

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SHROPSHIRE  
BUSINESS BOARD**

**HELD ON**

**TUESDAY 8 JULY 2014 4.30pm – 6.35 pm**

**AT SHREWSBURY COLLEGE OF ARTS & TECHNOLOGY**

**Present:**

**Board Members**

Mandy Thorn MBE (Chair)	Chair of Shropshire Business Board and Chair for the meeting - Marches Care Ltd
Tony Bywater MBE	Salop Leisure Limited, Shrewsbury
Nick Chavasse MBE	NRG Direct Mail Ltd
Duncan Gray	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd, Market Drayton
Arthur Hill	CH Hill and Sons (Vice Chair Shropshire Business Board)
Nick Scott	J Ross Developments
Mandy Stoker	E 4 Environment & Chair of METnet.

**Representatives**

Cllr Steve Charmley	Portfolio Holder Business Growth, Shropshire Council
Dr Catherine Baxter	Harper Adams University
Fay Easton	Shropshire Enterprise Partnership
Kairen Francis	Jobcentre Plus
Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Business
Simon MacVicker	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Richard Sheehan	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
Steve Wain	Shropshire Learning Network

**Shropshire Council Officers**

Claire Cox	Economic Growth Re-design Programme Manager
Mark Pembleton	Service Manager for Business and Enterprise
Clive Wright	Chief Executive
Julie Fildes	Committee Officer

**In Attendance**

Martin Timmis	Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd
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**1 Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Steve Wain and Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology for inviting the Board to use their facilities and for their kind hospitality.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from, Shaun Carvill of Clickingmad Ltd, Councillor Steve Davenport, Chair of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee, Andy Evans, Group Manager, Business Growth & Prosperity, Shropshire

- 1.3 The Chair reminded members of the retirement of Katie Foster – Chair of the Shropshire & Telford Tourism Strategy Board which had been previously announced and added that Karen Davies MBE of Heart of England Fine Foods, and James Thompson of Sansaw Estates had also advised her of their retirement from the group. She continued that she would be looking at the membership of the group with the view to recruiting new members.
- 1.4 The Chair thanked Arthur Hill for leading the ambassadors meeting at Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd. She thanked Duncan Gray of Muller Dairy for his hospitality and for an excellent, useful and interesting visit.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 Members were reminded to declare any interests either at this point or if they became apparent during the meeting. There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Minutes**

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2014 were confirmed as a correct record, with no matters arising.

## **4 Presentation By Martin Timmis of Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd**

- 4.1 Martin Timmis made a presentation to the Board, and explained that Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd was an arm's length company set up by Shropshire Fire and Rescue following the recent reduction in government funding of £3m. Shropshire Fire and Rescue had made the decision not to significantly reduce their service to the public and so had had to identify alternative ways to meet funding requirements. This had been done through internal reorganisation and voluntary redundancies. At the same it had been recognised that the force had a great deal of fire prevention knowledge and expertise that had commercial value and could be marketed to businesses in Shropshire. Recent changes in the law allowed this to be done.
- 4.2 The company had targeted the top one hundred businesses in Shropshire who paid the highest business rates. Its objective was to keep the businesses of Shropshire in business through effective fire prevention advice. The company charged for its services in a competitive market and all profit was returned to the fire service and was not retained by the company.
- 4.3 He explained that the company had to be kept completely separate to the fire service because of state aid regulations, which did not allow public money or assets to be used for unfair advantage in commercial situations. Serving officers were seconded to the company as advisors and were paid by the company on a subcontractor basis. In answer to a question Mr Timmis stated that no staff were directly employed by the company and no

staff had been transferred to it, although this situation could alter in May 2015. He confirmed that the company paid the fire service for any use of its assets, which included desk use. He added that the accounts were closely audited to avoid accusations of unfair competition.

4.4 Mr Timmis explained that the law required businesses to have a current risk assessment carried out by a competent person. The law did not define a competent person but it was recognised that anyone carrying out a fire risk assessment should have received training and have experience. Many companies felt that they did not have a member of staff sufficiently trained and experienced for this task and with the courts dealing severely with companies not taking their responsibilities seriously, led to many companies opting to use the services of the company. He added that the company was also in the position to be able to recommend workmen to undertake any work that was required and this provided a one stop shop and increased customer satisfaction.

