



27th November 2012

Agenda Item: 4

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT GROUP**

Purpose of the Report

1. To offer the Committee further details on the workings of the Nottinghamshire Business Engagement Group (NBEG) and to offer considerations on its value and operational aspects.

Information and Advice

2. NBEG was established by the County Council as a response to its signing-up to the Federation of Small Businesses "Small Business Engagement Accord" in December 2009. Backed by the Local Government Association, the Accord is a voluntary code of practice for individual local authorities and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to co-sign. It seeks to ensure that the local business community is given the opportunity to participate in local decision making processes as they may impact on small businesses and to understand the rationale behind any decisions made.
3. The Accord contains a set of principles aimed at improving the level of participation by businesses in local democracy processes and specifically, allows the County Council to demonstrate its commitment to supporting and engaging with businesses in Nottinghamshire. As a consequence, amongst a range of related activity associated with the principles, two key issues were enacted by the Council. Firstly, a nominated County Council member was appointed as the Small Business Engagement Champion and secondly, in order to facilitate a healthy on-going dialogue, a business engagement group was established.
4. Councillor Keith Girling was appointed as the County Council's Champion and NBEG was established in the new year of 2010 following a period of consultation with a range of umbrella business organisations impacting on and / or operating within the County. A Terms of Reference (ToR) was agreed and this is attached as an Appendix to this report. The ToR was agreed at its first meeting and is regularly reviewed by the membership, as will be noted from the version control.

Objectives and Operations

5. The Committee will note the formal Objectives of the Group at Section 2 of the ToR alongside the business membership as listed at Section 3 but additionally, local groups such as the Southwell and the Collingham Business Clubs are now regular and welcome attendees.
6. Since its establishment, the Group has met regularly on (approximately) an 8 weekly / quarterly cycle, being facilitated by the County Council's Economic Development Team. This is more than the minimum frequency referenced in the ToR and reflects the on-going desire of all parties to maintain the face-to-face elements of the wider business engagement work, particularly when joint discussions are required and / or a guest speaker is arranged.
7. It will be noted that while meetings remain an important part of the NBEG arrangements, in between times, crucially, NBEG members share information directly with each other and the Economic Development Team engages with the members via electronic means offering both information on new developments, seeking feedback on specific issues or requesting participation in events.
8. NBEG meetings are chaired by Councillor Girling. As a (predominantly) business group, Councillor Girling has consistently reminded the members that he would be happy to cede this role to the business membership but to date, they have unanimously agreed that Councillor Girling should maintain the role.

Latest Position

9. As paragraph 5 notes, the ToR has evolved and been amended over time to reflect changing circumstances and as a consequence of its own membership-led reviews. It will be noted that a further derivation is required given for example the introduction of the Committee system at the County Council. At its last meeting in September 2012, members reflected on the style and timing of the meetings, offered further ideas on presentations and encouraged the continued use of electronic means of communication in between meetings.
10. The most significant developments which have seen a positive response from the NBEG membership and which have impacted upon the ToR may be summarised as follows :
 - **Linkages to the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership.** With the establishment of the D2N2 LEP and its remit to be business-led, NBEG worked with the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham business representatives on the LEP Board to ensure that they attend NBEG meetings to update members as to LEP activity and to listen to the views of businesses in return, to influence the LEP's activity. The Economic Development Team has facilitated discussions with the NBEG membership to ensure its priorities were voiced as coherently as possible and the timing of NBEG meetings were altered to better align them with LEP Board meetings as a consequence.
 - **The Nottinghamshire Growth Plan.** NBEG has proved a valuable reference point to secure liaison with the County's many smaller businesses in addition to the contact made with larger employers. This includes early conversations on the proposed direction on the Plan and on-going liaison as the Plan has been in development. As the

Plan is now being progressed to a formal consultation phase, again, NBEG members will be offered the opportunity to comment and influence the final draft.

