

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

**HELD ON
TUESDAY 9th DECEMBER 2014
4.30pm – 6.45 pm**

**AT
UPPER VAUGHANS, SHREWSBURY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY,
SHREWSBURY**

Present:

Board Members

Mandy Thorn MBE (Chair)	Marches Care Ltd
Arthur Hill (Vice Chair)	CH Hill and Sons (Vice Chair Shropshire Business Board)
Tony Bywater MBE	Salop Leisure Ltd
Shaun Cavill	Clickingmad Ltd, Bridgnorth
Nick Chavasse MBE	NRG Direct Mail Ltd
Roger Emery	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd, Market Drayton
Duncan Gray	Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd, Market Drayton
Matthew Snelson	Grainger & Worrall, Bridgnorth
Mandy Stoker	E 4 Environment & Chair of METnet.

Representatives

Lindsay Barton	Federation of Small Business
Dr Catherine Baxter	Harper Adams University
Paul Bennett	Shropshire Business Partnership
Cllr Steve Charmley	Portfolio Holder Business Growth, Shropshire Council
Rob Hudson	Handlesbanken – High Street Bank Representative
Simon MacVicker	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce & Enterprise Ltd
William Morris	Utilities Representative
Steve Wain	Shropshire Learning Network

Shropshire Council Officers

George Candler	Director of Commissioning
Bryony Lainton	Business Engagement Officer, Business and Enterprise Team
Steve Murphy	Creative Media Co-Ordinator
Mark Pembleton	Service Manager for Business and Enterprise
Julie Fildes	Committee Officer

1.0 Welcome, Apologies, Introductions and Announcements

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Particular welcomes were extended to Lindsay Barton and Roger Emery as new Board Members.
- 1.2 The Chair announced the retirement of Duncan Gray of Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd, from the Board and thanked him for his hard work during this service

on the Board.

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- 1.3 **Agreed:**
That the Chair writes to both Joy Johnson and Duncan Grey following their retirement from the Board to formally thank them for their work.
- 1.4 Apologies were received from Matt Bulley of Caterpillar Ltd, Bill Evans of Jobcentre Plus, Tudor Griffiths of the Tudor Griffiths Group Ltd, Nick Scott of J Ross Developments, and Clive Wright, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council.
- 1.5 **Agreed:**
That the Agenda be re-ordered and consideration of the Minutes from the meeting held on 7th October 2014 and any matters arising be taken at an appropriate point later in the meeting.
- 2.0 Declarations of Interest**
- 2.1 Members were reminded to declare any interests either at this point or if they became apparent during the meeting.
- 3.0 Progress of the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy (SEGS) 2012-2026 – End of 2014 update**
- 3.1 The Chair asked for brief verbal reports from each of the Growth Champions.
- 3.2 Food and Drink Manufacturing:** Duncan Gray reported that the year overall had been successful with a great deal achieved.
- 3.3 He suggested that the sector, especially the smaller providers, should be prompted to raise its profile at the various festivals and shows held in the country throughout the year, such as the Shrewsbury Flower Show. It was suggested that the Business Champions could take a stand at selected shows to promote their area of interest.
- 3.4 A Board Member suggested a dedicated section for food and drink within the virtual business growth hub to be set on a Marches basis.
- 3.5 Referring to the longer term goals, Board Members discussed the potential roles of Harper Adams University and Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology (SCAT) to provide training in the food and drink sector and maximise the possibilities for research and development in the County.
- 3.6 The difficulties of measuring the increase in food exports from the County were discussed due to the lack of baseline figures. Anecdotal evidence indicated that food exports had increased significantly.
- 3.7 Provision of Suitable Employment Sites and Premises:** Members noted the report.
- 3.8 Improving Local Procurement:** Lindsay Barton reported that 86

businesses had signed up to the Charter and further work was being undertaken to recruit more members. She confirmed that the Membership comprised of a mix of companies. Currently Shropshire Council was in the top 4 local authorities for local procurement from local SMES but aimed to be in the top 3 next year.