4.5 The Chair thanked Mr Timmis for an interesting presentation and asked that due to time constraints, Members who had further questions should email Mr Timmis directly.

## **5 Feedback from the Business Summit**

5.1 Mandy Thorn invited Claire Cox to update Members on the recent successful Business summit, held in May 2014 at the Football Ground which provided important and extensive business input to the economic growth work of the Council.

5.2 It was reported that the Business Summit had engaged many new businesses who had listened to a range of speakers. Feedback from the event had been extremely positive with a wide array of businesses keen to engage with both the Council and the business support organisations who attended the event.

5.3 Findings from the table exercises indicated that delegates perceived problems with infrastructure in the County and a lack of both national and international promotion of the area. Delegates requested greater proactive business support with efforts focused on joined up services, supported start-ups and greater support for leaders and managers. Satisfaction was expressed with the tremendous support from the Council's Economic Development Team and those present felt that it was the most positive business summit held.

5.4 The Chair thanked the committee members for acting as ambassadors and hosting tables and she commented that CW's quick fire question and answer session had been very successful.

## **6 Economic Growth Services Redesign**

6.1 Members received a presentation from Shropshire Council's Economic Growth Re-design Programme Manager; Claire Cox, on the work to redesign Shropshire Council's Economic Growth Services to improve the way that the Council worked with businesses and enabled business growth

in the County.

- 6.2 She explained how the initial design work had begun in March 2014 and had identified the areas within the scope of the redesign, why there was a need for change, what success would look like and how it could be achieved.
- 6.3 As part of the initial design work the team had reviewed:
- the Shropshire economy;
  - the current operating context;
  - the impact Economic Growth services within Shropshire Council had on the Shropshire economy; and
  - the customers that the services had.
- 6.4 Her initial investigations established that:
- a lot of good work was being done in individual sections of the Council but the individual areas did not always work together as a co-ordinated whole;
  - the Council had a vast operational area from European to local parishes;
  - projects tended to be output driven and not impact driven;
  - no immediate view had been taken on the type of businesses that the County wanted to attract or whether some were more attractive than others;
  - that equal focus was given to all businesses regardless of potential outcome; and
  - businesses viewed the Council as the honest broker.
- 6.5 CC gave the example of the Council being excellent at obtaining and distributing grant funding, but in some cases getting the grant and distribution could cost more than the value of the grant, and very little impact work had been done on analysing the effectiveness of the funding after its distribution, focusing instead on the outputs delivered not the overall outcome.
- 6.6 The first Decision Accelerator (DA) in mid-June established four priority work areas:
- Business Growth;
  - Strategic Growth;
  - Physical Growth; and
  - Community Business Growth
- 6.7 CC described how quickly the work had progressed and how the programme was seeking critical friends for each priority area to overview the work and provide feedback. It was suggested that the Business Board Members may be minded to take on this role. Several Members expressed interest in this. It was commented that partnership working between the Council and businesses in the County had benefits for both and should be encouraged and were just as valid the Council's partnership working with other public bodies, the voluntary sector or the university. This was agreed.

6.8 It was decided that CC would set up an initial workshop session as discussed for the Business Board members to share their knowledge and expertise and further their involvement in the redesign work.

## **7 Mobile Telecoms**

7.1 Nick Chavasse briefed members on the progress of the Broadband Delivery programme through DBUK and British Telecom. The aim of the programme was to provide superfast broadband to 95% of the population by 2017. Shropshire had received an invitation to apply for £11.3m of funding from the Department of Culture Media and Sport, which to be granted had to be match funded on a 1:1 basis.

7.2 He continued that although the problem of broadband provision was being addressed for much of the County, there were still large areas without adequate mobile telephone coverage. He continued that since the amalgamation of Orange and T-Mobile there was anecdotal evidence that coverage was being further reduced. O2 and Vodaphone coverage were also reported as deteriorating.

7.3 There was a wide perception that telecommunication masts were being removed leading to a reduction in coverage. Members discussed the placement of masts on private land and the rent that was paid to land owners for this. It was agreed that providers were reducing costs by removing less profitable masts and it was observed that the removal of one mast could leave an entire community without mobile telephone provision.

