



**Devon Economic Partnership**  
**Wednesday 17 February, 10am-12:30pm**  
**Tiverton Pannier Market**

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Name:	Organisation:
Tim Jones (Chair)	Devon and Cornwall Business Council
Andrew Lightfoot	Devon County Council / Devon Economic Partnership
Andrew Southall	South West Regional Development Agency
Chris Knee	St Loyes Foundation
Daniel Bailyes	Devon Economic Partnership
David Incoll	Devon District Councils
Ian Morris	Government Office South West
Jane Rickhards	PLUSS
Janet Sinclair	Job Centre Plus
Jeremy Filmer-Bennett	Devon and Cornwall Business Council
Karime Hassan	East Devon District Council
Leanne Crawford	Devon Rural Network
Liz Oram	Business Link
Paul Sadler	Environment Agency
Rob Hetherington	Devon County Council
Steve Pitcher	North Devon +
Terry Murch	MIDAS
Tony Skeel	Learning and Skills Council

**Apologies:**

Name:	Organisation:
David Parlby	Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
Derek Philips	Exeter Chamber of Commerce and EHOD Tourism Partnership
Ellen Vernon	North Devon Council
Ian Gent	Business Link
Ian McGregor	EDF Energy
Paul Gompertz	Devon Wildlife Trust
Peter Harding	Community Council of Devon
Richard Ball	Exeter City Council
Sally Kittle	Job Centre Plus
Venessa Saunders	Torrridge District Council

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Tim opened the meeting by introducing the Tiverton Pannier Market building in which we were meeting. It was one of the projects to be built using European Objective Two funding. Jeremy commented that the building has been a success, with a youth drop-in centre on site, providing also a hub for third sector activities.

Tim also reflected upon the problems faced by Tiverton and other market towns in Devon. However, a number of initiatives are soon to kick in, and the Council is due to take a more strategic view in response to the recession. Levels of deprivation are also creeping into towns such as Exmouth, demonstrating the need for intervention rather than simply leaving the market to its own.

Introductions were also made around the table.

## **2. Devon Worklessness Forum (Janet Sinclair)**

Janet began by briefing the meeting on the latest Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) figures released that day (see attached). Please select the link below to access her report written for this meeting.

<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/assets/PDFs/DEP/Janet%20Sinclair%20Report%20for%20D EP.doc>

The figures show an increase of nearly 10% in the number of JSA claimants, up to 10,704. There continues to be a disproportionately high number of young people included in the figures. The long term unemployment figures have also increased. The changes seem to suggest that Devon is catching up with the national picture following a late seasonal boost in the hospitality sector.

It was also commented upon that with the expected loss of public sector jobs, and with university and college leavers due to appear in the market by June and July, there remain serious concerns.

Despite the disproportionately high percentage of young people on the register, the government response has been equally proportionate to the problem. However, Jeremy raised a concern that confusion among employers, concerning the sheer number of schemes available, is common. There are roughly 17 different programmes, each with a separate set of criteria.

Jeremy also raised concerns regarding the retail sector. Despite good Christmas trading figures, the sector is now laying off staff – even in Exeter. Tim raised similar concerns within hospitality. Many hotels are currently offering up to 70-75% discounts. More worryingly, it appears that a significant proportion of businesses, possibly up to 25% of SMEs, are surviving off credit cards due to the lack of affordable lending by banks.

These concerns over the retail sector were picked up by some members of the group. The sector provides an important blanket for employment rates, even if low skilled. For this reason Steve mentioned that the board of North Devon + identified retail as a priority sector. With balance needing to be restored in the sector, Jeremy suggested that perhaps this group ought to be informed of developments etc by someone in a higher level in the industry.

**Action: Consider Jeremy's suggestion to invite someone in a higher level in the retail industry to a future meeting to provide further insights.**

Regarding the market town issues being discussed, Rob reported work currently underway to understand them. Key indicators include, for instance, footfall, units in use overlaid with data on the nature of the shops in operation. Liz also raised to collective attention a Market Town Forum AGM taking place in Tiverton next weekend. **Details of the event to be circulated by Liz.**

During the discussion on the performance of the Devon economy Karime shared his concern that spatial planners were not taking into sufficient account the fragility of the economy as made clear by Janet's brief. Confidence is absolutely crucial to the economy, but the complexity of the current situation needs to be understood. Karime argued that there needs to be a consistent message communicated across Devon in order to inform decision makers. Tim

agreed, and a balance between a 'reality check' for some needs to be achieved without communicating a generally negative message.

