

WEST CHESHIRE TOGETHER

BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE and CULTURE Board meeting minutes.

9.30pm, Friday 27th November 2009, Castle Park, Frodsham.

Attending:

Sara Mogel - West Cheshire College

Debra Washington - Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Job Centre Plus

Charlie Seward - Cheshire West and Chester Council & Culture representative

Annette Moor – Chester Cathedral

David Horstead – Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance

Rita Waters - Chester Renaissance

Andrew Donaldstone – Big Storage, Cheshire and Warrington

Ricardo Gomez – Visit Chester and Cheshire

Support:

Gill Rogerson - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Iain Paton - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Robbie Taylor - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Visitors:

Andrea Mageean - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Phill Bamford - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Jamie Matthews - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Agenda Item:

1. Sara welcomed partners to the second meeting of the BEC Board, especially Andrew Donaldson as a representative from the private sector. The Chair passed on her thanks to Mark Wilson, in absence, for his support as Partnership vice Chair and wished him well in his new role.
2. The Board received three presentations concerning the current consultation exercises to develop a new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), Local Development Framework (LDF) and Local Transport Plan (LTP) for West Cheshire. The SCS consultation document has a section on 'rising to the challenge', which include the following suggested themes:
 - **Supporting Regeneration Areas:** need to identify opportunities which will make a real difference to worklessness. A key element of this will be to influence regional strategies in favour of West Cheshire. Work

with businesses to inspire confidence in the market. Promote faster decision-making.

- **Addressing the skill mis-match:** working to ensure that our skill base is more closely aligned to job opportunities.
- **Accessing jobs and training:** ensuring that transport links respond to employment need.
- **Low carbon economy:** working to promote business opportunities which support local sustainability, energy efficiency and support for training and education in low carbon skills, such as energy efficient building and new technology fields. Also local procurement of goods and services.
- **Preparing for Recovery:** aligned with the above, especially around the skills base, promoting new employment and residential sites, attracting large employers to the area, restructuring the borough's economy.
- **Enhancing Town Centres:** making a better retail offer to ensure that residents and visitors are encouraged to shop in the borough
- **Buy Local:** could be combined with the better shopping, healthy eating, green issues around food miles etc.

The Board agreed to discuss and respond to this particular consultation at it's next scheduled meeting (12/01/2010) as a substantial agenda item, as partners felt they needed some time to think through the strategic opportunities and challenges presented, as the Thematic Partnership is likely to be charged to deliver key parts of the new Strategy. A considered view of the BEC Partnership can then be provided to the LSP later that month.

With regard to the LDF and the development of a Core Strategy document; partners asked for clarification that the new planning policy would retain some flexibility to respond to emerging issues (e.g. economic recession) once legally agreed and approved. Although the LDF will be fixed until 2026, it will not be prescriptive and new innovative ideas will be balanced with planned growth: the Government describes an LDF to be "facilitative" to help enable local and emerging needs. The new Core Strategy will need to reflect the Regional Spatial Strategy and the legacy of the three previous borough plans. The consultation is designed to tease out fresh perspectives and challenges to the proposals: it is possible all proposals could be selected or a mixture of suggestions, for example, economic growth can be aligned with housing sector growth in proposed new developments.

The LTP will account for proposed large capital projects, over £5 million, although there must a very strong evidence base to support need for major investment projects and they must align with the regional transport plan. Among the over-arching challenges transport issues of Tackling Climate Change, accessibility and Equality of Opportunity, Safety, Security & Health and Quality of Life; a number relate to Economic Growth:

- Views that congestion is a result of economic growth

- Need better use of rail network, including:
 - ✓ Improve access to city regions
 - ✓ Access to airports ('Halton Curve')
 - ✓ More Paid & Ride at stations
 - ✓ Maximise benefits of 'HS2'
 - ✓ Electrify the Chester – Crewe – Holyhead line
 - ✓ Better quality infrastructure and facilities at stations.
- Improve connectivity within West Cheshire
- Avoid out of town locations
- Use of company travel plans / better marketing and publicity for alternatives to the car

A draft LTP will be submitted to Government in the autumn 2010 and an indication of the budget to deliver the new Plan will be provided. Previously, Cheshire attracted approximately £8m to deliver the last plan, though a 10-20% reduction is anticipated for LTP3 implementation. The Board noted a couple of key issues for them, which included how free travel is provided to all eligible Sixth Form College students, but not all young people attending FE colleges, University or adult learners attending FE courses, especially from rural areas. Closer timetables between rail and bus services would improve connectivity and punctuality for workers, students and visitors alike. The new LTP will be an integrated transportation plan, however, currently over 75% of local bus services are provided by private operators which are very difficult to influence.

The business community have been invited to attend a special joint consultation event for the sector at Chester Zoo on 10th December, the invitation to be forwarded to the Board for further distribution. The consultation period runs from 9am on Wednesday 11th November 2009 to 5pm on Wednesday 13th January 2010: there will be further iterations of the LDF and LTP for partners and the public to inform and shape throughout 2010.

Actions:

- The SCS consultation document and the hyperlink to the consultation web-pages to be circulated to the BEC Board and virtual network by Robbie and the private sector joint consultation event invitation to be forwarded to the Board for further circulation.
3. The Board identified a number of arising matters from the minutes of the last meeting, which were:
- The visitor economy proxy measure was of no great value and the STEAM data related indicator will be retained as a non-designated LAA indicator.
 - A number of cultural performance measures are available and work is underway to identify which are the most useful and appropriate for West Cheshire: Charlie to report back on progress at the next meeting.