7.4 It was suggested that as only anecdotal evidence existed for this, a formal survey of coverage should be undertaken to obtain a better picture of the situation and the map where coverage has deteriorated be put together. NC added that he would compile a short questionnaire and would send it out to Board Members, business networks and membership organisations

NC

7.5 It was noted that British Telecom were not the only potential provider of superfast broadband in the County and that the technology they were offering was no longer the most modern available. It was suggested that a company using more modern technology would be able to reach a greater number of homes and businesses. It was observed that no final projections as to the number of premises that could be reached had been made by BT and it appeared that they could not provide this information until the broadband infrastructure had been installed.

7.6 Members felt strongly that in the modern world the lack of adequate mobile phone and broadband coverage seriously disadvantaged both businesses and private individuals and should not be allowed to continue.

## **8 LEP Developments**

8.1 Councillor Steve Charmley advised the meeting that the Government had announced its growth deals for each LEP for the coming year, none of the Shropshire projects had new funding for 2015/16 but two were supported provisionally for 2016/17. He expressed his disappointment and frustration at this, which was echoed by those present. He continued that bidding for

the next round of funding had now begun. He also stated that they were still waiting for an announcement regarding the European Strategic Investment Fund (ESIF).

- 8.2 He confirmed that LEP funding had been granted for projects in Herefordshire and Telford for 2015/16 and he had received confirmation from both of these authorities that they would support the three top priority Shropshire projects in the next Growth Deal, which are:
- Oswestry Innovation Park;
  - Whitchurch Electricity Capacity Project; and
  - Superfast Extension Programme for Broadband.

## 9 High Growth Sectors Update on Actions

- 9.1 **Agritech:** Dr Catherine Baxter was asked to update Members. She stated that lack of investment funding in the sector had a significant impact on the delivery of projects.
- 9.2 She continued that the County had the advantage of having the premier agricultural university within its area and the university was going from strength to strength. Its new agricultural innovation centre was attracting high end business investment which meant that they were in a strong position to justify the application for £90m government investment.
- 9.3 Dr Baxter continued that she was in negotiations with local leading companies, as well as talking to major national companies, to bring investment to the university. She commented that she was also in regular talks with Government ministers about the sector and that the Marches LEP had agreed to support a future bid for agritech.
- 9.4 **Tourism:** Members were referred to the Visitor Economy Action Plan Report for Shropshire which has succeeded in attracting tourists to the county as well as persuading residents to spend their leisure time with in the County.
- 9.5 The Visitor Economy Team had been working with the neighbouring authorities of Hereford and Telford & Wrekin to co-ordinate a serious of joint bids for European funding through the Marches LEP Tourism Group.
- 9.6 Members of the Board noted the number of events being held in Shropshire over the summer months and commented on how the excellent weather had further added to their success and encouraged people to stay in the County.

## 10 University Update

- 10.1 Clive Wright advised that a paper would be going to the next meeting of full Council recommending approval for Officers to identify the location for a university campus in Shrewsbury. He continued that the locations being considered for the teaching and residential accommodation of the university were:
- The Shirehall
  - The Guildhall

- The Tannery
- The Reference Library
- Abbey Foregate

It was planned to gift Rowley's House to the university as its administration centre.

10.2 CW continued that Chester University was developing its curriculum to be offered in Shrewsbury with courses starting in October 2015. It was noted that the university would complement the current educational provision in the County.

10.3 It was agreed that the location of a university in the town would attract new businesses to the County and provide the area with entrepreneurial graduates. CW commented that the university was a key dimension in the partnerships of the area and a key driver for future business development in the County.

## **11 Future Agenda Items**

- Membership of the Business Board
- LEP Champions

## **12 Dates of Next Meetings**

12.1 The next meeting of the Business Board will be held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at 4.30 pm at Kingsland Consulting by kind invitation of Mr Will Morris.

12.2 It was decided that the December meeting would no longer be held in the Council Chamber, Shirehall but enquires would be made about using the recently refurbished Music Hall.

**The Chair thanked Steve Wain for hosting the meeting and Clive Wright for attending, the meeting closed at 6.35pm.**