

**East of England Regional Economic Forum**  
**21 April 2009, 9.00am-11.00am**  
**Location – Halifax Suite, Holiday Inn Hotel Norwich North, Cromer Road,**  
**Norwich, NR6 6JA**

**Minutes**

**Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Barbara Follett MP	Regional Minister (co-chair)
Nick Burfield	EERA
Richard Ellis	East of England Development Agency, Chair (co-chair)
Deborah Cadman	East of England Development Agency, Chief Executive
Richard Courridge	Regional Chambers of Commerce & Industry Representative
Daniel Cox	Leader of Norfolk County Council
Kevin Crompton	E of E Local Authority Chief Executives
Megan Dobney	Regional TUC
Katrina Doherty	Learning and Skills Council
Gwyn Drake	Highways Agency, Regional Director
Mark Eriera -Guyer	COVER
Robert Gordon	Chair of EoE Strategic Authority Leaders'
Angela Harrowing	Government Office for the East of England
Terence Illott	Government Office for the East of England
Laurie Kay	Learning and Skills Council
Michael Large	Chairman, East of England Business Group
Karen Livingstone	NHS East Of England
Steve Morphew	Leader of Norwich City Council
Chris Parkhouse	Chairman, Institute of Directors East of England Region
Paul Pugh	Government Office, Regional Director
Lynda Russell	Jobcentre Plus Regional Director
Andrea Stark	Arts Council England
Richard Tunnicliffe	East of England CBI
David White	Norfolk County Council, Chief Executive
Ian Jenkins	GO-East Secretariat

**Apologies**

David Burch	Federation of Small Businesses
Stephen Castle	Chair, Nations and Regions East, London 2012
Terry Fuller	Homes and Communities Agency, Regional Director
Richard Howitt	MEP, East of England
Neil McKay*	NHS East of England Chief Executive
Ian McPherson	Norfolk Constabulary, Chief Constable
Chris Mole	Parliamentary Assistant to Regional Minister
Caroline Neville*	Learning and Skills Council, Regional Director
John Reynolds	EERA Chair
Brian Stewart*	EERA Chief Executive
Caroline Williams*	Regional Chambers of Commerce & Industry Representative

\* deputy attending

## Action Points from this meeting

	<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>
1.	Consider how the empty shops revival plan should operate in the region.	Go-East, EEDA & partners
2.	Respond to Megan Dobney on the latest position on the delivery of the Redundancies Plan in respect of a specific business that had gone into administration.	Lynda Russell
3.	Future Economic updates to include a more detailed look at how the Government's response to the recession was being delivered in specific places that could be more vulnerable.	EEDA and GO-East
4	Provide case studies on Real Help Now in terms of what is making an impact, or where support is not being delivered in this region.	REF Members
5	Minister for the Third Sector to be invited to visit the region.	GO-East
6	Use networks to ensure maximum take-up of training support packages by those made redundant or currently out of work, as part of the joined-up implementation of the Regional Redundancies Plan.	REF Members
7	Support the development of a skills hub through which vacancies could be matched against the skills of those seeking employment.	REF members
8	Commission a piece of work to identify how the region is responding to skills activism and the skills that will be required in the medium term for key growth sectors, in order to begin addressing those gaps.	LSC & partners
9	Paper for a future meeting on the opportunities and implications coming out of the "New Industry, New Jobs" strategy.	EEDA
10	Future meeting to examine joined-up delivery for 16-24 year olds across a range of initiatives and funding programmes.	LSC & partners
11	Andrea Stark to provide Barbara Follett with an Arts Council England perspective on barriers in terms of delivery for young people.	Andrea Stark
12	A representative from Higher Education to be invited to join the Forum.	Secretariat
13	Provide a paper on access to finance for the next meeting.	EEDA
14	Provide Barbara Follett (via the Secretariat) with feedback on the Budget by 28 April	REF members
15	10 July REF has been cancelled in favour of an extended meeting on 26 June	All to note

## **Welcome and Introductions**

1. Barbara Follett thanked the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce for hosting the meeting to coincide with the Norfolk Skills Conference and welcomed those present to the sixth meeting of the Regional Economic Forum.

### **Item 1- Economic Update**

- **Regional Overview**

2. Deborah Cadman highlighted the key messages in the monthly Economic Outlook paper. She said that business confidence remained weak, but was less pessimistic than at the end of 2008. Unemployment was rising, with claimant count of 3.3% being the highest for over a decade, albeit still below the UK average of 3.9%. However employment had also risen, with the fourth quarter of 2008 seeing higher numbers in employment than the same quarter in 2007. The diversity of the economy was considered to be a contributory factor as to why the region had not been as seriously impacted as other regions so far. Business Link and the banks were reinforcing a message that access to finance was available for those businesses with robust plans.

- **Local Overview – (Cllr Daniel Cox, Leader of Norfolk County Council)**

3. Daniel Cox gave an overview of the recession's impacts on Norfolk. He said that the local economy was in a reasonably good shape, despite some significant job cuts, constrained consumer spending and pressures on particular sectors. He emphasised that while the Council was responding to the immediate impacts of the recession, it was maintaining a focus on the longer term fundamentals of the local economy and making investment decisions accordingly. While tourism accommodation bookings were very strong for summer 2009, other sectors were struggling as a result of reduced business and consumer confidence.

4. Steve Morphey echoed the comments about confidence and said that while the business base in Norwich was structurally sound there were continuing concerns over cash-flow, access to finance, and the sustainability of certain national business models. He said that the Council had taken decisions to bring forward investments (e.g. housing double glazing programme) and was helping to support advice to business, as well as money advice for individual citizens.

- **Discussion**

5. Barbara Follett referred to the Government's announcement of an empty shops revival plan to help prevent high street decline <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1201277> and said she would welcome advice on how the initiative should operate in the region. Megan Dobney asked about the delivery of the Regional Redundancies Plan in

relation to a specific business that had gone into administration and Lynda Russell agreed that she would provide Megan Dobney with the latest position. The meeting agreed that, while there was an increasingly good strategic understanding of the impacts of the recession and the response at the regional level, there was a need to take a more detailed look at how the Government's response was being delivered in specific places that could be more vulnerable. This was agreed for future meetings.

**Action – GO-East & EEDA to consider, with partners, how the empty shops revival plan should operate in the region.**

**Action – Lynda Russell to respond to Megan Dobney on the latest position on the delivery of the Redundancies Plan in respect of a specific business that had gone into administration.**

**Action – Future Economic updates to include a more detailed look at how the Government's response to the recession was being delivered in specific places that could be more vulnerable.**

## **Item 2 - Matters arising from previous meetings**

6. The meeting discussed developments in relation to the automotive industry and a paper on mortgage support for homeowners. Barbara Follett said that she would welcome case studies around the package of initiatives contained in "Real Help Now" in terms of what was making an impact, or where support was not being delivered in the region. The meeting agreed that while it did take time for policy initiatives to become delivery reality, the Government guaranteed lending through Enterprise Finance Guarantee <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk> was an example of an initiative that was now more widely known. Barbara Follett said she hoped to accompany Richard Ellis to a meeting with the banking sector on 21 May. It was reported that the Government was listening to those who were seeking action to bolster trade credit insurance.

7. It was also agreed that as part of Real Help Now for the Voluntary and Community Sector, Kevin Brennan (Minister for the Third Sector) would be invited to visit the region before the autumn. Barbara Follett also drew members' attention to the report card of the Task and Finish Group on Investment and Infrastructure.

**Action – REF members to provide case studies around the package of initiatives contained in "Real Help Now" in terms of what was making an impact, or where support was not being delivered in this region.**

**Action – The Minister for the Third Sector to be invited to visit the region before the autumn as part of Real Help Now for the voluntary and community sector.**

### **Item 3 – Skills East - reskilling for today, upskilling for tomorrow**

8. Laurie Kay introduced the above paper on skills that was timely given the publication of Business Secretary Lord Mandelson's strategy for the future, "New Industry, New Jobs" on 20 April <http://nds.coi.gov.uk/environment/fullDetail.asp?ReleaseID=398950&NewsAreaID=2&NavigatedFromDepartment=True> It was agreed that members would work to ensure there was maximum take-up of training support packages by those made redundant or currently out of work. This was part of the joined-up implementation of the Regional Redundancies Plan discussed last month. It was also agreed the members would support the development of a skills hub through which public sector vacancies (and in time other vacancies) could be matched against the skills of those seeking employment, or where appropriate skills were not available, pre-employment action could be instigated. To make this a reality, it was important that employers advertised posts through Jobcentre Plus so that this triggered the integrated support that was available on employment and skills.

9. The meeting also agreed to the commissioning of a piece of work, led by the Learning and Skills Council, that will set out how the region is responding to skills activism and identify the skills that will be required in the medium term for key growth sectors, in order to begin addressing those gaps. This would be part of identifying what was necessary to deliver the "New Industry, New Jobs" strategy. In discussion it was agreed that Insight East had a role to play in identifying growth sectors, albeit that forecasting the future direction of the economy was not entirely predictable. It was also important that business and skills organisations represented on the Regional Skills Partnership worked together to ensure a clear alignment of public expenditure behind a clear vision.

10. In conclusion, EEDA agreed to produce a paper for a future meeting on the opportunities and implications for the region coming out of the BERR "New Industry, New Jobs" strategy as a whole, highlighting sectors that were important regionally, or sub-regionally. There was also agreement that REF should examine joined-up delivery for 16-24 year olds in terms of youth unemployment and the risk of adverse long-term implications for adult life, including graduate apprenticeships for growth sectors, work experience, internships and delivery barriers. On the last point, Andrea Stark agreed to provide Barbara Follett with an Arts Council England perspective on delivery barriers. It was also agreed that a representative from Higher Education in the region should be invited to join the Forum.

**Action – REF members to work to ensure that there was maximum take-up of training support packages by those made redundant or currently out of work, as part of the joined-up implementation of the Regional Redundancies Plan.**

**Action – REF members to support the development of a skills hub through which vacancies could be matched against the skills of those**

**seeking employment, or where appropriate skills were not available, pre-employment action could be instigated.**

**Action – Learning and Skills Council to work with partners to identify how the region is responding to skills activism and the skills that will be required in the medium term for key growth sectors, in order to begin addressing those gaps.**

**Action – EEDA agreed to produce a paper for a future meeting on the opportunities and implications for the region coming out of the BERR “New Industry, New Jobs” strategy.**

**Action – A future meeting to examine joined-up delivery for 16-24 year olds in terms of youth unemployment and the risk of adverse long-term implications for adult life, including examination of graduate apprenticeships for growth sectors, work experience, internships and delivery barriers.**

**Action – Andrea Stark to provide Barbara Follett with an Arts Council England perspective on barriers in terms of delivery for young people.**

**Action – A representative from Higher Education to be invited to join the Forum.**

#### **Item 4 – Support to help Businesses**

11. Deborah Cadman highlighted the key points in an update paper on the support to help businesses in the region. She invited members to feedback to EEDA on the impacts of initiatives in the region and issues they would like to see considered in more depth during future meetings. In discussion, it was considered that access to finance remained a difficult area for businesses to work through, and that early engagement with Business Link was essential to know how to access funding. It was also important that the business community recognised that a robust challenge to failing business models from funders and bankers was part of business as usual. It was agreed that EEDA would provide a paper on access to finance for the next meeting that would cover traditional bank lending, venture capital and the contribution of business angels, and how Business Link were working with the banks to provide sound advice to business.

12. The meeting considered a paper on innovative solutions that was a snapshot of initiatives at the regional and sub-regional level across the English Regions, compiled through the Government Office Network. The meeting concluded that there were no strong candidates in the paper for replication in this region.

**Action – EEDA to provide a paper on access to finance for the next meeting.**

## **Item 5 – REF and national policy**

13. Barbara Follett said that the Regional Select Committee would meet again on 23 April and that its first Inquiry was likely to be on either the impact of the recession, or the Government response to it in the region.

14. Barbara Follett said that the Council of Regional Ministers (CRM) would meet on 29 April and the agenda would include a focus on how the Budget had been received. She said that she would welcome feedback from members on the Budget in time for the CRM meeting.

15. It was agreed that the REF meeting scheduled for 10 July REF would be cancelled in favour of an extended meeting on 26 June – the next meeting date.

**Action – REF members to provide Barbara Follett (via the Secretariat) with their feedback on the Budget by 28 April.**

**Action – REF members to note that the meeting on 10 July has been cancelled in favour of a meeting of extended duration on 26 June.**

Secretariat, 20 May 2009