**Action: A briefing on the state of the economy needs to be written providing this 'reality check' without inadvertently communicating a gloomy message.**

Moreover, Tim argued the need to be smarter in linking together planning with other interested groups. This is needed in order to avoid a Langage situation in the future, where a lack of communication between the planning authorities and skills providers led to 600 overseas workers being brought in – which means money leaves rather than remains in the Devon economy.

However, there are problems knowing what we can and can't do legally on this issue. Is there any legal advice or statement that can help? If we want to invest in local markets (regarding procurement) then it is an urgent priority that we understand what we can and can't do by producing a document with a consistent message. It was mentioned that political leadership would be needed on this, but it was also argued in reply that this is politically acceptable, but clarity is needed. Andrew Lightfoot mentioned the intention for a Job Centre Plus secondee to work with Devon Procurement Services to advise on contractors' recruitment practices.

**Action (Andrew Southall and Liz): To look into this issue on a collaborative basis. A document providing such clarity would be helpful if produced in the next three months. Tim and Terry will also be happy to provide assistance.**

St. Loyes Foundation (Chris Knee)

Chris is the Chief Executive of St. Loyes. Please find by clicking on the link below a document sent by Chris, as a result of this meeting, explaining the work that they do, and how it relates to work of partners.

<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/assets/PDFs/DEP/St%20Loyes.doc>

Out of the discussion that followed it was also agreed that Chris would produce a map of the sector to help those who may be confused by the number and variety of organisations involved in this work.

**Action (Chris): To produce this map and send to Daniel who will place it on the Partnership's website.**

### **3. Recovery from recession: report to regional minister (Ian Morris)**

#### **3.1 Recovery from recession**

(<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/assets/PDFs/DEP/091123%20LA%20Recession%20Assessment%20Template%20Devon.doc>)

Ian reported that the template (which can be viewed by selecting the link above) aims to assist regional partners in understanding the impact of the recession and also on planning for recovery. It will be discussed at the next meeting of the Regional Economic Task Group (RETG) and information from that will feed into the Regional Economic Council. Intelligence from that should help with the formation of policy.

Ian also thanked Andrew Lightfoot for the work that he had put into it.

### **4. Future of the partnership (Tim Jones)**

A number of meetings have already taken place on this issue. The message from Cllr Will Mumford, the County Council Cabinet Member for Economy, is that he wants absolute simplicity and clarity on the work of the partnership and slimmer delivery e.g. what does making Devon the 'greenest county' actually mean?

Funding from Devon County Council (DCC) will be made available should it become smarter in working with others e.g. the Devon Rural Network (DRN).

David identified a challenge with delivery within the DEP which needs to be worked upon. Andrew Lightfoot also mentioned that between now and 31 March a plan needs to be agreed to support the partnership.

## **5. Better regulation for business (Ian Morris)**

Issues of better regulation have been top of the business agenda for many years. This workshop aims to bring together central, regional and local regulators together with business in order to find a way forward. Details can be found on the DEP's website: (<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/news>)

Ian also mentioned that issues around procurement, discussed earlier, could also be raised.

Jeremy thanked Ian for the work that he has been doing on this agenda, and reported that Devon and Cornwall Business Council were delighted with it.

Andrew Lightfoot also expressed his hope that action points will be taken from the workshop that will lead to change which the Partnership could initiate e.g. to identify, for instance, two things that can change as a result.

Finally, Tim also thanked Ian for the work done in bringing the Cabinet to Exeter. A report on the Cabinet's visit will be coming out soon.

## **6. Reports from working groups**

- a. Infrastructure: Homes and Community Agency (HCA) Single Conversation (Karime Hassan)

The Devon Employment Space Strategy (DESS) was commissioned at a time when funding might have helped to deliver identified priorities. However, we are now in a different era. The product is still useful, but it needs to go somewhere. The obvious place for this is the Single Conversation, and priorities identified will then be incorporated into the Local Investment Plan with the HCA.

District partners are currently looking at their priorities and developing delivery plans which include barriers to development. There will probably be a focus on 0-5 year delivery plans.