- 3.9 Accelerating Business Growth – Inward Investment:** Matt Snelson reported difficulties identifying potential sites to establish business operations in the County and noted that Hereford had an Economic Zone and Telford had enterprise areas. Another Board Member commented that Wales set its own business rates for Welshpool which were at an attractive level due to additional funding from the Welsh Assembly. It was observed that Shropshire was open for business but this needed to be articulated with greater effect.
- 3.10 Concern was expressed that the new University Centre Shrewsbury was not offering engineering courses that would support manufacturing businesses in the County. BB was concerned about the lack of engineering and science course being developed by UCS, as there was a real skills shortage of engineers in the county. It was explained that this was because the University of Chester had established an Engineering Centre at Thornton near Ellesmere Port.
- 3.11 Board Members discussed the Phase 2 development of Shrewsbury Business Park and the provision of infrastructure in the County. It was agreed that businesses moving into the County had to be confident that the infrastructure was in place to support their needs, including broadband provision. It was noted that Scottish Power had agreed to upgrade electricity provision in North Shropshire following lobbying by both the Council and local businesses. In response to a Board Member's query, Mark Pembleton explained that the Council had Place Plans for every area of the County which detailed the infrastructure requirements of each locality.
- 3.12 LEP funding applications were discussed and the need for close cooperation with LEP Partners was noted, as was the need to be better prepared for the LEP funding application, with priorities clearly identified.
- 3.13 **Visitor Growth Sector:** Tony Bywater reported that this sector was working well, but continued to aim for better media coverage, with tourism journalists being invited to stay in the County on a regular basis. Board Members noted a good range of organised events to attract visitors to the county.
- 3.14 In response to a query, Mr Bywater confirmed that the Tourism Leadership Board had replaced the Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board.
- 3.15 **Growth of the Creative Industries:** Shaun Cavill reported that the Creating Success Conference had been well received by delegates and it was planned to hold another in 2015 with specific business problems being examined. He continued that priorities would be refocused with internet issues given better promotion.

- 3.16 Board Members noted that the problems the County experienced with broadband provision and poor mobile phone coverage acted as a disabler to business.
- 3.17 **Growth of the Agricultural Technology (Agritech) Sector:** Dr Baxter advised that although she appreciated that the report had been drafted on her behalf by Ms Yapp, unfortunately it had not been shared with her at any point prior to its circulation. There were a number of inaccuracies which needed to be corrected and these had now been corrected.
- 3.18 Board Members noted that the Precision Livestock Centre established at the Harper Adams University had successfully delivered all its targets ahead of schedule and was performing well.
- 3.19 Dr Baxter continued that despite the achievements already attained a significant amount of work still needed to be undertaken with the Agritech Strategy and LEP bids.
- 3.20 Skilled and Loyal Workforce:** Duncan Gray praised the HR department of Muller Dairy (UK) Ltd for their innovative approach in engaging with local schools and supporting the apprenticeship scheme.
- 3.21 Board Members discussed the merits of such schemes and the way in which schools prepared school leavers to enter the job market. It was observed that many schools were not promoting this route to the job market and career advice was often inadequate. A Board Member commented on the lack of communication between businesses and schools and that there was a general lack of understanding regarding the skills employees needed to become part of the workforce. Despite this there was a large number of younger people interested in becoming apprentices.
- 3.22 Members also observed that the apprenticeship scheme could be disjointed with employers uncertain of the costs of the scheme, or where to find further information.
- 3.23 Steve Wain suggested that local colleges needed to work more closely with each other and business federations to promote apprenticeships and ensure that young people were work ready.
- 3.24 Broadband:** Nick Chavasse reported that Phase 1 of the project to connect Shropshire was on track for completion in Winter 2016, which was to complete 350 cabinets and enable 72,000 premises to access them.
- 3.25 Board Members noted that he had undertaken a survey of mobile phone signal coverage which had given tangible data on poor coverage.
- 3.26 Mr Chavasse continued that commercial take-up of broadband remained at around 10 to 15%, he suggested that better promotion of the benefits of the technology was required.
- 3.27 Green Economy:** Mandy Stoker stated that this was a growing sector, due to an increasing demand for energy and lack of capacity with

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traditional production methods. She continued that there was also a demand for energy technology and services. She identified the potential barrier to growth as the Government's removal or reduction of tariffs and planning issues.