- **City / County Business Relationships.** Related to the Growth Plan developments, the NBEG membership now includes City-based business groups reflecting the self-evident inter-relationships between businesses across the City and County. As the Committee will be aware, the City's and County's Growth Plans are designed to be complementary and the Plans were the subject of presentations at the same NBEG meeting. The ambition for alignment was much welcomed by the business community. More recently, members will of course be aware that the Council has taken the step of securing business co-options to this Committee, further reinforcing the business engagement with the Council.
 - **County Council Budget Consultation.** The Council recognises the value of securing input from the business community alongside wider consultation as it sets its annual budget. NBEG is again being used as a vehicle to secure such input via the cascading of information through the membership for the 2013/14 Budget Consultation.
 - **Presentations and Information Sharing.** The membership has found significant value from presentations and discussions with a wide range of externally sourced expertise. Routes to NBEG are many and varied, be they suggestions from the Chairman and the Economic Development Team, suggestions from the membership or via direct approaches from agencies seeking an opportunity to reach local businesses. To date, meetings have welcomed presentations on matters including economic trends and issues; accessing business finance; venture capital; exporting / UKTI; the Bloodhound project; the local Universities' Ingenuity project (business / innovation support); business crime; the Nottinghamshire Innovation Centres; the Growth Accelerator initiative and broadband development. Individual business organisations also lead discussions on what issues are current within their respective memberships and reflect on trends and concerns - this may take the form of a simple verbal update or depending on the issue, a presentation.
11. Taking the total number of individual business members from the respective organisations which attend NBEG meetings or have information cascaded onwards to them, NBEG represents an effective way of maintaining engagement with some 12,000 mainly small businesses. It has proved a responsive group and both businesses and the Council value the engagement. It will also be noted that in parallel, contact is maintained with the County's larger sized companies via regular Member, Chief Executive and Economic Development Team visits with some 30 visits having been made over the past three years.

Other Options Considered

12. There are no other options applicable to this report.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

13. This report is offered to support the Committee's understanding of NBEG's operations as part of the Council's business engagement activity.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding

of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described in the report.

Financial Implications

15. NBEG meetings are held in various key locations across the County to ensure attendance is open to all. Costs are kept to a minimum through the use of Council facilities where possible or via member organisations offering to host meetings but a small budget is maintained via the Economic Development Committee budget to support NBEG meetings including room hire and refreshments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That members consider the details of the Nottinghamshire Business Engagement Group and welcome its continued operation in supporting business engagement and influencing growth across the County.

Report of the Group Manager, Corporate Strategy

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Geoff George ext 72046

Constitutional Comments (KK 19.11.2012)

16. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Economic Development Committee.

Financial Comments (DJK 15.11.2012)

17. The contents of this report is duly noted; the costs of holding the NBEG meetings will be contained within the Revenue Budget.

Background Papers

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All

TERMS OF REFERENCE

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Version control

Version:	9
Date:	1 December 2011
Status:	Final

1. INTRODUCTION

Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council and key business organisations, networks and clubs are members of the Nottinghamshire Business Engagement Group (NBEG) (the Group).

NBEG was originally established as a means of improving communication between the County Council and the local business community, given the latter's key role as an employer, creator of wealth and a key driver of the local economy.

Since its inaugural meeting of 12 July 2010, the Group has developed to include Nottingham City Council.

Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council (the Councils) are aware of the vital role played by small businesses, in terms of jobs, investment and the economic vitality of local economies. The Councils are committed to helping local businesses grow and thrive and to engaging with them effectively.

Good communication assists the Councils to better understand the views of the business community. Similarly, local authority objectives and actions can be clearly communicated to business.

The Group has also developed to include representatives of the D2N2LEP Board (Local Enterprise Partnership). The D2N2LEP Board's remit is to determine the Local Enterprise Partnership's strategic priorities. The Board is a strong influential voice for the area and a conduit between Government and the area at a time of change. NBEG is an effective link to the D2N2LEP. It provides a communication route which enables SMEs to be kept informed of the development of the D2N2LEP strategy and it enables D2N2LEP board members to hear directly from representatives of local SMES what the key issues are affecting them.

NBEG also provides a communication mechanism between Group members enabling them to share information about projects, services and to share best practice.

It is expected that Group members will cascade information provided by the Councils to their members / network.

