

Devon Economic Partnership Executive

Tuesday 22nd Sept 2009, 8.30 am via Audio Conference

Present:

Tim Jones	DCBC/Enterprise Plymouth
Steve Pitcher	North Devon Council
Andrew Lightfoot	DEP Executive Officer
Leanne Crawford	DRN
Tony Skeel	LSC
David Incoll	Devon CEX Group
Lucy Gough	DEP/DRN

Apologies

Richard Ball	Exeter City Council
Andrew Southall	SWRDA
Graeme Bell	DCC

1) Review of Partnership

Andrew gave the group an update on the current situation:

- DCC is reviewing its priorities and a new Strategic Plan will be available in the next couple of weeks.
- The RDA has initiated a review of all the Strategic Economic Partnerships in the region, with a report due to go to the RDA Board in January.
- Cllr. Will Mumford, the Economy Cabinet Member, is currently reflecting on his priorities.
- There seems to be an increased focus on what the County Council is doing itself and less support/resources for partnerships.
- Lucy is leaving at the end of September. Have tried to get another graduate on a placement through Exeter University, but this has been prevented by the County Council.
- Other options need to be looked at, such as Exeter University or another organisation employing and hosting a graduate on behalf of the Partnership.

General discussion around the table followed:

- In the current economic climate, it is felt that there has never been a greater need for DEP. Economic development companies in North Devon and Plymouth are taking shape, and business engagement is increasingly important. Also, with the new Local Economic Assessment duty and continued delivery within the LAA, the Partnership is going to be needed more than ever
- There is a need to ensure that work is not being duplicated by different organisations though.
- It is still early days for the new County Council administration, and there is still uncertainty around the upcoming general election and possible unitary status. However, the County cannot develop its role separately; it cannot be a strong player and abdicate its leadership role.
- DRN is also being heavily scrutinised at the moment, but if it ceases to exist then there will need to be something else to take its place.
- Feeling that there is a lack of appreciation for the softer outcomes of partnership working. Cllr. Mumford has a successful business background and likes tangible outcomes; things are going to need to be framed in this way.
- Need to re-evaluate Partnership anyway, as we move into a new economic cycle. We need to make sure we fit, and map what work is valuable and that needs to be retained.
- Within the public sector, nothing is sacrosanct – all areas will come under scrutiny from central government and there will be cuts across all areas including health and education where security has been taken a bit for granted.
- Therefore, we need to be working closely together to ensure that delivery is maintained at its optimum level.

- Increasing links with Torbay and Plymouth require reflection on whether a more formal partnership covering the wider geography is appropriate.
- There is a danger that the Partnership will be knocked around, but we need to hang on and keep doing what we do well.
- Now is the time for planning and preparation, so that once recovery happens we are ready. Need to look at a refresh of the Devon Economic Strategy – might need some adjustment. Could do sensitivity analysis – how would we respond to change? Don't want to waste time in the build up to the general election.
- However, there are still opportunities out there – but we need to be ready institutionally for cultural adjustments required.

Andrew and Tim were attending a regional meeting on the future of Partnerships with the RDA the day after this meeting.

Action: Andrew and Tim to feed back to the group after this meeting.

2) Update on Operational Plan

- Infrastructure meeting – 24th Sept, chaired by Karime Hassan, to discuss Employment Space Strategy, ICT and transportation schemes.
- Heard last week that Future Jobs Fund bid was successful.
- Disadvantaged communities – North Devon + progressing well, and looking at setting up a Strategic Investment Framework for 4 coastal towns. This has been received positively by the Districts and Town Councils.
- Skills – PS4D has obtained £1.66m LPSA reward money and are currently looking at how this will be spent. Lots of good ideas have been submitted.
- Business support – looking at more practical business finance.
- Team Devon - visit of Lord Coe to Bicton College/Arena on 22nd Sept to hear about/see work being done in preparation for 2012 Games.
- Low carbon action plan devised – this ties numerous themes together.
- New website to be launched in October – part of ongoing communications plan.
- LAA meeting being held on 29th September.

3) Arrangements for managing work over the next 6 months

- Lucy leaves at the end of September and so we need someone to take over her role.
- Had advertised for a graduate through Exeter University's Graduate Business Placement scheme, and received applications from a number of very good quality candidates.
- However, DCC decided that they did not want to take anyone on, to be based at County Hall. Therefore, we must look at other options.
- One option is that a graduate be employed by and based at Exeter University – this could help to strengthen our links with them.
- Andrew is to have a discussion with Leanne Dingle, Project Director of Relays (the regional educational legacy project for 2012) as they might have capacity to host a graduate on our behalf.
- David and Steve would both be happy to discuss other possible options with Andrew also – they might be able to provide some support.
- In the interim, Nicole Stacey, Regeneration Project Assistant at DCC will be covering the admin of the DEP. This however, is not a long term solution.

Apologies to all that this conversation was abruptly cut off at the end. Andrew and Tim agreed that given the current situation a face to face meeting would be useful to continue this discussion, and come up with options to be presented to the full Partnership meeting on 8th October.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 1st October, 8:30am, County Hall, Exeter