

WE ARE RURAL AND FOOD

LEP Rural and Food Sector Group

Wednesday 23 September 2015, 10:30am
Thrings, The Paragon, Counterslip, Bristol BS1 6BX

Attendees: Deborah White, Elaine Broomfield, Mandie Berry, Chris Lyons, Antony Merritt, Matthew Uren, Doug Douglas, Duncan Sigournay, Graham Clark, Mark O'Sullivan, Becca Thurston, Mike Amos, Martino Burgess, Chris Smith, Melissa Houston, Chris Head.

Apologies: Sophie Kirk, Charles Hignett, Steve Ashworth.

Welcome and introductions

- Chris welcomed the group and thanked Thrings for hosting.
 - Introductions were made for the benefit of visitors and new members.
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Actions arising from previous meeting

- Important to continue the links with neighbouring LEPs.

ACTION: Chris to invite a representative from Wiltshire LEP to the next meeting.

LEP Update

- Melissa went through the top activities:
- Internet of Things
 - £10m national competition – only one winner. Submission by end of Sept.
 - City region demonstrator (test bed) to prove IoT can improve public infrastructure.
 - 1 x LEP endorsed bid, led by Bristol City Council but working with the other UAs.
 - West of England has a good chance but we're not unique.
- Enterprise Zone bid
 - Government asked for applications for new enterprise zones.
 - The LEP have submitted 2 applications – awaiting decision/feedback.
- Devolution
 - The proposal by the West of England's 4 UAs (supported by the LEP) was submitted on the 4th Sept. Awaiting feedback.
 - Proposal for a £1bn investment which could triple the level of spending on major projects such as transport, flood defense and housing over the next 10 years.
 - The bid could generate an extra £2bn per annum for the economy whilst improving local lives.
- Annual Report
 - In the process of creating a LEP annual report.
 - This will be shared with local MPs and the LEP Board at an event in Westminster.
 - The document will share our ambition for the coming year and our achievements over the last 12 months.
 - Copies will be available at the LEP conference (post meeting note: [Available here](#))
- West of England Growth Hub – www.wearegrowth.co.uk
 - Funding from BIS – part of the SEP. Business West won the tender.
 - Launch for business support providers was held at Ashton Gate on Monday 21 Sept.
 - Interim website is currently live. Main website to be finished by Dec.
 - The Growth Hub will be the first port of call for all SMEs seeking business support and to access advice on finance, skills, export, innovation etc to help them growth.

EU SIF Update

- Committee's last meeting was held on the 9th September.
- Committee has approved (in principle) 4 calls for November (each call is for the whole of the West of England area and will therefore include rurally based businesses).
 - SME support – Social Enterprise.
 - (General) SME support.
 - Innovation.
 - Low Carbon – details not yet been determined.

ACTION: Chris to define what will be classed as 'Social Enterprise'.

- SFA call will be at the end of the year. They are running the national programme and have their own agenda.
 - Building Better Opportunities - £6m over 5 years (including an acknowledgement that issues need addressing in rural areas)
 - Committee members have to be aware of any Registered Interest and must remove themselves from meetings when projects they may be involved in are discussed.
 - A bid to government has been made for the LEP to employ some technical assistance to help increase activity and support the projects.
 - Although the LEADER is a relatively small pot of money (compared to ERDF) the minimum project size will be substantially smaller
 - Business West are working with other companies to drive the Hinkley agenda and a successful and well attended launch event was recently held at Leigh Court.
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Skills

- Becca gave a brief update on the current LEP skills team which has been reduced to 4 strategic members.
- Becca will continue to be the main contact with anything apprenticeship related.
- Pearl will be available to attend future meetings should the group want to discuss skills.
- Non sector specific apprenticeship scheme – Engaging with business and the apprenticeship ambassador network to look at the region and determine what's needed. B2B support, designed for SMEs.
- Other schemes working around business/education engagement include [Careers Enterprise Company](#) (working with local schools).
- Looking at how the [Employability Chartermark](#) can continue. At present Business West have taken it on with Becca supporting. Aim is to roll out to other LEPs and make it bigger.
- Group agree that now they have taken on food, this is a clear route for apprenticeships (as "rural" is geographical) Important to be kept up to date on the various schemes.
- Shared apprenticeship working group (construction and creative are already involved). Happy for a member to attend and represent this sector – meeting date TBC.

ACTION: RESG volunteer needed to attend the shared apprenticeship working group.

- Professional Services sector group are holding a Pathways to Professions (P2P) event in November.

ACTION: Chris to speak to Chris Bull (Professional Services sector chair) - can this sector be involved?

- Prior to the meeting, Chris circulated a presentation showing results from the recent Skills Survey. This data is being used to create 7 sector skills statements (5 x priority and 2 x emerging sectors).

Open discussion on the survey results:

- Mark expressed his concerns and challenged the reliability of the survey.
 - Barriers = Transport (logistics).
 - Connections with career advisers = linking universities and schools.
 - What can be done to help develop the young employees that companies already have – it shouldn't just be about taking on a new apprentice.
 - Ways to encourage companies to adopt a training plan.
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Enterprise Zones

- Mandie gave a quick update on the Food Enterprise Zone which has been delayed slightly due to the MOD land use.
- Currently developing a package of support and hoping for the launch to be early next year.
- Going forward Food will now be an item on the RESG agenda. Although Food Engineering is one of the biggest growth areas it's not "owned" by a sector – important to connect with the Advanced Engineering & Aerospace sector?

ACTION: Chris to find out who would be the best representative to attend a future meeting to address Food Engineering.

- Is a Food sub group needed?
 - Marti updated the group on Bristol Food Connections – Bristol City Council and BBC have committed for the next 3 years.
 - Food & Farming Awards will continue to be held in Bristol.
 - More trustees are needed and a chair that is commercially minded. This has been advertised via the Voscur website.
 - Things are looking positive. Securing funds now = more time to prepare and plan different events (at different levels) throughout the year.
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Rural Broadband

- Chris quickly updated the group on the changes and delays involved with the rollout of Phase 1 and 2 for North Somerset and B&NES.
 - Chris showed an example of the maps that are available online – Green showing where the superfast broadband is 'available' but then compared with actual availability.
 - To show the unreliability of this system, Chris looked at 6 different businesses that are within the "live" area in relation to the cabinet.
 - Important for the group to push/lobby for phase 2.
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AOB

The planning and frequency of next years meetings was discussed and it was agreed to set some dates and then review at the January meeting to check if sub- group was needed.

Next meeting: Wednesday 25 November, 10:30am

Location: TBC

Provisional dates for 2016 meetings

All on Wednesdays, start time 10:30

- 27th January,
- 23rd March,
- 25th May,
- 20th June,
- 28th September and
- 30th November