

**MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS BOARD MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 2013 4.30 – 6.40 PM
HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, SHIREHALL, SHREWSBURY**

Present:

Business Board Members

Tony Bywater MBE	Salop Leisure Ltd
Shaun Carvill	Clickingmad Ltd
Nick Chavasse MBE	NRG Direct Mail Ltd
Karen Davies MBE	Heart of England Fine Foods
Mandy Stoker	E4 Environment and Chair of METnet
Mandy Thorn (Chair)	Marches Care Ltd

**Business Board
Representative Members**

Cllr Steve Charmley	Portfolio Holder Business Growth & Commissioning (North)
Fay Easton	Shropshire Enterprise Partnership
Katie Foster	Chair, Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board
Ann Johnson	Federation of Small Business
Simon MacVicker	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ltd
Cllr Mike Owen	Portfolio Holder Resources, Finance and Support
Steve Wain	Shropshire Learning Network

Steve Orton	JobCentrePlus
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Observers

Cllr Steve Davenport	Chair, Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee
Glyn Jones	Bank of England West Midlands

Officers

Andy Evans	Head of Business Growth and Prosperity
Julie Macrae	Business Engagement Officer
Mark Pembleton	Service Manager for Business and Enterprise
Anne Cousins	Committee Officer

1. Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received from: Duncan Gray; Tudor Griffiths; Arthur Hill; Rob Hudson; Will Morris; Paul Noon and Nick Scott.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2013 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to listing Will Morris as a representative rather than an observer.

Matters Arising*European Funding (page 2)*

The final submission had been circulated to all on 7 October; anyone who had not received it was advised to contact Julie Macrae.

Low Carbon Economy (page 3)

It was reported that Mandy Stoker had been nominated as the Board's representative on the Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committee.

Tony Bywater reported on Shrewsbury's success in the Britain in Bloom awards and the Board congratulated Tony and the team including Shrewsbury Town Council and Shropshire Council.

Any Other Business – Heart of England Fine Foods

Karen Davies reported that the proposed meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the Business Board, Heart of England Fine Foods and Shropshire Council had not taken place, but a meeting had been held between Heart of England Fine Foods and Shropshire Council. A further meeting was planned for 25 October.

4. Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy – Update on Action Plans

Creative Industries Update

Shaun Carvill provided a detailed update. He explained he had concentrated on creative and digital industries, rather than cultural industries. He reported a great deal of expertise in Shropshire, but there had been a lack of promotion historically. Some of the actions required were to build a brand for Shropshire's creative and digital sectors and to investigate the feasibility of having a London office to promote the county. He further suggested holding a conference for all businesses in the creative sector, to encourage collaboration and co-operation rather than competition.

These actions, however, would require resources.

The Chairman thanked Shaun Carvill for the update and invited Shropshire Council to look at ways of facilitating the proposed actions.

Mark
Pembleton

Shaun Carvill went on to report the early results of the IT infrastructure survey which had been sent out to approximately 500 businesses. To date, there had been 169 responses, or 3.4%. The survey had already shown there were a number of issues to be addressed, e.g. 38% using old equipment, 20% not confident about IT; 19% do not know about Real Time Information (RTI). The comments boxes identified slow Broadband speeds as a recurring concern for businesses. Andy Evans and Mark Pembleton both suggested the roll-out of superfast Broadband would resolve some of these issues.

Katie Foster commented that there was a cultural strategy for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and that a cultural bid had been submitted to the Arts Council.

Visitor Economy Update

The main issues currently were:

- European funding
- Business opportunities at the Music Hall – retail and café space being advertised.
- Shropshire Star Tourism Awards
- Transport links – discussions being held re direct rail line to London; possibility of funding for the North West Relief Road.

Cllr Mike Owen confirmed government funding was being made available for transport projects, but at this stage, preliminary discussions were being held with government ministers and it would be some time before any decisions were made regarding the funding of the North West Relief Road in Shrewsbury.

