table with the aim of helping them do business better in the county and share expertise between the public and private sector. The Chair thanked and congratulated Ann for the huge amount of work she had undertaken so far. In order to boost take up for the event it was suggested using ‘buyer’ instead of ‘procurement officer’ which sounded very public sector.

4.5 *Inward Investment*

Mark Pembleton reported that this was now a Central Government Priority and the Business Board agreed that it should become a priority of the Shropshire Growth Strategy, requiring its own action plan and regular update. The Board approved this.

Karen Davies emphasised the importance of seeking inward investment and Andy Evans reported on his recent EU funded trips to China which had opened dialogue with Chinese central government, and also with cities and innovation parks. These links were likely to evolve in a positive way and there would be more trade missions to come. The Chair reported that Shropshire’s private schools had a big reach into the Chinese market.

4.6 *Employment Sites and Infrastructure and Export*

Members noted the positive update which had been circulated prior to the

meeting.

4.7

Skills

The Chair asked which Business Board Members were aware of the 'Growing Talent Programme'. Although some were, others were not and Shaun Carvill explained more as he currently employed a graduate under this scheme.

There was an aspiration for 68 graduates to be placed in businesses across Shropshire under the scheme which paid 40% of a salary for a year. Although there was a lot of paperwork to complete it was an excellent scheme and could be particularly useful for start-ups.

It was agreed that information about the scheme be circulated to Board Members and that efforts be made to make the details of the Programme more explicit on the website, perhaps with its own space and identity. It was felt this was a demonstration of how some businesses 'did not know what they did not know' and the new virtual hub would address this issue.

Julie
Macrae

4.8

Growth Sectors

Creative and Digital

Shaun Carvill reported on a conference he was arranging for 19 March 2014 for creative businesses in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. This was intended to improve communications, highlight the benefits of collaborative working and encourage looking out of county. He requested some funds from Shropshire Council for refreshments which would be matched by the Borough of Telford and Wrekin.

Food and Drink

Karen Davies reported that she had not had the benefit of a support officer since Bill Campbell left, but that she would be working with Delia Yapp whilst a new support officer was identified and that Duncan Gray would also now be getting back involved..

HEFF would be relocating to SCAT shortly and launching 'Taste' kitchen at Origins. HEFF been working successfully internationally, particularly with Poland, in building up relationships. HEFF had been chosen as UKTI partner for the Food is Great Britain campaign for Poland and the European emerging markets. The Chair congratulated Karen for this excellent news.

Agri-technology Sector

The Board agreed that the Growth Strategy action plan be refocused so that the Land Based Sector was now re-named and re-focused to be the Agri-tech sector and that regular updates be provided in this area. It was agreed that Dr Catherine Baxter be invited to join the Board and lead on this sector. It is very important as there is now a national industrial strategy for this sector and the Marches LEP area is the most important LEP for this sector in the country.

Green/Low Carbon Sector

Mandy Stoker reported that she had not had access to a supporting officer either as Rachel was leaving, but provided an update on progress. Tackling flood issues and the eco build trade were helping to pull all sectors forward.

5. ESIF and SEP and the LEP Conference

The consultation on the ESIF was just about to close.

Members noted that an LEP wide conference at Wroxeter was to be held on the evening of either 25 or 27 February 2014. This was intended to allow businesses an opportunity to feed in their views on the SEP. The importance of including large businesses as well as SMEs was emphasised.

6. Any Other Business

William Morris reported that a high end restaurant chain had decided not to locate in Shrewsbury because of restrictive licensing arrangements related to serving drinks in the Square. The Chair was particularly concerned to hear this and felt the Board should use its leverage to encourage a café culture to help the town thrive for residents, businesses and visitors.

Mark Pembleton said he would look into this.

William Morris suggested that in view of the importance of shops and restaurants to Shropshire, the Board should consider how best to bring these issues to the Board table.. It was agreed to invite the Business Improvement District lead for Shrewsbury Kirsten Henley to present about retail matters to a future Board meeting.

Mark
Pembleton

Kirsten
Henley

7 Dates of Future Meetings

Tuesday evenings had proved to be the most favoured evening for members to meet. The next meeting was scheduled for

Tuesday 15 April 2014 at 4.00 pm at Harper Adams University. Please note this will include a tour of Harper Adams University Agri-Tech facilities and will be joint with Telford Business Board.