

Draft Notes of KEB Business Advisory Board Meeting - Wednesday 19th January

1. Summary of key points from the Economic Commentary

- Poor December weather had slowed business performance – with estimates of between a 7% to 50% impact on volumes
- Members reporting slow January trading – thought to be a combination of low consumer confidence and potentially the impact of VAT rise
- Export sales holding up – volatility in currency rates continue to be problematic for long term pricing and yield forecasts
- Continued increases in paper prices – up 20% in last quarter – continues to impact on printing businesses and encourages greater use of digital marketing and communications
- Development companies reporting some upturn in London market – particularly associated to retail – though expectation that 2011 a period of quiet growth
- Public sector cuts not thought to be yet impacting the real economy – some concern over potential interest rate rises.

3. Business Crime

Chief Superintendent and Head of Partnerships, Neil Jerome and Alan Dann, Businesses Crime Reduction Manager came to talk to the group about business crime and the desire of Kent Police to develop stronger relationships with business in the County.

They offered some key facts;

- Kent Police has some 6800 staff, 3700 are officers and the rest are non-warranted officers
- They are one of the largest County forces
- 15 officers work in partnerships with business crime reduction
- Metal theft is on the increase as commodity prices rise. Theft also in Copper and catalytic converters
- Fuel theft has also increased as prices have risen
- Kent Police are taking a £50m budget cut over 4 years front loaded in years 1/2 – anticipating a reduction of some 500 officers and 700 non-warranted officers. The intention is to protect front line jobs where possible and reduce the number of senior officers.

During the discussion members asked about the following

- The role of community police officers
- How the police are communicating with business – and if there was a website to access
- What the impact of Operation Stack was on resources and incidence of business crime
- The scale of money laundering as an issue in the County and the volume of resources

Alan Dann responded

- there are 101 Community Officers and Police Officers work in partnership with Community Officers – funding is ring fenced for 2 years. Feedback received from the public is that these Community officers are highly valued – they do not work at night and do not have powers to arrest.
- Operation Stack results in Police resources being diverted to manage the situation and there is a concern that criminals take advantage of this situation
- The City of London leads on finance crime – there is a small local finance crime team. Alan undertook to make enquiries on the cost of money laundering query.
- Kent Police are keen to improve the reach of their relationship with the business community to proactively tackle business crime and help protect industrial estates, building sites etc. and would be pleased to be invited back as appropriate.

Geoff commented that the BAB should include the business crime opportunity Operation Stack represents in their lobbying on this issue.

4. LEP Update

Geoff, Douglas, Graham Brown and Paul Winter fed back on the meeting which had taken place the previous evening between the Kent & Medway Interim Local Authority and Business reps - the Local Authority LEP reps being – Paul Carter, Rodney Chambers, Jeremy Kite, Paul Watkins, John Gilbey, Andrew Bowles and Mark Worrall. This was a pre-meeting for the first LEP Board meeting on 24th January – and an attempt to create a coherent “team Kent” approach to inputting to the LEP.

The issue of the representative credentials of the BAB members was addressed and allayed. It was recognized that as the LEP develops so will the relationship with business – and that this should be expanded to include supermarkets and banks etc. The governance of the LEP had been discussed – agreement that the Board at 44 was too large, and the suggestion that either a smaller board or a small executive group formed to work to the large Board created to push forward the LEPs activities. The role of the chairman is recognized as key and the potential for conducting an executive search for this position will be explored.

In discussion the Board made the following points

- Governance issues are much less importance than the substance of what the LEP is equipped to do
- The BAB must be actively used to feed in issues – contribute to the agenda
- The LEP should discuss and take a view on the London Assembly recent report on Airport capacity for London
- A coherent Communications strategy will be vital to support the effective operation of the LEP – enable it to make and maintain the relationships needed with stakeholders etc.
- The FSB Kent Branch is keen to engage with the LEP

Geoff - concluded the discussion by remarking it was important that communication and reporting networks were quickly established for the LEP to make sure Business had easy access and could easily engage.

Date of next meeting

Tuesday	22	March	Inspiration Suite, Village Hotel
Tuesday	17	May	Village Hotel
Tuesday	19	July	Village Hotel
Wednesday	14	September	Village Hotel
Tuesday	22	November	Village Hotel