

DORSET LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP RURAL ENTERPRISE GROUP COMMITTEE

MINUTES

16th December 2021 10:30 – 12:00

MS Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Luke Rake (LR) Chair	Dorset LEP and Kingston Maurward College (KMC)
Jon Bird (JB)	Dorset Council (DC)
Laura Zisa-Swann (LZS)	Dorset LEP
Connor Tracay (CT)	Dorset LEP
Will Bond (WB)	Alaska Ecological Contracting Ltd (AEC)
Nicola Kildunne (NK)	Federation of Small Business (FSB)
Ian Alexander (IA)	Natural England (NE)
Imogen Davenport (ID)	Dorset Local Nature Partnership (LNP)
Elliott Hunt (EH)	Country Land and Business Association Limited (CLA)

Guest attendee:

Cecilia Bufton (CB)	Dorset LEP
Mira Koseva (MK)	Dorset LEP

Apologies:

Neil Wedge (NW)
Tom Munro (TM)
Louise Stratton (LS)
Martin Sutcliffe (MS)

Item	Subject/Title	Action owner
1.	Welcome and Apologies Apologies noted. Attendees introduced themselves and LR welcomed EH to the Group as new CLA representative.	
2.	Declarations of Interest None declared.	
3.	Minutes of Last Meeting (17th June 2021) The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record. <u>Matters arising from the meeting held on the 17th June 2021</u> To appointment a new CLA representative for the Group. LR confirmed EH appointed LR to work with DC and Dorset LEP to review REG's aims following Dorset LEP review. Review is still ongoing, hoping for finalisation by February 2022	
4.	Local Plan and Dorset Council Update JB gave an update explaining that the Local Plan comments are now published on their website with approximately 9000 comments received.	