2. OBJECTIVES / ROLE OF THE BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT GROUP (the Group)

The specific objectives / role of the Group are as follows:

- To provide strategic advice to Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council (the Councils) on issues that affect the business community and to assist in developing solutions to those issues.
- To provide an effective means of communication between the Councils and the Nottingham / Nottinghamshire business community
- To assist the Councils to engage with the business community on matters of significance including the dissemination of information to and consultation with businesses
- To provide advocacy in association with the Councils to enable effective lobbying of Government on matters affecting the economic prosperity of Nottingham / Nottinghamshire and its businesses
- To ensure that the needs of businesses are considered in the development of the Councils' Strategic Plans and delivery of services
- To provide an effective means of communication between the D2N2 LEP Board and the Nottingham / Nottinghamshire business community
- To enhance communications between business organisations in Nottingham / Nottinghamshire.

3. MEMBERSHIP

To ensure that a wide cross section of the local business community is represented membership of the Group is comprised of a maximum of two senior representatives from each of the following organisations which represent business interests across Nottinghamshire:

- The Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce
- The Federation of Small Business
- The Institute of Directors
- The Confederation of British Industry
- First Enterprise Business Agency
- Representatives from the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham Business Clubs and networks, including Mansfield 2020, Newark Business Club, Retford B4B, North Notts Business Connections, Worksop Business Club, Nottingham City Business Club and the Independent Business Association.

Applications for membership of the Group will be reviewed by all Group members who will, by majority vote, collectively decide whether an organisation can join the Group. As a general rule membership is restricted to organisations which represent a broad business base (not one particular sector).

Business membership of the Group is complemented by standing representation from Nottinghamshire County Council as follows:

- The Cabinet Member for Culture and Community (or nominated deputy)
- The County Council's Business Engagement Champion
- The Chief Executive Officer (or nominated deputy)

- The Head of the Economic Development team (or nominated deputy)

Other councillors or officers may be invited to specific meetings where agenda items relate to their area of responsibility or expertise (e.g. trading standards, highways, procurement).

Business membership of the Group is complemented by standing representation from the Nottingham City Council as follows:

- The Deputy Leader, Economic Development, Resources and Customer Care (or nominated deputy)
- Business, Growth and Investment Manager (or nominated deputy)

Other councillors or officers may be invited to specific meetings where agenda items relate to their area of responsibility or expertise (e.g. trading standards, highways, procurement).

The D2N2 LEP is represented by the business representatives for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire County Council's Business Engagement Champion, Councillor Keith Girling, chairs meetings of the Group.

The Vice-Chairman, John Collins (Rushcliffe Business Partnership), who was elected at the meeting of 26 May 2011, will chair meetings if Councillor Keith Girling is unable to attend a meeting.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman positions will be reviewed at the annual review of the Terms of Reference.

Members of the Group may arrange for substitutes to attend in their place if they are unable to attend a meeting.

4. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

No fewer than two meetings will take place each financial year (April to March). Each meeting will usually be for a maximum period of 2 hours.

The frequency of meetings will be agreed by Group members.

Where possible, meetings of the Group will be arranged to take place five to ten working days prior to the D2N2LEP Board meetings.

5. SECRETARIAT ARRANGEMENTS

The agenda for the meeting will be agreed, in advance.

Two weeks prior to each meeting NBEG members will be asked to identify potential topics for discussion. The agenda will ultimately be agreed by the Chairman of the Group.

The County Council will provide a secretariat service for meetings of the Group. It will be responsible for issuing the agenda and papers no later than five working days in advance of

meetings. It will also provide a minute taker and notes of meetings will be despatched to all Group members no later than 10 working days after meetings have taken place.

Meetings will mainly be held at the Councils' offices, the Newark Beacon Innovation Centre and the Expand Business Centre, Arnold. However, suggestions as to alternative venues are welcome, particularly if the meeting can be usefully combined with a visit to a business, or relevant project, which will support the Group in addressing its objectives.

6. REVIEW AND ALTERATIONS TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Group will review its 'Terms of Reference' on an annual basis. The first review of the 'Terms' took place on 20 July 2011.

7. CONTACT DETAILS FOR SECRETARIAT

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