

Policy & External Affairs Committee Notes – 21st January 2017

Group Attendees: Matt Jackson (Chair) Andrew Denniff, Dominic Beck, Lisa Pogson, Adrian Platts, Martyn Benson, Cheryl Sanderson, Tim O'Connell, Steve Blunsten, George Elliott

External attendees: None

Apologies from: Clive Watkinson, Steve Allard (he can no longer attend meetings due to organisational changes), Jemma Priestley, Ian Ashmore, Lynsey Partlow, Martin Beasley, Bob Langley, Matt Travis

Executive Report

- Andrew briefly updated the Committee on a number of recent and upcoming activities the Chamber were involved with.
- Andrew mentioned the recent publicity around the devolution deal and there being no Mayor.
- Andrew clarified that there is an ongoing court case regarding Chesterfield being part of Sheffield City Region (SCR), and due to the public of that area not being asked the question 'do they want to join', the local authority has had to revisit the conditions of being part of the SCR. Therefore the Mayoral election has been delayed by 12 months.
- A Yorkshire-wide Mayor has been suggested. Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) do not agree with this proposal and are very disappointed that SCR Mayoral elections are not taking place. Andrew is attending a meeting with Nigel Knowles at SCR Local Enterprise Partnership to discuss the issue. This is as a result of a notification sent to all regional Chambers to attend a discussion with him on the 28th February.
- Andrew also mentioned that Paul Jagger was now a Regional Chairperson for SCR based Chambers and that he should be the spokesperson on behalf of all Chambers where policy is concerned. Matt Jackson reiterated his past opinion of the need for a South Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce. Andrew clarified that we are farther from that position than we have been for some time. Matt clarified the utter frustration he feels as member that regional Chambers are not operating with one voice. Andrew stated that BRCC supports a regional Chamber and suggested if the question needs asking again that should a merger of Chambers be a priority to move towards.
- It was suggested by various group participants and agreed that members and the Chambers are not getting full value for Chamber relationships. There are also significant issues with local authorities wanting their own 'piece of the pie' which is making progress difficult. It was agreed that all regional business support organisations and local authorities need to come together to ensure the best outcomes for the region.
- BRCC delivered the Quarterly Economic Survey event in January and as a regional (and local) issue, it focused on the Trans Pennine Tunnel Study and brought attention to the need for this important infrastructure development. Andrew considered it to be a good event, however he was disappointed at the number of members booking and not turning up. As a regional cross-Chamber activity, it demonstrates the benefits that collaboration brings to SCR.

Policy Activities

- Matt Jackson asked how business was doing generally, and Andrew clarified that business was going on as normal despite the ongoing issues of Brexit. Cheryl Sanderson mentioned that some of her clients were doing well and some not so well.

- Matt queried how the Construction Forum was progressing since its recent reinvention, and Stephen Blunsten clarified that there is business to be done within the sector. AP mentioned that professionals in the sector suggest a downward trend over the coming quarters, however most construction companies are determined to grow through it. It was also mentioned that there had been some mergers in the sector to help improve the strength of some organisations to tough out the challenges ahead.
- Employability skills have been a clear need for the sector, and most educational establishments in the local area are looking to develop strong relationships with local construction companies to ensure workforce demand can be met
- An event was delivered at Barnsley College in January to provide information around the apprenticeship levy and how this could be best utilised in the sector.
- Andrew mentioned the Meadowhall planning application, and the group agreed it was a positive development as it will attract more spending to the region. An event regarding the plans will be focused at the construction sector in March, where British Land and Meadowhall will present their proposal.

Update on Legislation Issues

- Martyn clarified that the intellectual property bill is still moving forward. Further progress of the bill will be monitored and reported back on in due course
- Cheryl Sanderson mentioned the ongoing consultation by DEFRA to ban the use of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. The consultation is due to close on the 28th February. The focus is on the protection of marine wildlife due to the fact that it could seriously impact on livestock in seas and oceans across the world.
- Cheryl Sanderson also highlighted a potential trade deal with the US that could mean hormone and genetically modified cereal fed animals could be imported into the UK. This could have serious impacts on English agriculture as the laws do not allow UK agricultural businesses to produce in this way, thus affecting competitiveness for the industry.

Member Issues

Member issues (questions raised by members that affect their day to day business) were discussed during the meeting with individual resolutions shared back with the members.

Date of the next meeting

21st March 2017 at Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce

If you would like to get involved with the Committee please call the Chamber on 01709 386200