

Herefordshire Business Board

Notes / Actions from the Meeting – Thursday 29th May 2014

Present: Chair: Peter Brown (PB) **Vice Chairs:** John Jones (JJ), Richard Garnett (RG)
Andy Edwards (AE), Cathy Meredith (CM), Heidi Chamberlain-Jones (HCJ), Jane Preston (JP), Mike
Ashton (MA), Nick Read (NR).
Nick Webster (NW), Rachel Jones (RJ).

Apologies: Angela Fitch (AF), Helen Thomas (HT), Jon Turner (JT), Jonathan Hines (JH), Joseph
Connor (JC), Neil Kerr (NK), Phil Collins (PC), Cllr Roger Phillips (RP), Stephen Eckley (SE).

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies noted.

2. Herefordshire Business Board

PB had circulated a proposal paper to the Board in early April (paper attached) outlining proposals for a refresh of the board and updates to membership.

PB gave his view of the last year which he believed had been difficult for the HBB. Looking back, members were reminded that the board was instigated by the local authority with the involvement of the representative organisations (Federation of Small Business, Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire Rural Hub) so that a Herefordshire business representative could serve on the Marches LEP. The LEP has not been strong or well-resourced and as a result there has been little opportunity to contribute. It was intended the Board members, in the context of clear objectives and sector leads would provide a credible and positive resource to contribute to strategic discussions, but this has never really taken off. PB believed that the core problem is the lack of capacity of the Board and the LEP which leads to an over reliance on the local authority for information and leadership.

The proposal paper looks at where to find the capacity and the representative organisations appear to be a solution. They would be able to identify members who would be representative, help make the Board work with their own organisational officer support to help build capacity. HBB needs to take a different direction, there will be an election in 2015, the economy is beginning to grow and the LA is affected by further cuts. The Chair proposed to hand back to the representative organisations and task them with taking the Board forward with increased accountability and capacity.

The debate was opened out to the board for their thoughts and comments. There was a wide range of contributions from members. It was widely felt that the Marches LEP was important and would continue to be, but the lack of capacity and structure in the LEP and lack of communication from them has not been helpful in promoting what they do, or for the Business Board to find its role.

The Business Board should be representative, taking Herefordshire views and support to the LEP. There is a need to be clear on what the Board is and what it is supposed to be working towards. The existing Board was not elected and as such has no mandate from Herefordshire businesses, people do not know who the Board is and that the Board does not know what the business community wants.

It was agreed that representative organisations have a mandate to their members, constitutional credibility and are able to gather and provide evidence of what the business community wants. They would have the opportunity on behalf of their membership and the wider networks they are part of and be a two way conduit for information between the Marches LEP and the wider Herefordshire business community. There was recognition that the current board does not always have the right skill set to respond to consultations and a wider skill set was necessary, there is a need to make changes, ensure that the right representation and businesses are on the Board in the future.

Projects where the Business Board has had most success; the Hereford Enterprise Zone and Business Improvement District were helped because they were ready to go and the Business Board needs to get to this position for Herefordshire for future opportunities.

Business Board members want to get involved and make a difference. The board needs to pull on resources available to gather information, create a vision and the voice of businesses that can be used to give Herefordshire its voice on the LEP and more widely. A review of the constitution, such as bringing in task and finish groups or working groups when needed would be an option.

The LEP is the current vehicle to work with to bring down funding and support to Herefordshire and in the future it may be different but there will still be need for strong business representation. There is the opportunity for the Board to be an integral part of creating the Herefordshire Economic Master Plan proposed by the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council.

In summary the final proposal put to, and agreed by the board was that:

- The Business Board continues
- The Board agrees to change the recruitment process
- The FSB, Rural Hub and Chamber are tasked with recruiting the new members
- New membership will include representatives of the large (top 20) Herefordshire businesses
- A new Chair will be identified

3. Next Steps

The current Board will remain in place until new Board members have been recruited and the Chair will continue in post until the handover to the new Board and Chair.

The Board meeting in the diary for the 24th June is cancelled and a new date will be set up as appropriate within the process of recruiting the new Board membership and Chair.

The membership organisations are tasked with recruiting new members and will make a start on the process. The Board will be kept informed of progress.

4. Any Other Business

AE has been working with UKTI to put on exporting event in Herefordshire. There will be 12 people on an event next week which will be 20 overall that have been involved so far. Two more events are to be held over the next couple of months. Dates will be circulated.

RG informed the group that London Midland has been approached about the proposal for a railway station on the Hereford Enterprise Zone and that they have expressed an interest.