ACTION*Broadband/Connecting Shropshire Update*

Nick Chavasse reported on progress with the BT Broadband roll-out. A briefing was planned for 22 October at which it would be announced which communities were included in Phase 1. In January, further information would be available about which exchanges were affected and the roll-out would begin, with the intention of being live in April 2014.

The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) was addressing the issue of the 1300 premises affected by 'not spots' (no signal from any provider). Locations were currently being surveyed and funding was available. The programme was due to be completed by 2015.

The Chairman agreed to circulate information from central government on additional European funding and how this could be used.

Mandy Thorn

There was discussion about the recent Broadband seminar at Albrighton Hall Hotel and a question was asked about why Coventry University had run this. It was explained that, on this occasion, Coventry had European funding to deliver the event, but Cllr Steve Charmley confirmed the Council had the potential to do something similar next year, using funding obtained for "optimising Broadband".

Exports Update

Simon MacVicker reported good activity in this sector. He undertook to provide the detail of the regular international trade committee meetings to the Board. He confirmed Richard Sheehan was involved in the UKTI discussions with the LEP. Cllr Steve Charmley confirmed there was a meeting on 5 November with the UKTI Chief Executive, Nick Baird, Shropshire Council and Daniel Kawczynski, MP for Shrewsbury and Atcham, on the subject of inward investment opportunities and how UKTI can do more to help Shropshire attract more investment. Cllr Steve Charmley would report back at the next meeting.

Simon MacVicker**Cllr Steve Charmley***Food and Drink Update*

Karen Davies reported that the action plan could not be taken forward at the present time until the future of Heart of England Fine Foods had been settled.

She went on to describe positive export activity in the food and drink sector, including links with Poland, which was leading to an increase in sales.

Ann Johnson raised the issue of environmental health scoring of food premises. Due to staff reductions, the 'scores on the doors' were only being reviewed if the score was a 1 or 2. This meant that food

premises currently scored at 3, for example, had no opportunity to progress to a 5 because they were not reviewed. She suggested introducing an income stream (i.e. businesses paying for inspections) as a way to resolve this issue. Cllr Steve Charmley commented that the whole service was being re-designed. Ann Johnson said the business sector was not involved in the re-design, yet if asked, businesses could often come up with solutions. The Chairman agreed the business sector could help to create income for Shropshire Council. Cllr Steve Charmley would report back on this.

ACTION

Cllr Steve Charmley

Environmental/Low Carbon Sector

Mandy Stoker provided a verbal update. She referred to the Marches Timber Study report (obtainable from Louise Cross, Shropshire Council) which estimated the timber industry in the Marches had the potential to create up to 200 jobs. The next step was to develop an Action Plan.

Members were reminded of the MetNet conference which would take place on 14 November at Worcester Cricket Club and the excellent conference programme aimed at the sector across the Marches.

With regard to barriers to progress, Mandy Stoker said her Shropshire Council support officer was leaving so she needed a replacement. She also thought there would be value in linking this sector in more closely with the land-based sector. Karen Davies commented she was facing similar barriers and she also felt food and drink should be linked more closely with the land-based sector.

The Chairman concluded more work was needed to improve connectivity between the sectors.

Higher Education update

Steve Wain provided a verbal update. He reported the local colleges had put together a capital bid to go to the Higher Education Funding Council in March 2013, but had been requested by Shropshire Council officers not to proceed any further until after publication of a report by Chester University. Since then, there had been no further updates and the report from Chester University had not yet been released. Andy Evans confirmed that a meeting with all Higher Education and Further Education Vice Chancellors and Principals with the Council Chief Executive would be held on 23 October.

COGS Update

Ann Johnson had provided a detailed written report. She highlighted the #tendercogs Twitter account which was now working and she encouraged everyone to use it. She drew attention to an event for procurement officers on 12 November which would be looking at how to reduce barriers to small businesses. She encouraged Business Board members to support the work of Cogs. In response to a

question, Ann Johnson reported over 20 businesses were signed up to the Charter. The Council Leaders at both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Councils had written to the top 50 businesses recently encouraging them to sign up to the Charter.

