

Minutes of the eleventh Local Economic Forum meeting held on Tuesday 10th December 2002 in the Lighthouse Suite, Lerwick Hotel, Lerwick, Shetland.

Members Present:

Jimmy Smith, Federation of Small Businesses (in the Chair)
Councillor Rob Anderson (Shetland Islands Council)
Gordon Dargie (Shetland College)
David Finch (Shetland Enterprise Company)
Alec Miller (Shetland Islands Partnership)
Laurence Tulloch (Shetland Islands Tourism)

By Invitation:

Alvin Bashforth (SIC Development Department)
Andy Carter (Careers Scotland)
Maggie Gemmill (Manager, Jobcentre Plus)
Robin Lingard (Kinnairdie Consulting)
Emma Perry (SIC Chief Executive's Office)
Jacqui Watt (SIC Community Services Department)

Ann Black, Shetland Enterprise Company (Secretary)

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman welcomed all present, particularly Laurence Tulloch who had taken over the Shetland Islands Tourism nomination from Robert Smith. Apologies were received from Douglas Irvine (SIC Development Department), Brian Isbister (Shetland Enterprise Company), Gordon Johnson, (North Atlantic Fisheries College) and Kay Smith (SIC Training Section).

2. MINUTES OF MEETING OF 19th SEPTEMBER

The minutes of the LEF meeting of 19th September 2002 were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

New Ventures Scheme - Alvin Bashforth reported that the scheme was currently in abeyance following the failure to attract suitable candidates. Robin Lingard offered to see whether Bruce Morrison, Chief Executive of FUSION, could suggest an alternative way forward.

4. REPORT FROM SKILLS SUB-GROUP

Robin Lingard introduced the first report from the Skills and Learning Sub-group and gave an update on the main points from the meeting held the previous day. (Download at foot of page).

The Forum noted and welcomed the Sub-Group's intention to seek to add value to existing initiatives. This was felt to be particularly relevant in the area of Community Learning. Jacqui Watt emphasised the importance of continuing professional development (CPD), both as a major demand on Shetland's training infrastructure and as a factor in determining whether some professionals (particularly in the health sector) could be recruited to posts in the islands. The Chairman added that it was vital to ensure that the needs of the private sector were included in the assessment of demand and the development of courses.

5. MEETING WITH MINISTERIAL TASKFORCE

The Chairman gave a personal account of the meeting between LEF Chairs and the Ministerial Taskforce, which had been held in Glasgow on 2 December. Key conclusions were that:

- The concept of a Single Entry Point for the delivery of business support services, fronted by the local LEC, is now central to Ministerial thinking, though it is recognised that the model adopted in the Highlands and Islands would be different from what is appropriate for the Central Belt.
- Effectiveness in service delivery is apparently being given priority over efficiency.
- The strategic role of LEFs in the Community Planning process was consistently emphasised by Ministers.
- While the Shetland LEF had been commended in informal conversations for the way it had involved the private sector in its work, the general message was that more had to be done to give the private sector an effective voice.
- There is no longer a formal limit on LEF membership, but the expectation is that additional members will be drawn from the private sector.
- The work of the Ministerial Taskforce should soon be winding down, but there had been no further guidance on the life-span of LEFs.
- LEFs themselves are not to be allocated any additional resources and are expected to continue to make use of the resources of their members.
- Although there had been no startling revelations, it had been useful to meet other Chairs and to be able to talk informally to Ministers about the view from Shetland.

The Forum agreed that it would be timely to expand its private sector membership and suggested that Shetland Enterprise should sound out the following for their interest in nominating a member:

- BP
- Lerwick Port Authority
- The knitwear sector
- Shetland Renewables Forum
- The IT sector.

6. PROGRESS WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Alvin Bashforth reported that the SIC Development Committee's discussion on the revised draft local economic strategy ("Shetland 2012") had been postponed to 13 January. Initial reactions from external consultations had been positive, but the Development Committee was also planning to hold some form of seminar to facilitate a wider discussion of options.

In discussion, members of the Forum -

- Emphasised the need for a realistic balance between setting positive targets for key industries and recognising the reality of current threats to parts of the Shetland economy.
- Suggested that although the general conclusions of the strategy were well supported, further work would be needed to spell out what actions were required, by whom, and at what cost, in order to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Pointed out that the text of the strategy document made it clear that it was the Forum's strategy, not the sole property of any one member organisation, and that therefore the final version would need the Forum's endorsement - ideally by April 2003.

- Recommended that the draft strategy should be on the agenda for the next meeting of the Community Planning Board, since the Ministerial guidance made clear that such strategies should represent the economic input by LEFs to the next round of Community Plan development.

7. PROGRESS WITH ACTION PLAN TOPICS

- **Single Entry Point (SEP)** - David Finch reported that good progress is being made in developing the SEP concept in four LEC areas in the Highlands and Islands. He felt the most appropriate model for Shetland might be the one under development in the Western Isles. He planned to bring proposals to the Forum around March 2003. By then the final shape of the reorganisation of the SIC Development Department should also be established.
- **Links to Community Planning Board** - David Finch suggested that since there is now some overlap between the membership of the Forum and of the Community Planning Board, it might be better to postpone plans for a joint meeting between the two bodies - perhaps until the economic strategy was closer to being finalised. It was hoped that the Community Planning Board would have a standing item on its agenda for reporting on the work of the LEF.
- **Meeting with Business Community** - David Finch suggested that by February or March the Forum should have a substantial set of issues to discuss with the business community, including the emerging economic strategy, the related action plan and the various initiatives being undertaken by the Skills and Learning Sub-Group. At that point it would also be appropriate to brief the local media on the progress of the Forum's work. The Forum invited David to develop plans for an event on those lines and to identify suitable dates. Maggie Gemmill reported that the Jobcentre Plus offices were being relocated and that a "launch" of the new offices was planned for 10 March. This might also provide a focus for an LEF event.
- **Other Communications Issues** - Arrangements had now been made for updates on the work of the LEF to be included in the SIC's internal Community Planning newsletter. The possibility of a wider external circulation was being investigated. Alec Miller suggested that the LEF minutes should be distributed to members in future by e-mail as a standard procedure, since this made it easier to forward information to the wider networks they represented.

8. NEXT MEETING

A date for a meeting in January will be proposed and circulated in the near future.