



## Devon Economic Partnership

Held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2008, 2pm  
Okehampton Business Centre

### Present:

Tim Jones	DCBC/Enterprise Plymouth	Cllr Bill Hitchins	South Hams
Andrew Lightfoot	DEP Executive Officer	Janet Sinclair	Jobcentre Plus
Jen Brogan	Devon Rural Network	Ian Morris	GOSW
Andrew Southall	SWRDA	Graeme Bell	DCC
Ellen Vernon	North Devon Council	Cathy Doidge	Environment Agency
Tony Skeel	LSC	Jeremy Filmer-Bennet	DCBC
David Incoll	CEX Group	Peter Harding	CCD
Leanne Crawford	DEP Administrator	Cllr H Temperley	DCC
Chris Redding	Business Link	Alan Denby	Torbay Council
Andrew Ashley	Enterprise Network	Nicola Poultney	Destination Devon
Vanessa Saunders	Torrige District Council	Rob Hetherington	DCC

### Apologies

Karen Chapman	Jobcentre Plus	Steve Schlemmer	University of Plymouth
Peter Cloke	GOSW	Malcolm Sherry	East Devon Chambers
Gordon Oliver	South Devon Chamber	David Parlby	Plymouth CoC
Derek Phillips	Exeter CoC	Terry Murch	Midas Group
Edward Chorlton	DCC	Ian McGregor	Exeter CoC
Jane Rickhards	PLUSS	Cllr Chris Jenkins	West Devon
Richard Ball	Exeter City Council	Pete Tansey	BT/Devon Renaissance

### 1.0 Welcome and Introductions

Introductions were given round the table. The Chair congratulated David Incoll and West Devon Borough Council on the venue.

### 2.0 Response to the recession:

*First Steps: action for recovery – South West RDA*

Andrew Southall had circulated the First Steps document previously, and reiterated that there was an open access email to assist in intelligence gathering [business@southwestrda.org.uk](mailto:business@southwestrda.org.uk).

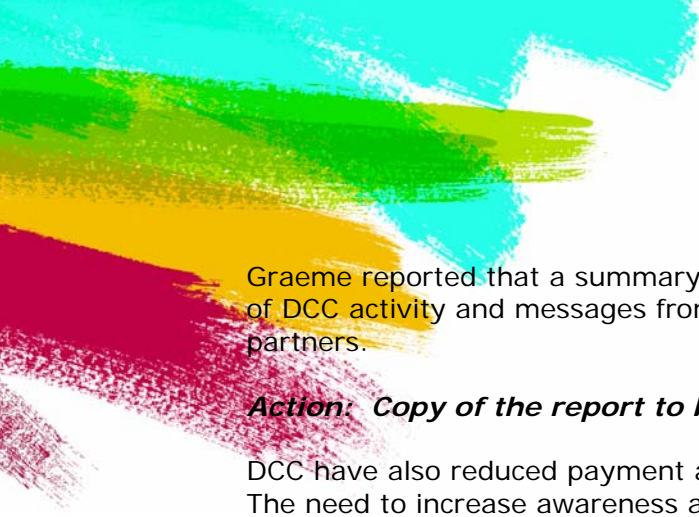
Andrew reported that a response group, known as an 'Area Action Force' would be developed, with the first meeting to be organised in the new year. He also reported on a 'credit crunch' conference held in Torquay, which was well organised and had a specific workshop agenda. This event will be rolled out to other Torbay towns and other communities outside of Torbay. Lessons to be learned from this event are ensuring exhibition space is available and ensuring there is a business voice in the audience, although the Torquay event was also aimed at community.

It was agreed that the outcome of the proposed DCC needed to be clarified to ensure the required audience was targeted.

A number of issues were raised at the Conference, including small firm loan guarantees; research and development; pragmatism over S106 payments etc.

*Public Sector Actions – Humphrey Temperley/Graeme Bell*

Humphrey reported that the County Council had benefited from several funds, including LABGI, LPSA, and airport funds, and had taken opportunity to continue investment in assets, with a consideration for a greater interventionist approach to longer term developments in terms of S106 agreements and the need for substantial investment upfront.



