

Swindon Enterprise Group

Tuesday 10th April 2007
Brunel Tower, Swindon

MINUTES

1. Attendees:

Daphne Milner (DM) – GWE/Business Link (Chair)
David Evans (DE) – Economic Development Directorate, SBC
Darren King (DK) – Swindon College
Julie Allen (JA) – Co-Operative Futures
Christina Howell (CH) – Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce
John Bennett (JB) – Young Enterprise South West
Peter Beech-Allen (PBA) – GWE
Andy Reeve (AR) – Business Link
Sue Watkins (SWA) – Learning & Skills Council

Apologies received from:

Geoff Tate – SBC Youth Service
Phil Merrick – Swindon Innovation Centre
Marc Braddock – University of Bath in Swindon
Mark Beard – Beard Construction
Matt Spencer – SBC
Jim Pettipher – Cooperative Futures

2. Notes of Last Meeting

The minutes from the meeting on 28th February 2007 were accepted. The following issues arose:

UK Enterprising Town Competition. DE said that he and MS had made a start on preparing the bid for Swindon.

Action: DE & MS to circulate a first draft to those members who offered to assist the drafting process by 20th April.

Skills and Employment Group. SW reported that a first meeting of the group has been arranged for Wednesday 18th April at the LSC's offices.

3. Summary of Issues

The group accepted the record of issues as accurate.

4. Activity Map and Summary of Priorities

DM asked each member to ensure that the list of activities includes only items that are actually being delivered in Swindon. For example, there is a need to distinguish between agencies that fund programmes and agencies that actually deliver them.

The summary also needs to include those organisations that were not present at the previous meeting.

Action: DE to redraft the Summary focusing on Activities, and including missing organisations, and present to the next meeting.

5. Action Plan for 2007/08

The meeting went through each Priority in turn and considered the list of actions currently underway, any gaps or duplication of activities, and potential new activities to meet Swindon's enterprise needs. It was agreed that the group should look to identify a handful of good, tangible projects upon which to focus over the forthcoming months.

I. Priority 1: Need to create an Enterprise Culture in Swindon via initiatives targeted at particular groups and locations.

It was recognised that there exist various groups in Swindon, defined by social group as much as by location, who face difficulties engaging with an enterprise culture. AR, for example, pointed to the needs of older workers. However, in order to focus resources and make a distinct impact it was agreed that the group would focus on encouraging young people. The group discussed this at length, referring to examples of good practice elsewhere in the region. AR referred to discussions that he and JA are having with St Joseph's Comprehensive School, which is very keen on this agenda, and it was recognised that those schools that are already engaged could champion the subject. It was agreed that a sub group should meet to produce an action plan to describe how we could address the issue. JB offered to lead the sub group, comprising AR, DK and JA, plus Tim Mason from SBC's Youth Service, Neil Reiach from EBPlus, and a representative of the LSC).

Action 1: Sub Group to produce a 3 year Action Plan on how to engage young people in Swindon in enterprise, identifying targets, headline actions, and good practice.

II. Priority 2: Need for provision of skills required by businesses.

Agreed to pass this priority over to the forthcoming Skills and Employment Group.

Action: SW to raise the issue with the Skills and Employment group.

III. Priority 3: Simplifying the range of business support on offer.

It was recognised that the business support simplification process needs to apply to all of the group's activities, and that this priority is cross-cutting in nature.

IV. Priority 4: Creating business networks, sectors, and improving the interface between support agencies.

The activities in this priority area fall into two general groups, firstly, general business and membership networks (such as those operated by the Chamber, FSB and other business networking bodies), and secondly, those networks targeted at supporting specific sectors. Regarding the former it was recognised that they are mostly private sector led and are therefore at the discretion of individual companies, Their existence is a sign of the strength of the business community in the Borough and there is no role for the partnership to be intervening. Regarding sectoral based

groups and networks, whilst many exist, each has a distinct role. There is a role for the Enterprise Group to map them properly, identify which may require support, and identify which sectors are not covered.

Action: MS to carry out a mapping exercise of sectoral networks and support in relation to Swindon's priority sectors, and identify which sectors would benefit from intervention.

