

Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership Management Board

Notes of meeting held on Thursday 16 October 2008

In Attendance: Rikki Hunt, Cipol Energy Ltd (Chairman)
Joanne Stagg, Swindon Chamber of Commerce
David Evans, Swindon Borough Council (minutes)
Gavin Calthrop, Swindon Borough Council
Bill Cotton, Swindon Borough Council
Steve Richards, South West RDA
Dr Mike Pringle, Swindon Cultural Partnership
Mark Beard, Beard Construction
John Davies, Thring Townsend
Cllr Phil Young, Swindon Borough Council

Peter Snowman, Swindon Borough Council
Phil Merrick, Swindon Borough Council
Andy Read, Wiltshire & Swindon Learning & Skills Council

Apologies: Robin Bailey, Nationwide
Alan Fletcher

1 Notes of last meeting and Matters Arising

- 1.1 GC questioned the accuracy of the minutes, particularly in relation to the decision taken at the previous meeting to shelve the Ambassador Scheme until the New Year.

RH said he had driven the change from that agreed at the last meeting (which he was not present at) on the basis that he felt we needed more urgency in getting the scheme live in time to launch at the conference. MB (who was also absent from the last meeting) was also of the view that the scheme should not be shelved, and that as per plan, it should be launched at the Conference.

- 1.2 RH updated the Board on his discussions with GWE Business West in the light of the company's offer of resources to the SSEP. He emphasised that it is important that the partnership retains its independence of private interests, and that he will be meeting with Daphne Milner on Friday 17th to progress the relationship.

Action: RH to report back to next meeting on his meeting with GWE

2 Board Membership

DE explained that the Board is still looking for a suitable candidate to join the Board with the portfolio of the Investment and Enterprise Group. RH was of the view that it is important that the Board gets the right person, rather than rush into

the wrong solution. With that in mind he intends to chair the Group in the short term and until a suitable candidate can be recruited.

3 Conference Update

DE updated the Board on arrangements for the conference. To date 95 people have signed up to attend, out of a target of 150. Members each gave an indication of their intention to attend.

RH argued that the Conference should be an opportunity to address the current economic downturn, and to try to identify measures to offset the impact locally. It was agreed that businesses would see direct relevance in a change to the agenda to that effect.

Actions:

- **DE to circulate list of delegates to date.**
- **All to consider additional business people to encourage along to the conference**
- **DE to amend the conference format, and communicate the changes to delegates and in promotional material**
- **RH to discuss with SBC Leader and Chief Executive what SBC can announce at the conference that will assist local businesses, with the aim of encouraging businesses to make similar commitments.**

4 Focus on the Employment & Skills Group

4.1 Introduction

JD explained that the E&S Group is difficult to chair. Its focus has to date been on attracting funding to enable the statutory agencies to deliver their programmes, and it has been difficult to recruit businesses. He proposed that the structure be amended to separate businesses from the providers, building closer links with an existing employer's HR forum in Swindon.

It was recognised that the SSEP has a valuable role to play in voicing the interests of businesses in Swindon, to inform the provision of skills training, and to inform UWE's bid to HEFCE

Actions:

- **PS to attend Employers' HR Forum and report back to the E&S group on business priorities.**
- **PS to ensure that SBC 13-19 Service is represented on the provider group.**

4.2 Raising the level of skills in Swindon

AR reported that provision of NVQ Level IIs (one of the two key indicator in LAAI) is ahead of target and that local provider contracts are progressing very well.

In contrast achieving increased delivery of NVQ Level IIIs (one of the two key indicators in LAA II) is progressing poorly, so the W&S team has requested assistance from the regional LSC to design a delivery plan. AR explained that funding is not the issue; rather, engagement of businesses and getting an

understanding of businesses' needs is the difficulty.

MB interjected that the LSC must respond to the needs of employers, rather than try to push employers towards delivery of qualifications for the sake of the LSC's targets.

It was recognised that the Council needs to shape its education policy in anticipation of the hand over to the Council of 14 to 19 funding next year.

SR explained that the LSC has capital funding available for local provision. That funding is likely to disappear in 2010 with the demise of the LSCs.

PS expressed his concern that the E&S group has no plan in place to deliver 4,500 additional NVQ Level IIIs, and it was agreed that the group needs to work with the LSC to come up with that Delivery Plan as a priority.

Actions:

- **BC to organise a meeting between LSC, SBC and the E&S group to shape the Borough Council's policy on delivery of skills for business from 2009.**
- **PS to continue to support the LSC to produce the Delivery Plan for the NVQ III target.**

4.3 Reducing Benefits Claimants in Swindon

PS spoke briefly to the report attached to the agenda produced by Job Centre Plus, explaining that it is acknowledged that it is impossible to measure the LAA I target relating to reducing worklessness. The Department for Communities and Local Government, through the Government Office South West, is currently considering how to resolve the difficulty.

Regarding the LAA II target to reduce the number of claimants in the worst performing areas, no data is available yet on the DCLG website to enable measurement. In the current economic difficulties, however, Benefit Claimant levels are rising rapidly in Swindon, which is completely contrary to the LAA target. Job Centre Plus therefore intends to 'refresh' the target with GOSW at the appropriate opportunity.

4.4 Delivering a Swindon Skills Academy

PS outlined the proposal by Swindon College to provide a hands-on training facility for employers. It aims to construct a new building with replica machinery to the business. The facility would be independently run.

SR felt this is an exciting opportunity, but that it should be part of the University proposal.

PY expressed concerns that the SSEP, through the Council, would not have the capacity to take on the progressing of the project.

4.5 University Update

BC explained that the Council continues to liaise with UWE over its planned

campus development in Swindon. The university is liaising with HEFCE.

UWE is faced with a choice of sites, in the town centre and at Commonhead, although the latter will be subject to a Planning Inquiry in the New Year. The Council is also discussing opportunities to start delivery prior to the new building.

PY outlined the Council's position on Commonhead, ie without a University there will be no development. He would prefer to see UWE in the town centre, but it is important to demonstrate that the business community is 100% behind the proposal.

RH argued that even though the university campus may end up at Commonhead, it is important that it keeps a town centre presence.

5 **Protocol for dealing with large redundancy situations**

Deferred to the next meeting.

6 **Date & Venue of next Meeting**

0730 on Thursday 20th November, Civic Offices.

Focus on Regeneration