

**County Durham Economic Partnership
Business and Enterprise Working Group**

**25 July 2007, 9.30am
Mile House, Chester le Street**

MINUTES

1. Attendees

Sue Parkinson SP (Chair)	Business Support Network
Tarryn Lloyd Payne TLP	Secretariat, CDEP
Zoë Thirlaway ZT	Secretariat, CDEP
John Parnell JP	Wear Valley District Council
Peter McDowell PMcD	Derwentside District Council
Ginny Williams GW	Children and Young People's Services, DCC
Rachel Spence RS	North East Chamber of Commerce
Joanna Tait JT	Bishop Auckland College
Nick James NJ	Learning and Skills Council
Julie Richards JR	Enterprise Advocate
Julie Underwood JU	County Durham Enterprise Agency
David McKnight DMcK	County Durham Tourism Partnership
Dorothy Kelly DK	One NorthEast
David Carr DC	Business Link North East

Apologies

Rachel Orange

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes / Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as an accurate account of the meeting.

Page 1 – **Matters arising item 3** – SP welcomed Julie Underwood as the nominated Enterprise Agency rep to this group.

Page 2 – **Matters arising item 7**– SP had written to the LSP economy groups and responses had been received from Easington and Sedgefield. Sedgefield had asked for clarity on what the BEWG was as they were confused with the Block Leads. SP would chase up responses but asked district reps to do the same. TLP would collate the responses into a report

Action: SP / TLP

Ginny Williams offered to feed in from the Prosperous Sedgefield Group as she was the DCC rep on that group.

Page 2 – **Protocols of representation** – a schedule of meetings had been circulated to the group for information.

Page 3 – **LAA VAT Registration Report** – BLNE would provide a presentation to this meeting.

Page 3 - **Procurement** – A paper had been circulated to the group. SP thanked everyone who had contributed feedback. SP had asked the Board if they were happy for this to be on the LAA agenda and they had agreed they were comfortable with that.

Page 3 – **Workplan for next meeting** – Nick James would provide a presentation on LEGI at a future BEWG.

4. BSN Evaluation Report

SP asked the group if they were happy to adopt the report for consultation. The group agreed.

Agreed Action: SP

5. Business Link Presentation

David Carr explained the role of Business Link North East and the tasks that lay ahead including the formation of more VAT registered businesses.

- They would be working with customs and revenue to decide whether the VAT registrations and de-registrations were the same businesses. This would help to identify market opportunities.
- Examining appropriate support for “Lifestyle businesses”.
- 2000 workshops with 35,000 places for people looking to set up businesses including 1-1 advice and support as well as access to Solutions funding.
- Solutions funding could also provide subsidies for non essential areas of work such as website development.
- Oracle was being used to merge the four current databases in to one. The businesses would then be able to be grouped under a number of criteria including turnover targets.
- The new Solutions fund did not have an upper limit and therefore there was potential for 100% funding for example in the hiring of an accountant.
- Procurement was a big issue. A pilot entitled “Fit for Opportunities” had taken place, this included 6-7 events which attracted 300 companies. They would be looking for ONE funding for a “Meet the Buyer” 2 day event which would take place at the end of this year or the beginning of next. They were hoping to attract national companies.

The group discussed the issues around VAT thresholds and concern that the Partnership could get hung up on VAT registrations and loose sight of business start ups. It was agreed that access to advice and confidence building was paramount. There needed to be clarity around where organisations got this advice from. DC explained that there was a diagnostic process which the Relationship Managers would go through, this was currently a telephone based process but it was hoped that this would eventually be online.

GW asked if there were any special arrangements for disabled people. DW explained that they were working with the Northern Pinetree Trust who were specialists in this area.

NJ expressed concern that the Partnership was using VAT registrations as a driver for their work programme and he was not confident that this was the right direction. SP explained that VAT registration was a proxy measure but it was also a national measure that provided consistency. There was value in the target as it was useful for measuring business stock. She highlighted that in the EKOS report they had demonstrated that the issue for businesses was not the prospect of going over the VAT threshold but that the level of the threshold was in fact about the same point that the businesses would also need their first employee. Therefore this was a big change and not just about filling in a form. She personally felt that the Partnership needed to have a measure and this was as good as any. NJ felt that the key would be getting people to register who didn't have to. SP stated that she hoped it could be done by genuinely increasing the economy. There were other organisations contributing to this agenda including ONE, JobCentre Plus, the colleges, universities and local authorities therefore they would need to look at the size of the gap and decide how the Partnership could fill it. It was highlighted that Chris Bramley would be representing BLNE at future meetings.

6. Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP)

SP explained that in terms of process the summary document had been circulated and a formal response would be required from the CDEP. It was proposed that the BEWG would write the response which would then be presented to the ODG.