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- 3.28 Board Members discussed the loss of Iron Bridge Power Station and the impact this would have on electricity supply. William Morris commented that the closure of this power station was part of the Government's plan to phase out coal fired power stations and this would not result in power outages or a reduction in availability of electricity in Shropshire. He agreed to investigate the energy supply situation in Shropshire and report back to the Board in Spring 2015.

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Members agreed that it would be useful if the Business Board could work with Shropshire Council and others to draw up an Energy Strategy for Shropshire

4.0 Performance Measurement of the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy, the Dashboard of Indicators

- 4.1 Mark Pembleton, Service Manager for Business and Enterprise for Shropshire Council introduced this report. Board Members noted that many of the indicators illustrated that the County had returned to its pre-recession position.
- 4.2 Citing the example of employment, a Board Member observed that some of the figures misrepresented the true situation; long term unemployment was reducing but many of the jobs created had reduced hours in small businesses which paid a lower hourly rate. He added that his was supported by the low GVA figures. He added that more people had become self-employed consultants which had created a high volume of micro businesses.
- 4.3 Mark Pembleton confirmed that the data included the public sector and added that this sector continued to reduce in size, now standing a 20.9% compared to 25% in 2009. He continued that many of those leaving the public sector had joined the private sector or become self-employed.

5.0 The Marches Skills Plan 2013-2015

5.1 Agreed:

That due to lack of sufficient time for full consideration, this item be deferred and placed on the Shropshire Business Board Agenda for the next meeting and that Professor Ian Oaks be asked to attend to present this item.

6.0 Future Direction for the Shropshire Business Board

- 6.1 Mandy Thorn asked Board Members to consider the discussion points set out in her discussion paper.

- 6.2 George Candler agreed to relay the points set out in the discussion paper to both the Leader of Council and the Chief Executive.
- 6.3 Board Members expressed frustration that the wide range of skills and experiences of its Members were not being fully utilised by the Council. George Candler responded that the views of the Business Board were valued by the Council and influenced the decision making process. Board Members queried where the Board sat in the governance arrangements of the Council.
- 6.4 Board Members noted the level of financial savings having to be made by the Council. It was suggested that the Board needed to refocus its energies on a narrower range of priorities which would promote a more robust role and would allow for a deeper relationship to be established with the Council Leadership.
- 6.5 The achievements of the Business Board were discussed. It was agreed that the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy (SEGS) had been highly effective, especially due to having Board Champions for each activity and working on each priority. It was further agreed that publicity highlighting key achievements early in 2015 would be obtained.
- 6.6 Board Members suggested they be given greater involvement in the Council work. It was noted that they were often not involved at an early stage on decisions relating to infrastructure or funding applications for projects where their business experience and local knowledge could be of value.
- 6.7 It was noted that the Business Board operated without financial resources but the Members brought energy, experience and knowledge to contribute to the County.
- 6.8 Councillor Steve Charmley advised Members of the Board that he recognised the traditional disconnect between business and the Council but believed that this situation would alter in the New Year. The Business Board had been identified as a key partner in the redesign of the Council's operating practices and Members' skills would be used to better effect.
- 6.9 Councillor Charmley confirmed that the Council had to reduce its spending by £84 million and the only way this could be achieved would be to change the way in which it operated. He hoped that the Business Board would share the direction of travel with the Council to face the challenge before the County.

7.0 Marches Growth and General Marches LEP Update

7.1 Agreed:

That due to insufficient time for full consideration, this item be deferred and placed on the Shropshire Business Board Agenda for the next meeting.

8.0 Any Other Business

8.1 Shropshire University Update

8.2 Agreed:

That George Candler provide an update to Members at the next meeting of the Business Board.

9.0 Future Agenda Items

- 9.1 Due to insufficient time, the Minutes from the meeting held on 7th October 2014 and matters arising from them will be considered at the next meeting of the Business Board on 3rd February 2015.

10.0 Dates of Next Meetings

- 10.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Shropshire Business Board be held on Tuesday 3rd February 2015 at 4.30 pm at Kingsland Consulting by kind invitation of William Morris.

Meetings for 2015:

(All from 4.30pm to 6.30pm)

3 rd February 2015	Kingland Consulting, Shrewsbury;
22 nd April 2015	Caterpillar, Shrewsbury;
15 th July 2015	Salop Leisure;
7 th October 2015	University Centre Shrewsbury; and
9 th December 2015	Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.