

East of England Regional Economic Forum

4 December 2008, 9.00am-10.30am

Location – Babraham Institute, Cambridgeshire.

Minutes

Attendees

Name	Position
Barbara Follett MP	Regional Minister (co-chair)
Marco Cereste	EEDA Board Member
Chris Mole MP	Parliamentary Assistant to Regional Minister
Cllr Jill Tuck	Cambridgeshire County Council, Leader
Deborah Cadman	RDA, Chief Executive
Cllr John Reynolds	EERA, Chair
Brian Stewart	EERA, Chief Executive
Paul Pugh	GO, Regional Director
Terence Illott	GO-East, Director of Economy and Environment
Tim Freathy	GO-East, Director of Development and Infrastructure
Caroline Neville	LSC, Regional Director
Gwyn Drake	Highways Agency, Regional Director
Karen Livingstone	NHS East of England, Chief Executive
Terry Fuller	Homes and Communities Agency, Regional Director
Martin Reeves	Bedfordshire County Council, Chief Executive
Michael Large	Chairman, East of England Business Group
David Burch	Federation of Small Businesses
Richard Tunnicliffe	East of England CBI
Jerry Golland	Chairman Institute of Directors East of England Region
Caroline Williams	Regional Chambers of Commerce & Industry Representative
Megan Dobney	Regional TUC
Mark Ereira-Guyer	COVER
Mike Todman	GO-East (Notes)

Apologies

Richard Howitt	MEP, East of England
Dympna Wilson	Jobcentre Plus, HR Business Partner
Lynda Russell	Jobcentre Plus, Regional Director

Barbara Follett thanked Forum members for attending and for taking the time and effort to attend such an early meeting.

1) Progress on Actions from 06/11/08 meeting and Pre Budget Report Events.

All Actions from the November REF meeting have been cleared.

Barbara Follett advised the group that the 27/11/08 Council of Regional Ministers meeting was cancelled and that the next CRM meeting is scheduled

for 11/12/08. The Forum discussed how feedback from CRM and how information collected by members was shared. Barbara Follett agreed to update Forum members following all future CRM meetings and GO-East agreed to share their fortnightly briefing on the wider impacts of the economic downturn with REF members. Business organisations were encouraged to feed in intelligence on impacts to EEDA so that they can be included in the regular state of the region report.

Action: Barbara Follett to send REF members an update following each CRM meeting.

The forum discussed the content of the Pre Budget Report and Queen's Speech, with Forum members provided feedback on the content of both.

There was discussion on the implications of the Marine Bill for the region, including feedback from a visit by Defra and KPMG to the region earlier in the week regarding the location of the Marine Management Organisation. A decision on the bid is expected by end of the year.

Action: EEDA to produce a short brief for REF members on the Marine Management Organisation bid.

There was discussion on the impact of the downturn on the manufacturing and tourism sectors.

2) Evidence of economic impacts within the region.

Councillor Jill Tuck presented to the group on the impacts of the downturn in Cambridgeshire, providing an overview of the impacts on the County and the Local Authority.

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.

Concerns were reported around resources from across the Third Sector as they seek to support individuals affected. The Forum noted the increase in demand on Citizen's Advice Bureaus across the region and the additional funding made available to them in the Pre Budget Report. The Forum agreed that further work should be done to identify where and how this money is spent in the region.

Action: GO to track where additional CAB funding is being applied for and spent within the region.

COVER reported that they are surveying VCS groups regionally and will report their findings to the next REF.

NHS regionally reported that the Pre Budget Report confirmed that they are in a position to increase spending, while still realising efficiencies, meaning that

they will be able bring forward substantial amounts of capital investment over the next two years.

Action: SHA to produce a brief on acceleration of capital spending in 2008/9 and 2009/10 for Barbara Follett.

Other issues discussed appear below:

Impacts on the Construction Industry:

- The long term impacts of the downturn on the construction sector and particularly around the closure of three cement works within the region.
- The impact of delays resulting from Local Government Reform on contractors within the construction industry.
- Means by which housebuilders can be encouraged not to mothball sites.
- The use of local labour and construction agreements and apprenticeships to ensure that housing projects produce jobs locally.
- Ensuring that we still build sustainable communities.
- Recognition that civil construction hasn't been affected as much as housing.

Impacts on Businesses

- Whether prompt payment by public bodies filters down to sub contractors.
- The lack of credit available to fund buy-outs from insolvency.
- Routes of communications with small businesses and the potential of using Chambers of Commerce and Business Rate Demands.

Impact on Local Authorities

- Concerns around how to deliver further efficiency savings, without affecting services (?)
- Council tax: do you help communities more by cutting council tax or through higher tax and better services?
- Recognition that inflation for Local Authorities is running 2 - 2.5% above standard measures.
- Opportunities to change ways of working and funding models.

Skills Issues

- How to the increase the attractiveness and uptake of apprenticeships.

Collaborative Working

- General recognition that the complexity of the current economic situation required closer working between regional and local partners.

3) Measures to respond to immediate economic impacts.

- At national level.
- Within the region.

Due to time constraints the Forum agreed to deal with this item out of committee by correspondence ahead of the next REF meeting.

Action: GO-East to circulate notes and suggested actions on Legal Aid for forum members to consider.

4) Other measures to bring forward investment.

The Forum discussed the list of infrastructure projects

Some concerns were raised around how the list fitted with other regional processes of prioritisation. It was agreed that EEDA, EERA and GO-East would undertake further work to ensure that the requirements are clear and fully reflect regional priorities.

5) Requirements for further work, date and venue of next meeting (13th January 2009).

The next meeting of the group will take place in Hatfield, Hertfordshire on 13/01/09.

Future dates for the meeting will be:

13 Jan 2009
27 Feb 2009
24 Mar 2009
21 April 2009
8 May 2009
26 June 2009

6) Communications.

It was agreed that an update would be circulated to regional partners following the meeting.

Action: GO-East to circulate a contact list for the forum to REF members.

Action: GO-East to provide a forward agenda for future REF meetings.

7) Any other business.

The group discussed the format of REF meetings to date and agreed that future meetings would benefit from an overview of the regional economy at the start of the meeting.

Action: GO-East to add an update on the regional economy to the agenda for future REFs. EEDA to make a short presentation at the beginning of each meeting.

There was discussion around the membership of the REF and whether a representative should be invited from the Higher Education and Banking

sectors. It was agreed that the membership would not be expanded and that Higher Education would be represented via LSC.