JU highlighted that there was confusion between Business Link the organisation and Business Link the brand. The aim was to have a consistent offer across the country. The key was making sure people knew how to access the products on offer and that there was not duplication as Business Link only made up one part of business support.

It was highlighted that they would need to look carefully at the 6 themes to decide what the County would not be able to achieve if they go ahead with the proposals. For example the products proposed around capital investment would only give DTi selective assistance as an option but it was suggested that this product was not right for the business market. This may tie the Partnership's hands now and in the future. There was concern that there were still gaps and work areas being missed. SP proposed that a small group be nominated to write a response which would be circulated to the group for comment. There was a local authority event on 8 August with the final deadline being 14 September. SP, TLP and PMcD volunteered.

Agreed Action: SP / TLP / PMcD

7. Procurement Paper

It was agreed that Rachel Spence would take the procurement report to the LAA Board and would act as a lead on behalf of the BEWG. RS emphasised that she would be looking to compliment David Carr's work.

Agreed Action: RS

NJ highlighted that tactically this was a good opportunity to re-introduce Business Link into the LAA Board and associate them with particular activity. SP suggested the group would require evidence of what was being achieved through the LAA blocks, leaders of organisations also needed to take responsibility and ensure leadership.

8. County Durham Enterprise Advocate

SP introduced Julie Richards. She explained that BLNE were hosting the post but workload content and managing the resource would be the responsibility of the BEWG.

JR explained her background and detailed the work she had been doing to date. She explained that her ongoing workload would involve revising the Enterprise Strategy, bringing forward new actions, the monthly newsletter and further networking activity. She would also be looking at role models and role places as well as linking up activity with the Education Advocate.

Workplan

SP highlighted that in terms of JR's future work plan she would need to continue with activity detailed in the Enterprise Strategy. It was suggested that LEGI should also feed into this process.

SP stated that it made sense for JR to be a member of the BEWG and asked if the group were happy for her to join. She highlighted if anyone had any concerns to contact her asap, otherwise she would take the proposal to the next ODG for approval.

Agreed Action: SP

9. County Durham Action Plan

A revised copy of the full strategy would be circulated for comment by the 3 August. A response would be required by Friday 17 August and would be principally to decide if the Partnership are happy for it to be used as the basis of the consultation. Once all comments had been received and presuming Partners were in agreement documentation would be produced for the official consultation process.

The CDES Action Plan and Single Programme Investment Plan would be circulated on 13 August in preparation for the ODG on 22 August.

It was agreed that SP would provide a response on behalf of the BEWG partners.

Agreed Action: SP

10. Social Enterprise and One NorthEast.

One NorthEast had provided their submission to Central Government. DK explained that all RDA's were being given the opportunity to bid for funding which would amount to £55,000 this year and £200,000 per annum for the next 3 years. This would be the opportunity to join together social enterprises and BLNE. This year would concentrate on raising understanding of Social Enterprises. The future years would be about helping social enterprises to access the support.

11. Enterprise Education

SP had been asked to sign off the business case for the Education Business Advocate. Single Programme would be the main funder with contributions from LEGI, Sedgefield Borough Council and Durham County Council. If anyone would like a copy of the Business Case please contact SP. SP highlighted that she would want to put some wording into the Single Programme Investment Plan for Enterprise Education Activity.

Agreed Action: SP

NJ highlighted that this was an area of work County Durham should be proud of. SP suggested further debate around Education and Enterprise should be brought to the next agenda.

Agreed Action: Secretariat

It was agreed that this agenda should continue on from the work that has been undertaken in primary schools and reinforce the message at all levels of education including further and higher education levels. It was agreed that GW should report between this group and the advisory group looking at this agenda. SP stated that she would also take this discussion forward to the ODG and gain agreement on a formal sub group for Enterprise Education.

Agreed Action: GW / SP

12. North East Programme Network (NEPN)

SP and TLP would be attending the NEPN. TLP reported that the group was discussing the regional enterprise agenda and enabling County Durham to feed into this process. SP agreed that this was very much welcomed, it was great to see what other SRPs were doing and it was not just a reporting mechanism.

13. Discussion areas for next meeting

SP reminded the group that it was Enterprise Week in November and suggested this might be a good task for the Enterprise and Education Advocates, she asked the group to feed any suggestions in to them.

Agreed Action: Enterprise and Education Advocates

SP highlighted that there was a county wide focus on manufacturing, a key partner was the Manufacturing Advisory Service and she asked if the group would like them to provide a presentation on their role at the next meeting.

Agreed Action: SP

SP suggested that NJ provide a presentation on LEGI at the meeting on 26 September.

Agreed Action: NJ

14. Any other business / Date of next meeting

There was no additional business.

The date of the next meeting was the 29 August and Peter McDowell from Derwentside District Council offered to host the meeting.

The meeting on the 26 September would be hosted by Julie Richards.