

**Minutes from the Special Meeting of the North Norfolk Skills Partnership Steering Group
held at Paston College, North Walsham on 24 February 2009 at 10.00 am**

Agenda Item		Action
	<p>Present: Roger Allen (RA) – Connexions Tim Ellen (TE) – Paston College Stuart Hutcheson (SH) – VBS Rik Martin (RM) – Norfolk Learning Partnership Jason Middleton (JMidd) – Shaping Norfolk’s Future John P Morgan (JPM) – Skills Partnership Development Officer Nigel Morgan (NM) – North Norfolk Business Forum and Griffon Area Partnership Jan Munn (JM) – 14-19 Learning Systems Group Richard Polley (RP) – Learning and Skills Council Gill Powell (GP) – North Norfolk Business Forum Jose Socao (JS) – North Norfolk District Council Robin Smith (RS) – North Norfolk District Council Denise Treissman (DT) - IAG Don Venvell (DV) – Chairman Beatrix Ward (BW) – North Norfolk Community Partnership Diane Woodhouse (DW) – IAG Judy Youngs (JY) – Norfolk Adult Education</p>	
1	<p>Introduction and Welcome DV welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded them that this was a single purpose meeting to discuss this group’s contribution to the proposed economic summit. Some helpful statistics and reports had been circulated. Everyone then introduced themselves.</p>	
2	<p>Apologies: Pauline Chamberlain (PC) – Fakenham College Paul Dunning (PD) – 14-19 Worker Janet Holden – Fakenham Area Partnership David Martin (DM) – Business Link Catherine Plewman (CP) – Poppyland Partnership Su Pointer (SP) – Health and Social Care Sector Geoff Thompson (GT) – North Norfolk District Council Steve Walker (SW) – TCHC, Skills Broker, Train to Gain Pam Williams (PW) - Norfolk Learning Difficulties Service Julie Worrell – UEA representing HE Sector</p>	
3	<p>Economic Summit Discussion There have been a series of meetings to face up to the issues surrounding the current recession. The NNCP thematic groups were discussing how best to prioritise allocation of resources with the Better Jobs and Prospects group being perceived as having the greatest impact. Access to services was a key issue and it was agreed that activities with a direct impact on the economy should be supported, eg IAG, VBS and Response to Redundancies. There needs to be an immediate reaction in the short term as well as support for longer term strategies. RS and JPM had briefed Norman Lamb on the economic situation and expressed a number of concerns to him including Paston and the finances of NNDC. It is intended to hold an Economic Recession Summit in late March/early April bringing together major partners in the area and region. It is important to ensure NNCP resources are focussed where they will make a difference. There are three key areas; competitiveness, skills development and job creation and it is important to identify priorities and actions at this summit to deal with these. Access is a major issue locally for which NNDC has no strategy. The recession is now beginning to attack worthy businesses with the potential for</p>	

future growth. However, there is a lack of liquidity. Norman Lamb hopes to hold a cross-party meeting to discuss more help for micro and small businesses.

With regard to access, the IAG team work in the seven market towns in North Norfolk delivering advice and guidance. DT was also part of the redundancy rapid response team. A key feature of this project is £500 worth of training which is available if people are seen before they are made redundant.

The IAG team are constantly being asked for funding for courses to retrain people, which is not available. RP informed the partnership there are a range of activities being run by Jobcentre Plus but JPM pointed out that these were not local and people with limited income could not afford to travel.

JMidd felt there were too many schemes across the County which led to confusion. Business Link had mapped support at a County level but it is important to share this information with all partners so a consistent and up to date message is given.

DT informed the partnership that she is also working with Workhouse to deliver Springboard to Work. So far three sessions have been run, two in Cromer and one in North Walsham and they had been very successful. DW also reported that they had managed to arrange some training in Fakenham. RA mentioned that Connexions is also providing information, advice and guidance to 16-18 year olds. Access to advice and training for those in rural areas was a problem.

JMidd reminded the group that deprivation in Norfolk had been mapped and suggested this tool could be used to identify unemployment hotspots as evidence for proposed initiatives. RM said it is also about matching people with the right training and suggested it would be useful to know what skills are required. NM stated the Business Forum would be unable to provide robust guidance on this. He felt there should be more concentration on preventing people from losing their jobs. Many businesses in the district were run by people with limited ability in running a business or management. They required extra support to strengthen those businesses. The RESULT project around North Walsham had been very successful in this regard but funding for this will end in April. It is important to keep this project going. JMidd reported that there is to be a campaign to encourage businesses to contact Business Link for help.