5. Close

Paper for point 2

Herefordshire Business Board - Proposal to refresh the Board and update Membership

The board has previously agreed that to have a significant influence on the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Business Board needs to be stronger.

I have previously discussed with the board, three principle weaknesses of the current arrangements:

- a) The board membership is a good selection of different sectors but has a poor representation from larger companies. Larger companies have more influence, impact on the economy, employee numbers, supply chains. It is critical that they are embedded in the county and yet they are absent from the business board.
- b) Although the board has agreed specific sector leads, the majority of individual members do not actively make contact with businesses in that sector nor seek out relevant issues and apply those to various consultation documents or discussions.
- c) As chair of the board and representing Herefordshire business on the Local Enterprise Partnership, the principal source of advice is the Economic Development team at Herefordshire Council. This has reinforced the very strong public sector bias on the LEP. The subjects covered on the LEP are an extremely broad spectrum, it is critical that the chair is briefed appropriately to press the key issues.

I believe that this has come about because of the way the board were selected. An open invitation followed by selection mainly by the representative organisations – Rural Hub, FSB, Chamber of Commerce. So, although all parties had to be 'comfortable' with the chosen candidates, there was no subsequent connection with any of the representative organisations. Neither was there an opportunity to widen the candidate pool – only those who applied were considered.

We agree the board should be stronger but to use the same recruitment method will create the same outcome. A different approach must be adopted if a different outcome is to be achieved.

Proposal

HBB members are asked to consider an alternative.

1. The HBB should be members of business membership organisations, specifically the Hereford and Worcester Chamber, the Federation of Small Businesses, and the Herefordshire Rural Hub.
2. The member organisations would each nominate three HBB members to serve on the board plus an executive member (i.e. Cathy, Angela, Mike as at present.)
3. The HBB would select a chair from its membership or seek an independent 'high profile' chair from elsewhere.

This would,

4. Allow for representatives of large, small and rural businesses to serve on the board.
5. Give greater opportunities for targeting potential members.
6. Tie the representative organisations more closely in to their nominees creating a closer relationship between the member and their 'sponsoring' organisation – which

in turn will reduce the reliance on public sector advice and strengthen the private sector analysis and input.

This arrangement may be a challenge to the membership organisations, but compared to individuals on the board, they have the resources. The Membership organisations have a wider reach than current membership which would allow for a greater sharing and gathering of information, adding strength and substance to the HBB. The membership organisations hold data, facts and information about local business issues, economic position, concerns which would be useful in developing strategies, proposals etc.

Herefordshire Council relevant Cabinet Member and Officer support would continue as existing.

Members will recognise that this would mean a radical change in the existing arrangements and individuals currently serving on the board. If we look to our activity since winning EZ recognition, I think we would all acknowledge that for a variety of reasons, our achievements and impact has been limited.

This proposal seeks to redress that and I ask that you support it.

Peter Brown
Chair
9th April 2014

Role of the Board

- To be accountable to the wider business community and specific organisational membership bases.
- To become a two way conduit for information between the Marches LEP and the wider Herefordshire business community.
- To present a private sector view into discussions with local partners concerning LEP Board decisions, projects, and priorities, and to assist in the formulation of a "Herefordshire" position to be taken at Board.
- To be representative of a range of views and present a range of experiences.
- Provide leadership and experience in support of a thriving Herefordshire economy.
- To attend bi-monthly Herefordshire Business Board meetings.
- To bring forward specific issues or opportunities which the business community are facing and highlight possible mitigating action.

Responsibilities to

The Marches LEP

Herefordshire partners within the LEP

The Membership Organisation they represent and its members

Responsibility for Membership Organisations

Representing the (canvassed) views of their membership into the Business Board.

Dissemination of information to their membership organisation and members

Represent the Herefordshire Business Board on Marches LEP Board

Feeding information into the HBB from their membership organisation and members

Members should be:

Non-political

Representative

The Membership Organisations in Herefordshire:

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce

A member-led, not for profit organisation, working to support the local business community and specifically their 1300-strong network of member businesses, working to strengthen the position of members and ensuring that the interests of local businesses are heard.

Herefordshire Rural Hub

Herefordshire Rural Hub is a business support organisation which is led by farm and rural businesses across Herefordshire. Established in September 2004 the Hub has grown from strength to strength and now has a membership of over 1,000 rural businesses. Membership is free

Federation of Small Business

The Federation of Small Businesses is the UK's largest campaigning pressure group promoting and protecting the interests of the self-employed and owners of small firms. Formed in 1974, it now has 200,000 members across 33 regions and 194 branches.

