



West of England Partnership

Bath & North East
Somerset Council



North
Somerset
COUNCIL

South Gloucestershire
Council

Draft minutes of meeting of the

Skills & Competitiveness Board

14 July 2010, 16.00 – 18.00, Skills Funding Agency, St. Lawrence House, Bristol

Present

Stephen Harrison	Chair	Skills & Competitiveness Board
John Betty	Strategic Director of Development and Major Projects	Bath & North East Somerset Council
John Cox	Economic Development Manager	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Lucio Mesquito	Head of Regional & Local Programmes West	BBC
Jane Taylor	Strategy Leader, Parent & Learning Communities	Bristol City Council
Phil Smith	Chief Executive	Business Link SW
Keith Elliott	Principal	City of Bristol College
Steve Birch	Managing Director	DECTEL
Kevin Tinsley	Locality Manager	Government Office for the South West
John Savage	Managing Director	GWE Business West
Sue Keogh	External Relations Manager	Jobcentre Plus
Marlene Morley	Head of DE&S Collation Project	Ministry of Defence
Richard Kent	Development Control Group Manager	North Somerset Council
Simon Gregory	Regeneration Manager	North Somerset Council
Nick Sturge	Centre Director	SETsquared, University of Bristol
Peter Mildburn	Learning Services Manager	Skills Funding Agency
Steve Evans	Director of Community Services	South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr John Godwin	Executive Member	South Gloucestershire Council
Ann O'Driscoll	Head of Business Development (West of England & Gloucestershire)	South West Regional Development Agency
David Draycott	Director of Skills and Competitiveness	West of England Partnership
Terry Wagstaff	Chief Executive	West of England Partnership
Daniel Moore	Partnership Secretary	West of England Partnership

1. Welcome & Apologies for absence

Apologies from:

Jeremy Smalley, Bath & North East Somerset Council

Cllr Barbara Janke, Bristol City Council

Hilary Neal, Government Office South West

Karuna Tharmananthar, North Somerset Council

Mark Williams, Rotork Controls

2. Membership

The election of Vice Chair was deferred.

Interviews for a Board Member from the Voluntary & Community Sector had taken place. More news would be provided at the next meeting.

The resignation from the board of Patrick Kearon, Communications Director of Bristol Port Company was noted. All agreed Simon Bird, Director of the Bristol Port Company could be approached as a replacement.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2010

Item 8:

The Operational Group met and agreed to add the issue of sites and premises to this Board, though they would primarily remain the responsibility of the Planning, Housing & Communities Board.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

5. Member and Public Forum - Statements

There were none.

6. Chair's Business

The Chair told the Board that he had agreed to join the Board of the West of England 14 – 19 commissioning service company. This is a newly established service intended to provide a framework of underpinning 14 – 19 strategies.

Keith Elliot stressed the need for commissioning to be informed by the employer.

David Draycott will sit on the Operations Group and provide views from a business perspective.

7. Skills and Competitiveness: Recent Government Announcements

Terry Wagstaff described recent government announcements regarding the abolition of regional governmental bureaucracy, and which invited proposals to form Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

The West of England had submitted an early expression of interest with a fully worked

proposal due for submission on the 6th September. A planning board had been established involving business, local authorities, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) and the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA).

An explanation of what constitutes a LEP and the likely implications for the area follows:

- It will reflect the economic or travel to work areas
- Businesses will be thoroughly influential
- It will encompass issues such as transport and spatial planning, as well as responding to government's request for strong local 14-19 education systems
- Constituent authorities are encouraged to dictate the shape and structure of their proposed LEP
- No additional resources likely to be available
- Potential changes to the structure of the West of England Partnership.

Ann O'Driscoll of the Regional Development Agency (RDA) added that government had not been prescriptive about the content of proposals. This was a chance for localities to promote their own agendas. It was not clear which RDA functions would be incorporated into the LEP.

Subsequent discussion highlighted the following points:

- The Department for Business Innovation & Skills was keen to see a national skills framework;
- Skills needed to follow the learner;
- Following government's removal of top-down targets, which effectively meant there was no measure of value against funding, Further Education would be very supportive of the Board's original objectives to influence 'those with resource', which in turn emphasised the urgency for a LEP to influence the work of the Skills & Competitiveness Board;
- Train to gain had been abolished and money was being channelled back in to apprenticeships. There were no targets, but there was an 'ambition' to create 50,000 new apprenticeships nationally. The Skills & Competitiveness Board had an important role in guiding this;
- The Jobcentre Plus would eventually move to a single work programme and the organisation would be diminished, though it was unclear when and by how much;

John Savage asked how the skills requirement of the West of England was defined and stressed the need for agreement across the Partnership Area.

