

## LSP ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB-GROUP MEETING

7<sup>th</sup> June 2011

5.00PM

Committee Rooms, Brentwood Town Hall

### Minutes

#### **Present:**

Keith Brown (Chairman)	Federation of Small Businesses
Gary Disley	Buzcom
Michael Hardy (MH1)	Town Centre Partnership (Previous)
Colin Heaps	Brentwood Borough Council
Clive Othen	Chamber of Commerce
Dominique Phelan	Brentwood Borough Council
Scott Prestedge	Brentwood Borough Council
Cllr Mark Reed	Brentwood Borough Council
Candice Robinson	Brentwood Borough Council
Cllr Keith Sparling	Brentwood Borough Council

#### **Apologies:**

Martin Hobart (MH2)	Mid-Essex Enterprise Agency
Cllr Jean McGinley	Brentwood Borough Council
Andy Taylor	Ford Motor Company

#### **Notes of Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011:**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

#### **Matters arising from those notes not elsewhere on the agenda**

- (a) NIC Contributions Holiday – KB is still yet to hear back from Eric Pickles following EP's letter to the Chancellor regarding Essex's non-inclusion in NIC contributions. KB to chase up this issue with EP.
- (b) National Express East Anglia: Local Distributors – There is no protection for local distributors at Brentwood Rail Station after NEEA lost the franchise. New concessions commence on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2012; the group will contact the new franchise holders to seek assurances regarding the safety of local distributors businesses.
- (c) Business Event Dates – Cllr MR at present is unable to confirm dates for the Business Events which will take place in 2011. Cllr MR is to confirm these dates with the Leader of the Council and feed back at the next group meeting.

**ACTION:** SP to send Cllr MR the previously proposed Business Event Dates.

- (d) Thanks for Departing Members – KB formerly recorded the group's thanks for members who will no longer be attending future meeting of the group. KB thanked Cllr Phil Baker, Roger Kelsey and Keith Hughes for their service and input.
- (e) Local Distributor Postcodes – Following an enquiry from KB; SP confirmed that as per a previous request, supplier postcodes are now being published with the council's online expenditure.

## **1. Procurement at Brentwood Borough Council:**

Colin Heaps gave members an overview of the current state of procurement at BBC. The Procurement department became a stand alone entity, independent of the Finance department in September 2009; as such Procurement at BBC remains very much in its infancy. However significant steps have been taken at BBC in the Procurement department's short history. A Procurement Strategy has been developed and implemented at the council, whilst this is a big step in the right direction, changing the culture is expected to take time. Part of this change in culture will see the introduction of e-procurement at the council. CH has also been heavily involved in compiling and producing a comprehensive contracts register for the entire organisation, identifying contract start/end dates, which department the contract relates to and the company holding the contract. To coincide with this, contract management is being introduced and developed in each department with the support of Procurement. BBC is also looking to encourage new companies to tender with the council, moving away from consistently using regular providers.

KB asked that BBC consider publishing the contracts register to alert local businesses as to start and end dates of council contracts; thus giving them time to prepare tenders for any contract they may be interested in obtaining. KB also queried the level of flexibility of any liability insurance attached to the content of a Council contract. CH stated that the contracts register is not yet 100% complete, however it is CH's intention to publish it on the council's website once finished. With regard to the level of liability insurance, CH confirmed that contract managers have received guidelines regarding contract liability. KB also stressed the importance of the council providing positive feedback to unsuccessful companies in the tendering process; tendering is expensive and it is crucial businesses receive constructive comments for future tenders. CO questioned how Chamber of Commerce members get involved in the tendering process for council contracts, how do they become aware of the opportunities? CH suggested that once complete, in addition to being published on the council website, the contract register could be provided to KB and CO for distribution in their respective member newsletters. KB thanked CH on behalf of the group for the overview provided.

**ACTION:** CH to be invited to provide a further update at a future meeting.

## **2. Buzcom Presentation:**

Gary Disley, Managing Director of Buzcom, attended the meeting to give a presentation to the group on the service Buzcom provide. FibreWiFi is a Radio Broadband Service provided by Buzcom, it is Buzcom's intention to enhance coverage in the Brentwood area so that businesses and home users can benefit from the product. The service allows Super Fast connection speeds to the internet and does not require a telephone line, instead it uses radio. A year and a half ago Buzcom were approached by Essex County Council to bring it's FibreWifi service to the Maldon District. ECC ran a competitive tender for a grant aimed at sourcing a solution capable of delivering Super Fast Internet to areas struggling with telephone line broadband. Buzcom won the tender and has rolled out the FibreWiFi Service across Maldon with great success. The service works by connecting users to the Internet using a radio, no telephone line is involved so the problems other providers may have reaching rural areas is reduced. Tree cover and general topology can affect speeds so to combat this, repeater radios are installed.

Buzcom's success in Maldon has seen third year subscription targets surpassed within the first year, as a result Buzcom are well ahead of schedule on paying back the grant to ECC.CO asks that Buzcom engages with BBC, the Brentwood Chamber of Commerce and FSB to bring greater coverage to the area. KB thanked GD for his attendance and informative presentation.

**ACTIONS:** GD to contact Cllr MR with further details of what Buzcom could provide in Brentwood and how the council could help deliver that provision.