Shropshire Business Hub Update

The Chairman introduced the paper, in the absence of Will Morris. She explained there was an open invitation to the Board to visit the Innovation Centre at Chester on 25 October.

Fay Easton said she had offered to contribute at the last meeting and had done a critique which she offered to e-mail to Board members. The Chairman suggested that, as Will Morris was not able to be at the meeting, it would be sensible to have a separate meeting to discuss this further before circulating the critique.

ACTION

**Mandy Thorn/Will
Morris/Fay
Easton/Andy
Evans/Mark
Pembleton**

5. Youth Unemployment

Fay Easton introduced her report, explaining that youth unemployment was a serious issue, with 3.7% of young people in Shropshire not in education, employment or training. As young people faced barriers to employment, one solution was to support them to become self-employed, running their own businesses. She reported on the Young Britain project and how Telford Enterprise Hub could help and support young people starting their own businesses.

Steve Orton from JobCentrePlus reported 500 businesses had been started in Shropshire as a result of government funding, through the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the contract with an organisation called Business Enterprise Support, to help reduce youth unemployment. The young people involved were those who had been unemployed for over six months. The key issue was how many of these businesses were still operating, but Steve Orton explained it was difficult to track people. JobCentrePlus offered a range of services to employers to take on local unemployed people.

Fay Easton described the importance of colleges embedding enterprise into their teaching and of strengthening the links between employers and the education sector.

The importance of work experience was discussed and the Chairman commented that there were no longer co-ordinators in schools to deal with work placements. Karen Davies suggested some central facilitation was required where businesses could advertise work experience opportunities. The Chairman suggested a pledge by all Board businesses.

6. Presentation – Strengthening the Links with Employers, Steve Wain, Corinne Brown and Karen Hayward, Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

Steve Wain introduced this item, explaining it was an exciting time for colleges which, because of funding changes, had more freedom now. In the past, colleges had delivered specific qualifications, but now the focus was to develop a young person's character which was just as important as achieving qualifications.

He introduced his colleagues, who gave a presentation setting out how Shrewsbury College was working with employers to enhance opportunities for students.

A key concept was the Shrewsbury College Employability Passport, which gave students the chance to gain "stamps" in academic achievement, work experience, volunteering, enrichment and enterprise. Employers would know that students from Shrewsbury College who had achieved the Employability Passport had demonstrated their abilities in a range of skills, including team working and customer handling.

Cllr Mike Owen asked about the importance of young people learning foreign languages. Steve Wain suggested this was a question to be addressed to schools. If a young person had not enjoyed learning languages at school, it was difficult for a college to pick this up.

Simon MacVicker commented that his company was keen to encourage visits by local school children, but his experience was that schools were only able to offer very limited times and he felt the education sector should be more flexible. In response, Steve Wain commented that schools were constrained by the National Curriculum, whereas colleges had more flexibility due to changes in the way they were funded. This offered colleges much more opportunity to engage with businesses.

Shaun Carvill suggested it was difficult for businesses to influence schools and colleges, but Steve Wain hoped the recent funding changes for colleges meant there were greater opportunities for colleges to develop what was needed.

The Chairman thanked Shrewsbury College staff for the presentation and the Business Board formally endorsed the concept of the Shrewsbury College Employability Passport.

7. Future Agenda Items

Fay Easton suggested looking at the membership of the Business Board to ensure a majority of members were business people. She also suggested putting some young people on the Board. The Chairman agreed she would look into this.

ACTION

8. Any Other Business

Ann Johnson referred to a report on the impact of parking charges on businesses, which she agreed to circulate to Board members. It highlighted that Shropshire Council was in the top three areas in the country for low parking charges.

Ann Johnson

12. Dates of Future Meetings

2 December 2013, Bridgnorth room, Shirehall, Shrewsbury.

The Chairman informed Board members she was hoping to arrange a joint meeting with Telford Business Board next spring.