Terry Wagstaff confirmed that the LEP proposals would take a realistic view of what could be delivered in terms of skills and development, and that a strong voice from the Skills & Competitiveness Board was crucial.

Stephen Harrison confirmed the importance of this Board's involvement and involvement on the proposals for the LEP.

A draft LEP proposal would be circulated to the board before the September meeting.

8. Towards a Skills Strategy for the West of England

David Draycott presented an update on progress with the development of the strategy for which reports on tackling worklessness and on the wider skills needs of the

business and employer community would be submitted in September and November 2010 respectively.

In light of recent government announcements it was necessary for the Board to move quickly on the development of the strategy. The Board were invited to consider the 2009 South West Regional Employment and Skills Analysis plan and provide comments over the summer.

It was important that the plan was developed with input from both Further and Higher Education representatives on the Board.

Sector specific workshops were planned over the summer, to which relevant members would be invited.

**Agreed:
That the Board note the report.**

9. Work Plan

David Draycott presented an update on the progress with the Board Work plan. This would become a regular item on the Board's agenda, and the Operational Group would drive it forward between meetings.

David confirmed that a report on inward investment would be taken to the Board in September. Work was being done to produce a single proposition. It was suggested that this should be part of the LEP proposal too.

He also highlighted the urgency of the Single Work Programme element of the work plan. There was some discussion about small voluntary organisations' ability (as secondary contractors) to cope with a system in which payments were made two years after work started.

Keith Elliot expressed concern about how the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Work Programme was intended to fit with the localisation agenda, considering it a radical set of reforms that only large organisations could engage with.

David Draycott explained that an event would be held for any interested parties wishing to tender, explaining some of the key issues regarding worklessness. Further details of the event would follow.

10. Business Support

David Draycott presented a paper outlining the current, publicly funded business support structure in the West of England, and making recommendations for further action moving the Board towards the Multi Area Agreement objective "to simplify and strengthen business support solutions to enhance indigenous business competitiveness".

Ann O'Driscoll provided the following feedback from the Regional Development Agency's (RDA) perspective, noting that circumstances were subject to regular and rapid change:

- The office for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) were due to commission start-up activities based on worklessness with lead agencies, but it was not

- clear if this was due to include Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs);
- It was not yet clear if services would be included in Growth Hubs, nor if their coverage would be universal;
- Current Business Support offers needed to be modernised;
- The Skills & Competitiveness Board needed to decide what elements of RDA support were vital to retain;
- It was not clear what would become of Business Link or Skills 4 Business services, though it was thought that all business support in Bristol would be provided by the Growth Hub;
- This Board had an opportunity, as part of an emerging LEP, to inform what a Growth Hub should include.

Nick Sturge suggested the Skills & Competitiveness Board put forward a proposal for a growth hub, which Phil Smith seconded.

Members recognised that the Board would not be able to provide a full Business Support service without retaining some of the existing functions of the RDA.

Steve Birch suggested that Business Support services might be more effective if delivered at local authority level rather than across the Partnership Area.

David Draycott queried the positioning of a LEP proposal in the context of a Growth Hub, to which Ann O'Driscoll replied that any Growth Hub proposal was likely to focus on priority businesses and services, and that it was important for the West of England to retain generic business services as there was unlikely to be funding for a separate piece of infrastructure.

Cllr Godwin confirmed South Gloucestershire's support for a LEP and stressed that any business support proposals must be put forward within that context.

Kevin Tinsley stressed the importance of a robust evidence base to support any proposal.

Agreed:

That the Board note the need for further simplification of the public sector support for businesses and greater engagement with private sector providers to ensure complementarity and cross referral.

By the September meeting, absolute priorities would be identified in terms of business support and, in the context of budget reduction and policy development, the Board would advise on what was most vital to preserve in terms of business support.

A further paper be brought to a future meeting setting out proposals for future priorities and performance measures.

11. Communications and promotion of the work of the Board

David Draycott presented a report asking the Board to consider activities for communication about the Board and its priorities.

A simple plan would be developed for handling the media and dealing with the Board's increased profile.

Agreed:

That members:

- **Note the aims of the communications plan**
- **Agree target audiences**
- **Consider the suggested actions**
- **Delegate responsibility to a secretariat to create an action plan for the next meeting.**

12. Urgent Business

There was none.

13. Date of next meeting

15th September 2010, 16.00 – 18.00, SFA, St. Lawrence House

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