### **3. Brentwood First:**

DP provided an update to the group. Since Brentwood First's launch in February 2011, it has met twice with the next meeting set for July 6<sup>th</sup>. The group brings together the biggest businesses in the Brentwood area, including Marks & Spencer, BT, Mellon and Ford; the group is chaired Nick Abbott from BT. The priorities for the group have now been set out, Action and Business Plans have been drafted and are to be confirmed at the next meeting in July. The groups over-riding focus is to better promote Brentwood as a business area, promoting the businesses already based in Brentwood and making it an attractive prospect for businesses considering re-locating to the area. KB suggested it would be beneficial to involve 'Invest Essex' in Brentwood First. On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, CO asked Cllr Mr for an explanation of the relationship between the Brentwood Renaissance Partnership, Brentwood First and the Brentwood LSP. Cllr MR stated that Nick Abbott had been invited to meet Mike Hawkins (C.O.C) to discuss this issue; KB offered to attend the meeting to help explain.

### **4. Update from Business, Community & Culture Panel:**

Since the last meeting of this group, the Business & Economic Development Panel has been amended to now encompass Community and Culture; Cllr MR is new Chair of the Panel. At the last meeting of this group it was decided to align the LSP meetings with that of the Business Panel, as such a meeting of the panel is due to take place following this meeting. This agenda for this meeting includes an end of year (2010/11) report on the council's local economic performance indicators, DP and CR will also be talking about projects currently taking place in the town centre; a number of new businesses are moving into the area. Cllr MR also presented the finished Brentwood Tourism guide to the group; distribution of the guide has already begun. Refurbishment of the High Street toilets will be going ahead in the near future; local businesses such as Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer have agreed to signs directing the public to use their toilet facilities whilst the refurbishment takes place. A number of new and existing successful markets are continuing to be held in and around the high street area, the presence of these markets have also boosted other local businesses. The council are working towards reducing fees for market traders. In response to CO's question regarding the checks conducted on the stalls, MR confirmed that the council licensing enforcement team conduct regular food safety standards checks. CR informed the group that a business consultation regarding the day the 2011 Lighting Up will take place on had just been launched; KB and CO asked that details of the consultation are forwarded to them. CO asked whether the group were aware of the 'Street Pastors' project currently being implemented in the Brentwood area, SP informed the group members that the Brentwood Community Safety Partnership had commissioned this project, Tracey Lilley is the councils internal contact for the project.

**ACTION:** KB and CO to be placed on DP and CR's distribution list for future business updates.

### **5. Update from Brentwood Renaissance Partnership:**

Due to NA's absence, a full update was not available. DP commented that the last scheduled meeting of the Renaissance Partnership did not take place due to unforeseen circumstances.

### **6. Local Enterprise Partnership – Update:**

Following a request at the previous meeting, KB has requested an organisational chart from the LEP Secretariat. As of yet no chart has been developed as the LEP is still evolving, KB will follow this up and hopefully one will be available for the next meeting in September. The official LEP Secretariat is based at Essex County Council and now has a dedicated enquiry e-mail

([LEP@essex.gov.uk](mailto:LEP@essex.gov.uk)). Weekly newsletters are now being produced in individual LEP areas and are available on request from the previously mentioned e-mail address. On June 16<sup>th</sup> KB will be chairing a LEP Procurement Group and attending a Communications Task & Finish Group. KB informed members of an apprenticeship scheme currently available through the Regional Growth Fund; the scheme pays for a 6 month apprentice salary. Council's are currently waiting on an expression of interest decision from Eric Pickles, if accepted councils will go into a formal process. KB stressed the importance of getting local businesses involved in the LEP and in a position to benefit from the support and funds available. KB suggested that Brentwood businesses write directly to the Heart of Essex LEP delivery unit expressing their desire to be involved, CO shows support and interest in this proposal.

**ACTION:** KB and CO to liaise with Brentwood businesses regarding contacting the local LEP unit.

## **7. Updates:**

### **(a) Enterprise Agency Activity in Brentwood**

MH2 sent his apologies for this meeting. However KB informed the group that he had met MH2 last Friday who had told him the Mid-Essex Enterprise Agency is due to meet this month with the intention of closing the business, effective from July or December depending on certain details. This added to the closure of Business link, means there is a lack of business support available in Brentwood. With this in mind KB urged BBC to take steps to work with NWES to bring their business support services into the borough.

### **(b) Small Business Rate Relief / Business Legal Charges**

SP updated the group with the following figures (as at 06.06.11):

Brentwood current has 1228 business properties with Rateable Values under £18000.

641 do not qualify because they have more than one business property, or the property is empty.

508 are awarded Small business rate relief.

79 businesses are an unknown quantity.

Brentwood's up take figure at present is 86.54%

Following concerns raised regarding the amount of businesses facing summons as a result of not keeping up with their business rates payments, a meeting had been due to take place prior to this meeting between Cllr MR, KB and a representative from BBC's business rates department to discuss the potential of early intervention and support for businesses. However this meeting did not take place, a new date is to be set.

**ACTION:** New meeting date to be set by SP.

## **8. Any Other Business:**

### **(a) Vacant Retail Premises**

MH1 has updated the list of Vacant Retail Premises which was circulated with the previous minutes; MH1 commented that generally the trend is moving in the right direction. The updated list will be circulated with these minutes.

### **(b) Local Neighbourhood Planning Consultation**

MH1 attended a recent event connected with the current Neighbourhood Consultation; MH1 believes the event and the Consultation appear to be a positive process.

### **(c) Essex Next Generation Broadband Conference**

KB informed the group of the event taking place on June 21<sup>st</sup>. The fee for the conference is £50, however members can register for free as guest of the FSB using the following details. Go to <http://www.nextgenevents.co.uk/events>, go to the invited guest section and put in the code 'EEIDB'.

### **9. Dates of future meetings**

All meetings 5 - 6.30 pm in Meeting Room 2, Brentwood Town Hall, on the following dates:

- Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2011
- Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011