	<p>The council have not yet responded to these comments. The current purposed timeline for the Plan is as below</p> <p>May 2022 – Draft Plan publication and consultation October 2022 – Local Plan and comments go to planning inspectorate Spring 2023 – Public examination Winter 2023 – Plan finalised</p> <p>Discussion followed with regard to the possible direction the Plan will take and if any major changes are anticipated following comments received. JB was not aware of any direction changes yet discussing recent decisions such as the approved build of solar farm and if this indicates planned direction or not.</p> <p>Volume of negative comments made on North of Dorset Housing development was commented on but not yet known how the Council will respond to these whilst acknowledging the need for more homes. With BCP's recent high housing targets and mention of duty of collaboration between neighbouring Councils the potential risk to Dorset's Local Plan being added to by BCP due to lack of building land availability was discussed.</p> <p>Talk followed regarding the possibility of more solar farms developing as the farming community realise the need for direction change with renewable, particularly solar being an obvious route. With this direction an additional point was made on employment land and the need to consider how planning will deal with farm buildings that are freed up from their current purposes.</p> <p>It was highlighted that solar farms change the economics of the countryside with traditional farming using investment from farmers themselves and renewable farming dealing with investors. Concern here is that this takes the work and investment opportunity away from local farmers and gives it to investors that are often outside of the county. Renewable farming is viewed favourable but more opportunity is needed for local farmers/land owners which would result in greater local benefit.</p> <p>WB: Suggested using this forum to discuss how we keep reward from farm scale renewables in Dorset</p> <p>Action: add farm scale renewables item to next meeting agenda</p> <p>CLA membership has seen changes to farmer income streams with renewables proving an option for many but other directions are being used especially for farmers who don't have the location for renewable.</p>	LR/LZS
5.	<p>Dorset Labour Market Information</p> <p>MK presented on Dorset Labour Market insights. MK noted that the data typically looks at the whole of the Dorset LEP area including BCP as well as DC areas but where possible it was broken down into urban and rural areas to show the difference in how industry has been developing.</p> <p>Summary key points are given below.</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The end to lockdown in the summer created a unique demand spike. 47% increase in vacancies in November 21 when compared to 2020. • Although vacancies have increased mostly in urban areas the increase has been across the board including rural areas as well. • Health and Social Care have significantly more vacancies and it is the most significant % of vacancies in Dorset Council areas. It is also a sector increasing in demand at a greater rate than the national average. • Hospitality, Food and Tourism, Business Management and Operations, Sales and Clerical are the sectors seeing good growth in the DC areas whereas IT is decreasing. Food and accommodation services in Dorset has more than doubled since 2020. • This year has seen much higher demand in low level skills labour such as cleaners and hospitality. This could be linked to jobs that were possibly taken by members of the EU previously. • Dorset area is slowly showing direction to getting back to pre-pandemic employment rates with vacancies growing and unemployment decreasing. • GPD had a big decline in 2020 and then quick rise but now really slow growth the last year and still not back to pre-pandemic levels • Sectors experiencing recruitment difficulty are care and nursing, software engineering, project managers and customer services. • Employees are reluctant to switch roles due to the pandemic and many vacancies are temporary so struggle to attract candidates • Covid has prompted many foreign workers to return home and not sure if they will return. This is coupled with fewer incoming EU workers. • Dorset Local Skills report is due 28 January 2022 • Website link for more information is: https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/latest-insights <p>Data source questions followed the presentation. MK confirmed the use of Software Burning Glass which does have limitations but provides good basis for trend data to show what is happening. The Committee went on to discuss the impact this method has on truly reflecting top job sectors with agricultural and land sectors not typically advertising opportunities in ways that this data stream would pick up resulting in sector opportunities being under represented and disadvantaged when presented to audiences. Linked to this LR commented on his surprise to the exclusion of environmental jobs from the top 10 sectors commenting that the dominance of health care in Dorset's labour market shows it continues to be driven by the aging population and raised the question of how this should be managed in rurally dispersed areas.</p> <p>WB highlighted the classifications used and how these can potentially further dilute the data for example environmental work doesn't always fall into these set out categories. More lateral ways of collection are needed perhaps making use of surveys to try and gain richer information.</p> <p>LR and ID discussed that while vacancies are increasing employers are finding it hard to recruit, a contributing factor in this could be people's reluctance to move following the pandemic. This challenge seems to be across the board regardless of sector.</p>	
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	<p>Action: MK advised that work is underway looking at key growth sectors including agriculture particularly agritech and offered future presentation to go over agricultural and green jobs in more detail.</p>	LR/LZS
	<p>Action: MK to share slides with LZS for circulating to Committee.</p>	MK/LZS
6.	<p>The Pandemic and the impact on SME's</p> <p>NK presented on the pandemic impact on SME market, main points noted below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over last few years many factors have impacted SME's not just the pandemic. EU transition, skill shortages and now labour shortage plus the rising living costs such as inflation, minimum wage and energy prices. • Pandemic showed essential part SMEs play being able to provide services and products to local community during lock down. • Big acceleration in digital engagement. • Home working has had a big impact; lack of HR infrastructure, employee trust, additional health and safety measures, cost of providing equipment and mental health impact. • Business confidence levels in South West normally optimistic but for first time has dipped below national average due to high levels of uncertainty. • Constant change in environment means it's hard for SMEs to keep staff up to date and stricter restrictions lead to suppression in customer demand, hospitality industry has been particularly affected. • Labour shortage is preventing expansion and growth as well as many SMEs struggling to retain staff • SMEs have strong position to be agile and adapt to change but have to embrace digitalisation and currently seeing a gulf between companies taking the opportunities and those that aren't possibly due to lack of business owner skills and confidence in digital technology • Key is to help businesses maximise digital opportunities and help with HR aspects covering good leadership and looking after staff <p>Discussion followed on the divide between businesses that have done well and are struggling to expand fast enough and those that have found it hard. Question was asked if there were common themes that Dorset can benefit from. Smaller communities seem to be doing better than larger ones, those embracing digital including interactive websites, e-commerce, social media, online appointments and service videos are doing better.</p> <p>The importance to educate businesses to show success is achievable, sharing of best practice and the use of peer networks to give businesses environments to learn and make real improvements was highlighted.</p> <p>Action: NK to share slides with LZS for circulating to Committee.</p>	NK/LZS
7.	<p>Members update</p> <p>ID: LMP have recruitment open for new Board members particularly looking for land management and business representatives. Contact ID or sign up to newsletter for more info. Request to EH to share amongst CLA colleagues. LMP are hoping to go for national environment investment ready fund 2nd round through the Environment Agency deadline of 3rd February.</p>	EH

	<p>EH: CLA busy helping/advising members through agriculture transition, rural diversification is a key aspect.</p> <p>LR: Undertaking work on South-West BPS to ELMS transition to respond to DEFRA on behalf of Dorset LEP to use business support funding to enable farmers to get additional guidance and help with transition. Together with CB spoke on all party parliamentary groups and chair of Devon and Cornwall LMPs and seen good support giving opportunity for business resilience, environment improvement and enhancement.</p> <p>JB: Currently filling in for David Walsh in interim. Levelling up bid was unsuccessful. One successful bid through community renewable fund for young enterprise to deliver enterprise programme to young school children. Their additional restrictions grant competitive round just closed receiving £7m worth of applications for £1.5m worth of funding. No news on Plan B/C funding from government.</p> <p>IA: Sustainable farming incentive launched replacing entry level schemes. Expecting landscape recovery scheme to launch first week in January and looking forward to seeing detail of this. Working on finishing touches for £1m of infrastructure to facilitate grazing unit restructure on private heath nature reserve. Provisional agreement for employment for 3 farming enterprises to provide livestock, 2 of which are orientated around providing high nature value landscape grazing.</p> <p>CB: No update as yet waiting for white paper LEP review expected end of January.</p>	
8.	<p>Board Report</p> <p>Action: LR and LZS to work on points to report back to the Board.</p>	LR/LZS
9.	<p>Any other business</p> <p>Covered in member updates agenda item 7.</p>	

Note: Date of Next Meeting – 17th March 2022 11:00 - 12:30