- The latest performance position for the social enterprise local indicator is now available for circulation by Gill Rogerson.
- The Future Jobs Fund (FJF) programme has started to appoint people into positions, 40 jobs are to be filled from January 2010 when progress is expected to accelerate. A number of technical issues with the programme are being addressed, including the impact on additional benefits of a 25 year old working for an extra hour per week and the criteria reducing from 39 to a 26 week point of eligibility and a review of the training and qualification entitlement of each recruit.

The Board also heard about the launch and initial work of the 'Routeways into work' pre-employment training programme and of the complexity of eligibility rules for local trainers, employers and job seekers. The Board agreed there is a gap in the knowledge everyone has in the tools and resources available to tackle unemployment and increase skills and qualifications. The Partnership should be able to provide that knowledge, as a menu of options for local stakeholders to pursue. There is a mid-Cheshire network of Human Resources managers who can receive the briefing report, but more would need to be done to share the information consistently across West Cheshire.

Actions:

- Jobcentre Plus to provide a progress report on FJF at each meeting of the Board, to enable the Chair and Vice Chair to report to the LSP and Thematic Leads meetings.
 - Iain to contact Lisa Conway (CWaC) and Helen Nellist (WCC) amongst other partners, to draw together the necessary information on current projects, programmes and funding streams (and eligibility criteria, age groups, targeted areas of deprivation etc) to help the Board and others understand what resources are at local disposal. The Board to receive a report at the next meeting.
 - Charlie to report progress on the culture dimension to the Partnership next time.
4. An update on current LAA Outcome performance was provided: currently NI 171 is on track, NI 163 and NI 164 are flagged as amber and we are awaiting latest claimant numbers for NI 153. Delivery plans for each of the outcomes can be made available electronically between Board meetings to keep partners apprised of developments. The Board also received outlines on the technical definitions of what the national performance indicators actually measure.
 5. The latest version of the developing Economic Recession Action Plan was shared with the Board. Some details are still to be populated in the spreadsheet and champions for each of the six themes have been identified along with a named officer for each individual action. Overall progress of the Action Plan will be reported directly to the Council's 'Credit

Crunch' Committee, the BEC Board will receive regular implementation and progress reports too.

Action:

- Iain to liaise with Ricardo and Andrew about how best to share information concerning business support and advice for the services contained in the Action Plan (e.g. guidance on business rates) to help facilitate better understanding of what services are available.

6. Second Homes Income funding: no new or additional funding ideas were tabled at the meeting.

Action:

- Sara and Robbie to prepare paperwork for consideration at the Thematic Leads meeting scheduled for Monday 14th December.

7. A background briefing paper was shared with the Board, the report describes the need to research and produce a Local Economic Assessment (LEA) and what will be undertaken to do so. The LEA is a statutory responsibility for all local authorities and guidance about what is entailed is covered in recent guidance (available from Iain). However, the LEA is designed to be undertaken in partnership and a working group to deliver the analysis will be set up. An initial Assessment is due for completion by early September 2010, at a cost between £60 – 100k. The Assessment will have many uses from provided advanced local intelligence and analysis, evidence of needs to support funding applications and plugging gaps in local knowledge.

The sub-regional Leaders Forum will be looking at the Assessment to feed into regional policy and strategies and will help to ensure LEAs are implemented consistently across the region so we are able to compare local information across the region. Once more detail is available on the details of how the West Cheshire LEA will be carried out, the Board will offer advice on which areas need, geographic and sectoral, to be targeted and value added.

8. The Board received a paper on the latest position concerning the roles, responsibilities and processes for the West Cheshire partnership structure and how communications and relationship are functioning across the different levels. The Board suggested it needs more intelligence about local issues (e.g. developing more enterprise in Ellesmere Port) before it can add value to the work of, or commission the Area Partnership Boards. The Board and Partnership need to fully understand what are the local pictures for businesses, enterprise and culture across the Borough; so it can start to add value as a strategic partnership.

Action:

- The Board to develop it's vision and objectives at a future meeting, but take the discussion on local enterprise at it's next meeting in January.
9. Following the discussion at the last meeting and communications received since then, the Board discussed recent developments, which included:
- The need for a new Vice Chair on the BEC Board;
 - The recruitment timescales for the independent Chairs/Chief Executives of the three remaining regeneration boards not yet represented on the Board;
 - Communications from Chester Business Club on proportionate representation of the sectors on the Board;
 - An offer from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to join the BEC Board;
 - Mike S. Jones (MBNA) has been appointed as interim Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce.

Andrew proposed a model to engage and involve the business sector on the BEC Board, without increasing demands upon the sector's resources. The offer was to establish a sub-group of the Board, composed of private sector representatives composed from the range of available networks. This group would meet after Board meetings to consider actions and to inform and shape the business of future Board meetings. This 'business forum', would identify a single representative to attend Board meetings and liaise back to the forum with simple, clear information and guidance on partnership activities and establish a sustainable two-way dialogue. The Board also agreed to co-opt in representatives from any organisation to visit future meetings as and when the agenda needed additional expertise.

Actions:

- Sara to invite Mike S. Jones to join the BEC Board and to write to John Salt.
- Andrew and Charlie to discuss the establishment of a business forum to engage with the Board and report progress at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting: **Tuesday 12th January, 2.00pm at 'Visit Chester and Cheshire', Station Road, Chester.**