V. Priority 5: The availability of finance and support for start-ups.

In the context of the Business Support Simplification agenda, it was agreed that this area needs to be driven by Business Link, and that the Enterprise Group needs to back the current Business Link offer to businesses. It was argued that Business Link's services might be extended and enhanced in the Swindon area, and AR was requested to provide an overview of existing activity in the Sub Region, including provision, take up, targets and outputs.

Action: AR to provide baseline evidence on existing Business Link activity in Swindon.

VI. Priority 6: Encouraging sustainable and growing businesses.

Three areas were identified within this priority as being worthy of further action. Firstly, in order to enable new, fledgling businesses to learn from those with experience, the group might introduce a business to business mentoring programme.

Action: PBA, CH and Marc Braddock to prepare a paper on a Swindon Mentoring programme

Secondly, work is already progressing on building business links with China, and the Enterprise Group has a role to play in supporting that initiative.

Action: MS to progress Chinese Partnership and report back on progress

Thirdly, in response to SWERDA's increasing emphasis on 'greening' businesses, a programme of support to businesses to advise them on means to reduce carbon dependency.

Action: AR / SWi to report to next meeting on a Greening business programme

VII. Priority 7: Supporting innovative businesses.

PBA argued that we need to be supporting existing innovative businesses, as well as those that aren't currently, but could be. DK suggested there is a need to extend the concept of LEAN in to more businesses. The Thames Valley Economic Partnership has recently carried out some good work on innovation, whilst the Wiltshire & Swindon Innovation Group is about to finalise its own Innovation Strategy.

Action: PBA to set up task group to include MB, DM, MB If available and prepare suggested activity plan for discussion at June meeting. Group to take into account work of Wiltshire and Swindon Innovation Group and ideas being developed by the Thames Valley Economic Partnership,

Action: PBA to circulate Thames Valley Economic Partnership's recent Innovation Report to all members.

VIII. Priority 8: Improving Swindon's image and reputation.

Agreed that this important issues should be passed on to the forthcoming Destination Swindon group

IX. Priority 9: Advice and Support for Social Enterprises and community based enterprise.

The group recognised that Cooperative Futures has a funding gap, which needs to be resolved if it is to continue being able to play a full role in supporting social enterprises in Swindon.

Action: JA/JP to continue discussions with Swindon Borough Council and SWERDA over resolving the funding situation.

DM suggested that there is a need to identify areas of action within the statutory service providers, such as Swindon Borough Council, the Strategic Health Authority, and others, where social enterprise could be a realistic delivery option.

Action: JA/JP to prepare a paper considering where Social Enterprise might provide solutions to meet service delivery needs.

X. Cross Cutting Issue: Economic and Labour Market Research

The end of the Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Partnership means that an Annual Economic Assessment will no longer be produced for Swindon, yet to date it has been a valuable document in describing economic issues and trends. DE suggested that his team has significant potential to carry out economic research, although reproduction of that document is not planned at present. He also argued that the Economic Assessment would be required by the whole partnership and that the issue might be referred up to the Partnership Management Group for resolution.

Action: DE to submit a report to the PMG outlining the Enterprise Group's concerns over the loss of the Economic Assessment, and identifying the likely research requirements of each of the Sub Groups.

Action: MS, Jim Plunkett-Cole (GWE), and someone from the LSC will meet to ascertain the research potential existing amongst partners, and report back to the next meeting.

6. Chamber of Commerce Update

In the absence of time at this meeting, CH agreed to present a report on the progress of the new Swindon Chamber to the next meeting.

7. Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership Update

DE gave a brief update of the new structure of the SSEP, including reference to the individual members on the Partnership Management Group and the four Sub-Groups. Members voiced concerns over the structure, including the apparent lack of strategic capacity within the PMG, particularly as some of the funding partners are not included. Concern was also voiced over the lack of consultation that has taken place with regard to the new structure.

Agreed: DM to write formally, as chair of the Sub Group, to Bill Cotton expressing the group's concerns over the new structure of the SSEP.

Post Meeting Note:

Dates of next meetings:

- 11 May 2007, 10.00-12.00, Brunel Tower
- 8 June 2007, 11.00 – 1.00 provisional (nb. The Employment and Skills Group meeting will follow at 2.00. Lunch will be provided for those attending both meetings)
- 3 July 2007, 10.00 – 12.00, venue tbc
- 7 September, 10.00 – 12.-.00, venue tbc