

Summary of Outcomes of a Business Breakfast Meeting held on 4th May 2016

The purpose of this brief is to outline the key outcomes and summarise the points raised with elected Members at the Business Breakfast Meeting held by the Economy and Development Select Committee on 4th May 2016.

Key Outcomes of the Breakfast Meeting for Select Committee Members

- ✓ In listening to the business community, Members received feedback on several key issues that affect businesses in Monmouthshire. Members met several individuals with specialist expertise who could assist them in their future scrutiny work through attending meetings and engaging with topics being scrutinised e.g. scrutiny of tourism may benefit from input from Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association.
- ✓ The Committee raised the profile of scrutiny and linked elected Members to businesses i.e. 'meet your local Member who can assist you in the following ways...'

Key Outcomes of the Breakfast Meeting for Business Owners

- ✓ Business owners identified synergies with others which may assist them in developing their business e.g. Thai Restaurant and Monmouthshire Food Festival in terms of cookery demonstrations.
- ✓ Businesses were linked to elected Members who may be able assist them by providing advice and guidance ~ signposting to information/resources.
- ✓ Businesses gained a greater awareness of the role of elected Members and have an additional vehicle through which they can feed their views.

The following summary is provided for discussion/exploration, accepting that suggestions to address these issues may not be actions for the Council primarily to take forward.

Key points:

- 1) *Positive Working Relationships* ~ People were incredibly positive about Monmouthshire as a geographical location for business, with excellent road networks. The achievement of a new hotel and a car park in Monmouth town with a Spa Hotel on the horizon were felt to be significant achievements for Monmouth town. The Chamber of Commerce told Members that this reflected a good working relationship between the Chamber and the Council officers.

- 2) Business engagement ~ People welcomed the fact that the elected Members were engaging with the business community directly, explaining that they want to be involved in helping to shape Monmouthshire. The businesses spoken to were passionate about putting Monmouthshire on the map and are keen to input into key changes in service delivery, such as the Alternative Service Delivery Model. As key stakeholders, they are seeking a platform to be involved in proposals at an early stage.
- 3) Clarity of role ~ A number of people sought clarity on the Council's role i.e. whether the Council is looking to run things or facilitate things ~ the expectation was not for the Council to be leading on everything, rather to coordinate and signpost what is taking place.
- 4) Business Start-up ~ A business owner advised that she had been unaware of existing business forums when starting her business and that she had experienced obstacles / had made basic errors she felt she could have avoided had she attended a business forum. Some other attendees were unaware of existing business forums. There was a suggestion that the Council could assist prospective businesses by providing a short document to welcome them into the county, presenting the 'Monmouthshire offer' - whilst also signposting people to wider information on business support.
- 5) Collaboration ~ The importance of collaboration across county boundaries and across country boundaries was raised, highlighting that businesses and visitors do not operate according to geographical or county boundaries. It was suggested that websites need to be coordinated and advertise cross-county and cross-border events in order to maximise the economic benefit (accepting that Welsh translation would need consideration).
- 6) Coordination ~ Members felt there may be a need to ensure coordination in terms of policy and strategic direction across departments (planning, enterprise, events and tourism). Some service areas were felt to be driving tourism whilst the activities of others may be counter-productive in supporting tourism. An example given was that there is a need for a clear policy on brown signage. Members felt there may be benefit in undertaking internal engagement on supporting business development to ensure policies are complementary.
- 7) Business Awareness ~ Members gained a sense that some businesses are operating in geographic clusters and that some are unaware of others in associated fields/those with synergies who may be located in a different part of the county. Members felt there may be a lack of communication between small businesses who are highly focussed on their actual business and are unaware of the ancillary business elements ~ E.g. a new food business was unaware that

they needed to achieve a 3* rating or above in order to take part in food festivals or to be considered in guides etc.

- 8) Source locally ~ An initiative on 'buying locally' would help to strengthen the relationship between local suppliers and local businesses to maximise the economic benefit ~ The suggestion was that this could be promoted by the Council through the sustainability agenda.
- 9) Business Rates ~ Feedback suggested that business rates are a key concern for numerous independent business owners in Monmouth, with some businesses struggling to turn over a profit. There is a feeling that the town is not as busy and vibrant as it should be – recent press coverage in the Sunday Times noted Monmouth as a vibrant place (no suggestion given on this).
- 10) Historic Town Maps, Tourist Maps and Signage ~ There was a view from a Monmouth business owner that the 4 towns should have concise and well-distributed town maps to signpost people to historic sites (examples given of Ludlow, Ledbury) to encourage people to visit the museum, the castle, the old town, the main street, linking to the QR codes on historic buildings. It was also suggested that there is a need for tourist maps and that these could be available on buses. There was a suggestion that signage in towns should be improved to direct to historic sites.
- 11) Park and Ride ~ A business in Monmouth suggested that a park and ride in Monmouth (collecting in the new car park at Rockfield with drop off points at the top of Church Street) would improve accessibility around the town.
- 12) Tourist Information Centres ~ There was a view that computerised TIC's are not as effective as office based TIC's and that the closure of the TIC in Castle Car Park Chepstow is a loss. There was a concern that the Chepstow TIC is being used less frequently as coach drivers are not parking by the TIC ~ given that there are fewer food establishments near the coach parking.

The Committee have concluded that the holding of the Business Breakfast has aided their understanding of the issues for small businesses in Monmouthshire in addition to achieving their objective to purposefully engage the business community to foster a working relationship with the Select Committee. The Committee would like to offer it's thanks to the business owners and managers who attended the breakfast and particularly to the Enterprise directorate for their sustained efforts in supporting economic growth in the Monmouthshire. Members recognise that this is not a simple task and requires continuous efforts over the long term to create a foundation for successful business. The Committee will discuss the feedback that they have received and agree areas where they can focus further progress.