- b. Productive Skills for Devon (PS4D): Regional Skills Priorities and Strategy (Tony Skeel)

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will cease to exist on 31 March. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) will be responsible for post 18 learning, while Local Authorities (LA) will be responsible for 16-18s, with support from the new Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). Regional planning will be moved to the Regional Development Agency (RDA), with the SFA less concerned with planning than funding.

The plan is that each region would produce a regional skills strategy with a 20 year vision, accompanied by 3-5 year delivery plans. Each year partners will produce a set of priorities with specifics on funding from the SFA.

The Regional Priority Statement draft is available on the link below:

<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/assets/PDFs/Productive%20Skills%20for%20Devon/Regional%20Priorities%20Statement.doc>

The message for this group is to be clear about your priorities, linked with the Local Economic Assessment (LEA) and Local Employment and Skills Boards (LESBs)

Andrew Lightfoot also reported to the group the latest developments regarding the PS4D capital reward grant. The following schemes have been accepted:

- Bicton College for the EARTH project (Environmental and Renewable Technology Hub) - £400k
- Devon and Cornwall Training Provider Network for a project to centralise the workings of the virtual learning environments of the private training providers across Devon - £9,985
- Petroc for a Creative Arts Centre at the Brannams site in Barnstaple - £200k
- Torridge Training Services (TTS) for a Support Centre in Bideford - £91,200

## **7. Notes of meeting held on 10 December 2009**

The previous minutes were approved by those present.

### **8. News round-up**

#### 8.1 Steve Pitcher

- The Atlantic Array has significant potential;
- The visit to Brittany as part of the innovation programme was a success and a challenge to us. The French have obviously invested heavily in their infrastructure e.g. with high speed rail links and broadband. The return visit is in April. The idea is to learn from the experience of the other.

#### 8.2 Paul Sadler

- Paul plugged to the group the regeneration / flood risk seminar.

#### 8.3 Ian Morris

- On a national level, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) are looking at innovation infrastructure, and have been conducting studies in Germany as part of it;
- The Local Area Assessment (LAA) is at the refresh stage, and is due for submission on 31 March. The LAA is the main toolkit for much if what has been discussed here.

#### 8.4 Chris Knee

- There will be a royal visit on 11 March. Chris is hoping that a visit to St. Loyes will be on the itinerary.

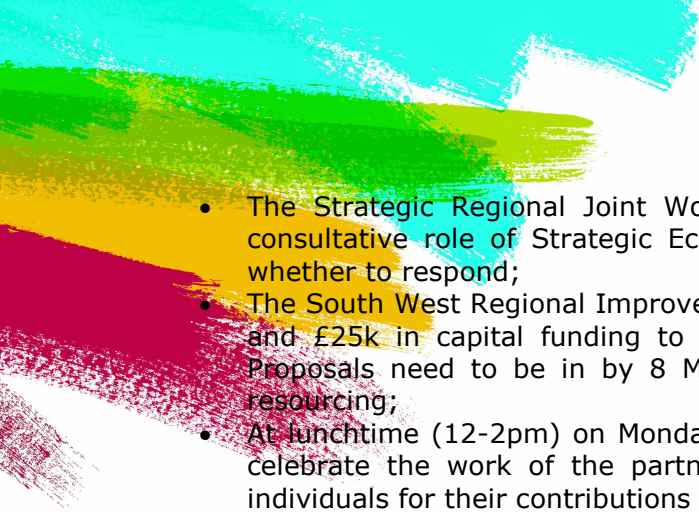
#### 8.5 Jane Rickhards

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) delayed by 3 weeks announcement of the contract award for £3.1m of work.

#### 8.6 Terry Murch

- Reflected that a true public / private sector relationship is vital e.g. in planning.

#### 8.7 Andrew Lightfoot

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- The Strategic Regional Joint Working document is now available and refers to the consultative role of Strategic Economic Partnerships (SEPs). Worth a look to decide whether to respond;
  - The South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Group is offering £30k in revenue and £25k in capital funding to Devon, Plymouth and Torbay to help joint working. Proposals need to be in by 8 March. Worth thinking about themes that could need resourcing;
  - At lunchtime (12-2pm) on Monday 22 March a reception will be held at Darts Farm to celebrate the work of the partnership over the last few years and to thank a few individuals for their contributions who will be moving onto new things.

### **Next meeting and other dates**

Next meeting will be on 21 April, 10:00-12:30 at Follaton House, Totnes.

The following dates have also been penned in, each 10:00-12:30:

22 June, 9 September, 11 November.