Graeme reported that a summary report had been produced for the Executive in terms of DCC activity and messages from Districts, and was a resource that could be used by partners.

**Action: Copy of the report to be circulated with minutes**

DCC have also reduced payment agreements from 30 days to 20 days for suppliers. The need to increase awareness about credit unions, benefit entitlement, and income support was highlighted, although agreed that the current low take up rate in Devon was due to a cultural perception of benefits. The impact of recession had also been noted in continuation of training and availability of apprenticeships.

It was suggested that the DCC event should look at the broader agenda of the people of Devon, and not just around businesses in training, repossessions etc.

It was stated that in terms of the Area Action Force and engagement, there needs to be a pan county event that can then signpost to relevant local authorities and agencies that can offer advice around benefits etc, and should also include Plymouth and Torbay.

David Incoll reported that the CEX group had been looking at housing and imaginative ways of taking on developments unfinished by developers, including support for landlords and advice on benefit systems to increase private rentals; increase in percentage of social housing onsite, balanced with existing buyers; business rates and take up; local procurement; voluntary sector support; investment in tourism; S106; and money lost through decreased interest rates.

#### *Private Sector Experience – Jeremy Filmer-Bennett*

Jeremy reported on a number of sectors including:

- DIY retail – planned redundancies in place
- White good and electricals – losses already seen
- Legal – loss of approximately 5-10% of full-time lawyers, although this is also due to a change in the sector's organisation; there has also been an increase the number of practices opting to reduce hours rather than experience redundancies
- Similar experience for accountancy firms, although the small local businesses have been doing better
- Retail – SMEs are likely to cut back to family management
- Motor – High end garages are closing and Honda have stopped manufacturing cars globally. This has impacted the small businesses in Devon whose main contracts are to supply these manufacturers with parts
- Recruitment – there has been a big call for interim senior management

Other issues raised included:

- There had been a growth in the number of people willing to make private investments in business – buyers market
- Banks have changed rules ***Please feed back any example to Jeremy***
- Bigger companies have plans in place for redundancies if required, most are relying on natural wastage
- Supply chains – too many small businesses are relying on sole contracts
- Olympic purchase portal – website that presents and invites suppliers to bid for contracts to supply Olympic venues  
<https://www.competefor.com/london2012business/login.jsp>
- Lots of low level redundancies are starting to add up, and these are being monitored. Jobcentre Plus had changed its policy to address redundancies over 20, with a Rapid Response team
- Opportunities around match funding should be considered

- Benefit take up should be encouraged when applicable as grants can be based on level of benefit claims in the county; it was agreed that benefit form turn around could be difficult to change
- Recapitalisation of high street banks is holding back recovery, and land values have become negative due to S106 – needs to be greater understanding of cashflow
- Skill retention has been managed more strategically i.e. working hours reduced rather than redundancies
- 1994 recession recovery should be examined to determine which sectors recovered quickly or slowly
- engagement with accountants required to ensure they are aware of where to signpost clients for help – public funded agencies are often the last place where people go for advice
- The LSC had looked at the fitness for purpose of many of the policies devised under differing economic circumstances; and encouragement of people to continue training if no longer in work
- Regional Ministers had pulled together a group to produce a Regional Economic Recovery Plan, a largely public sector response around agencies local impact, with official sign off end January 2009
- Information collection needed streamlining, and the things that are happening should be catalogued i.e. extra £10 million for business loans; BSSP network; Jobcentre + information and practical support e.g. worklessness forum; etc
- DCC and Business Link are willing to run further procurement workshops
- Support and actions from agencies and organisations needs to be pitched right, specifically beyond redundancies and closures. The debated needed to be broadened and bankers and accountants invited to sit round the DEP table  
**Action: meeting to be organised**
- The Enterprise Network has been approached by a major high street bank to offer packages for start ups and micro businesses
- Info is being fed back to Government through GOSW and RDA
- Larger private companies are extending payment agreements to up to 90 days, which is having an impact on smaller suppliers

### 3.0 Devon Economic Strategy:2009 Delivery Plan

A brief of the key actions under each priority was circulated, and the six priorities within the 2008 Delivery Plan would remain the focus.