RS stated that schemes had been developed in the past to help businesses start up which provided some element of training, which had been fairly successful, however these have disappeared. RESULT only covered a very small area. It is important to find more funding now for this type of help County-wide to increase survival rates of small businesses. It is necessary for all public sector bodies to work together at this time.

JMidd informed the group that Shaping Norfolk's Future has prepared a draft concept document for the County to support business start ups and mentoring which it will forward to the District Councils with the aim of starting a programme in April. The main hurdle is funding.

SH informed the group the he offered ICT support to small businesses and access to Business Link courses via computer. Training is being expanded and he hopes to make more courses live. None of the businesses he supported had ceased trading.

JMidd asked if partners could provide him with details of provision they were already involved in so their effectiveness could be enhanced. RS mentioned that he is bidding for Interreg funding to further resource the VBS project.

DT stated that the Government had highlighted the need for one stop shops where advice and guidance together with learning opportunities could be offered. Merchants' Place was already doing this. DV agreed that this Centre's style should be replicated across the district if possible. Computer and business admin skills courses were being run continuously at the Centre.

JM remarked that when people were unemployed they often suffered low self-esteem and it is important to have good quality local provision of training and support. JY commented that part-time courses could be complemented by full-time ones once it is clear what skills are required but these would take time to develop.

ALL

TE stated that the economy will recover eventually and it is important for people to have the basic skills in order to reduce the effects of this downturn and aid recovery. The development of diplomas is important. It is necessary to ensure public funds are used wisely. DT commented that computer, English and Maths skills were vital in order to survive. She has waiting lists of people wishing to do courses in these subjects.

JS stated that it is also important to look in the short term at job protection and sustainability, eg energy saving measures which will have benefits for the future. The proposed Centre for Excellence will encourage this. The single market place project will also be recommended to the summit as this will provide more work for local businesses.

DV mentioned that the economy had been discussed at the Voluntary Steering Group Committee and it was felt that some people would benefit by becoming volunteers. NM said that many experienced people locally had taken early retirement and could possibly help new and small businesses, although this would need co-ordination and training. RS agreed that all new businesses would benefit from a mentor. Self-employment is the bedrock of the future employment market and it is essential for those business people to understand budgeting and business management. NM remarked that these skills are also useful for employees.

DV asked how the diplomas were helping young people at the present time. JM replied that students found the breadth of the diplomas very useful. DV commented that it was important young people felt there were prospects for jobs when they finished their education. TE said that those with good qualifications will be in an excellent position once the economy recovers. It is more difficult for those who lack qualifications.

The economic crisis will create some opportunities for new businesses or smaller businesses to expand but they will need support. RA commented that it is difficult to get support for younger people.

Jobcentre Plus is having difficulty finding enough people to provide advice to clients. DT said she is having the same problem. The IAG team were overstretched and would benefit from a larger team.

If business mentoring was to be successful it would require a co-ordinator to match businesses with relevant mentors from a pool of volunteers. JM commented that mentors are available. NM informed the group that the Business Forum have been looking at a mentoring project and had agreed a structure but funding now needs to be found. This is urgent.

Summary

The County view had been echoed regarding support for a business start up programme. VBS had been recognised as a valuable asset as support could be gained as and when required at home. Diplomas should continue to be supported. There is also a need to carry on supporting IAG, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus etc with more resources.

It is vital to improve core skills by improving accessibility of training as those with poor skills are less likely to want to travel. There is a risk that, as most of the redundancies have been in Norwich, most support will centre there.

There are three strands: competitiveness, skills development and employment creation/job security and in the short term more resources are required. It is necessary to keep diplomas to the forefront and engage with business by supporting initiatives like the Centre for Excellence and the single market place.

RM stated that the funding for the Norfolk Learning Partnership had ended and this will only run for another five months unless more funding is found. It is important to retain successful projects, for example the forum co-ordinating of Skills for Life.

JM felt the unemployment figures for the North Norfolk were inaccurate as small

	business owners often will not sign on but try to keep going which masked the poverty level locally. DT felt that funding for individuals to do training is key. The meeting closed at 12.00 pm.	
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Signed:

Dated: