

## East of England Regional Economic Forum

6 November 9.00-10.10

Location – LSC, Redwing House, Chelmsford

### Notes

#### Attendees

Barbara Follett	Regional Minister (co-chair)
Richard Ellis	EEDA Chair (co-chair)
Chris Mole	Parliamentary Assistant to Barbara Follett
Peter Watson	Executive Director, EEDA
John Reynolds	Chair, EERA
Brian Stewart	Chief Executive, EERA
Chris Hilliard	Regional Director, GO-East
Caroline Neville	Regional Director, LSC
Lynda Russell	Regional Director, Jobcentre Plus
Neil McKay	Chief Executive, NHS East of England
Gwyn Drake	Regional Director, Highways Agency
Michael Large	Chair, East of England Business Group
David Burch	Federation of Small Businesses
Jerry Golland	Chairman, Institute of Directors East of England Region
Caroline Tapster	Chair, East of England Local Authority Chief Executives
Megan Dobney	Regional TUC
Mike Todman (Secretariat)	Strategy Unit, GO-East

#### Apologies

Richard Tunnicliffe	East of England CBI
Deborah Cadman	Chief Executive, EEDA
Caroline Williams	Regional Chambers of Commerce & Industry
Richard Howitt	MEP, East of England
Naisha Polaine	Regional Director, Housing Corporation
Simon Bishop	Director, English Partnerships

#### 1) Welcome and introductions.

Barbara Follett and Richard Ellis welcomed the group and expressed their thanks to colleagues for rearranging diaries in order to attend. Barbara Follett

outlined the new national economic architecture that the group would be part of.

Barbara Follett also introduced Chris Mole, the new Parliamentary Assistant to the Regional Minister.

## **2) Role of Regional Economic Forum.**

- *Terms of reference.*

The group discussed the constitution of the Forum and considered whether any additional or alternative members should be invited to join.

It was agreed that a representative of the voluntary and community sector should be invited to join the group.

### **Action – Secretariat to approach COVER to nominate a regional voluntary and community sector representative.**

Schools (and specifically the Building Schools for the Future programme) and Colleges are represented via the Local Authority and Learning and Skills Council representatives.

### **Action – Any further comments on the draft Terms of Reference circulated to Forum members to secretariat by close 21/11/08.**

- *Links with National Economic Council, Regional Economic Council and Council of Regional Ministers.*

The new national architecture and the mechanisms by which information from the Forum would be fed back to national meeting across government were outlined and discussed. Outputs from this meeting will be fed into the Council of Regional Ministers (CRM), the Regional Economic Council (REC) and from these into the National Economic Forum (NEC).

Barbara Follett expressed her thanks to EEDA and GO-East for the support and briefing they have provided to prepare her for all of the meetings involved in this new structure. It was agreed that these briefings would be shared confidentially with Forum members, to inform their discussions.

- *Links with Regional Partnership Group.*

The differences between the Regional Economic Forum (REF) and the Regional Partnership Group (RPG) were defined. The Regional Partnership Group is a longer term, more strategic group with a broad view across policy delivery in the region. By contrast, the Regional Economic Forum is an executive action group with a specific focus on economic issues and outcomes for the East of England.

Feedback was provided from Regional Economic Council meeting, which took place on 05/11/08.

### **3) Measures to respond to regional economic impacts.**

The Forum members gave their perspectives on the state of the regional economy, discussing what the economic challenges are in the East of England and the options for responding to them.

The Forum agreed that discussions should be focused on necessary remedies to specific areas of concern within the region which can be communicated to Council of Regional Ministers and Regional Economic Council.

Issues discussed appear below:

#### **Impacts on Local Authorities**

Loss of revenue, increased costs and demand on services.

Employee pension schemes.

Relaxation of targets and measures.

The cross government commitment to settle accounts within 10 days.

Increased demand for social housing.

Section 106 contributions.

#### **Impacts on Businesses**

Access to credit / cost of credit,

Business rates on empty properties,

Corporate pension schemes and Financial Reporting Standard 17.

Proposals for European Investment Bank funding.

#### **Skills**

Relaxation or amendment of the 16 hour rule.

Maintaining investment in skills through the downturn.

Promoting the Train2Gain funding Learning and Skills Council can make available for Small and Medium sized Enterprises.

Flexibility and transfer between budgets and funding streams.

#### **Diversions**

LSC Restructuring.

#### **Sharing of information**

With London and South East as part of the functional Greater South East region.

**Action – East of England Business Group to prepare a note on changes that could be made to Financial Reporting Standard 17.**

#### **4) Other measures to bring forward investment.**

The Forum agreed to produce a list of regional infrastructure projects that had been affected by the economic downturn and which would benefit from intervention by the Regional Minister, Forum members or other regional partners.

These should be existing projects where intervention could mitigate the impacts of economic circumstances, rather than new projects or projects requiring additional funding from central departments.

**Action - All Forum members are invited to submit suggestions of suitable infrastructure projects.**

#### **5) Requirements for further work, date and venue of next meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the group would take place in Cambridge on 04/12/08, venue and timing to be confirmed.

The Minister was keen that the Forum meets at a variety of locations, throughout the region and invited attendees to suggest venues for future meetings.

The Forum also requested that meetings for 2009 be booked well ahead of time.

**Action – All Forum members are invited to submit bids for the venue of future meetings.**

**Action – Secretariat to circulate a list of proposed dates and venues for Regional Economic Forum meetings in 2009.**

#### **6) Communications.**

The Forum agreed that it would consider communications as a standing item.

It was also agreed that a note of meetings would be produced and circulated within 2 days of each meeting and published on the Regional Minister's pages of the GO-East website within 10 days.

#### **7) Any other business.**

None