#### **Action: input from partners required**

It was stated that the Devon Employment Space Strategy will also require an Action Plan on completion.

If partners were happy with the main proposals Andrew Lightfoot would start to flesh out the summary with the priority leads and input from Districts. It was suggested that the Plan should reflect economic assessments, and stated that the District pages of the LAA also needed to be refreshed, to be tied in with the Delivery Plan work.

### 4.0 Economic Research and analysis priorities – Rob Hetherington

Rob introduced his role and explained that the priority of the new Economic Research team will be to provide a bottom up response in analytical detail. The team would set priorities for research to help target support and intervention by providing a firm evidence base.

The team would be looking for steer on where research should be taken, to provide stronger evidence for central Government.

Vanessa stated that Torridge had proposed to start producing bi-annual 'State of Torridge' reports to Members.

Nicola reported that Devon DMO would be using the STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) model to provide tourism statistics.

Some difficulty in business specific ground level data accuracy had been reported.

## 5.0 Government's response to the Sub National Review

The meeting agreed that this needed to be discussed in greater detail at a later date.

The Government had responded and clarified the role of the single regional strategy. The Regional Assembly was to be replaced, with provision made for Economic Improvement/Investment Boards to build on the Strategic Investment Framework approach.

**Action: SNR Q&A to be circulated**

## 6.0 Opportunities to involve young people in DEP

Tim and Cathy reported back on the youth involvement in the Devon Futures debate, and suggested that engagement of this group needed to be retained.

It was suggested that a positive spark was needed to overcome the current bombardment with negative messages.

It was suggested that the DEP looks at the young entrepreneurs "don't judge us til you know us" programme within DCC, and also consider the potential input from voluntary organisations. It was stated that a successful Youth Chamber had been set up in Partnership with Plymouth University and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce.

**Action: Tim Jones and Andrew Lightfoot to liaise**

## 7.0 Meeting reports

All minutes are available on [www.devoneconomy.co.uk](http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk) under 'meetings'.

## 8.0 Minutes of meeting 6<sup>th</sup> October

Any issues please raise to Leanne – [leanne.crawford@devon.gov.uk](mailto:leanne.crawford@devon.gov.uk)

## 9.0 News updates

- DRN – RDPE needs promotion, with a workshop on 11<sup>th</sup> December, the report will be circulated
- DRN – Food and Farming Board, awaiting response from invitees
- DRN – Jen is leaving the Coordinator post, Phil Wagstaff and David Incoll will be representing DRN in the interim.
- CCD – the migrant worker welcome pack is being refreshed and reprinted and is looking for business sponsorship
- CCD – the Devon Strategic Housing Group is meeting with Colin Molton of the new Homes and Communities Agency
- RDPE – a plea from businesses to produce an 'idiot's guide' for applications. Most do not want to spend time looking at websites.
- Business rate consultation meeting – more could be held
- **Action: Janet to send Leanne Jobcentre Plus documents for circulation**
- Tourism – Nicola willing to make presentations to any group of potential funders
- Torbay Mayoral Vision – there are 19 priority sites looking at cultural as well as physical change
- Enterprise Plymouth – City Council is to undertake a new look at procurement of



goods and services

- Publication of first annual Innovation report – includes a chapter on regional innovation [http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/annual\\_innovation\\_report.html](http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/annual_innovation_report.html)
- The £100K that the RDA had agreed for the DEP has been put under review, with a reduction by £25K and conclusion of the contract in September 2009, with rediscussion of contract terms to start next year. The DEP budget would have to be reviewed in light of this.

#### **10.0 Dates of meeting**

Dates have been circulated, see attached.

The venues had to be confirmed, the next meeting will be held on **19<sup>th</sup> February**