

### REPORT OF THE BUSINESS FORUM MID DEVON MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2011, 6.30pm at the TIVERTON HOTEL

#### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Jim Enright (JE), Chairman, welcomed the attendees. JE thought it was promising that BFMD had the same number of attendees at this event, 70-80, as at the inaugural event. JE reported that BFMD now had close on 50 members, and numbers were rising.

JE introduced the Executive Committee of BFMD:

Jim Enright, Chairman; Rhys Roberts (RR), Peter Shaw (PS), Chris Prentis (CP), Kevin Finan (KF), Michael Gutierrez (MG), Peter Hare-Scott (PHS), John Potter, Treasurer (JP); David Disney (DD) and Kim Knox, Secretary (KK).

He stressed that all of the Executive Committee were freely giving their time and their expertise to benefit local businesses.

In addition Rhys Roberts, Owner of the Tiverton Hotel, was providing a free buffet as well as the venue. JE recommended the Tiverton Hotel for business events, Christmas parties etc!!.

#### 2. Welcome by Neil Parish MP Tiverton & Honiton

Neil Parish (NP) gave a very uplifting speech, commencing with the 3 extremely funny myths of all time, culminating with "I'm from Parliament and I'm here to help".

NP then continued to say on a more serious note that it was great to see so many businesses in the room but that he had no magic solution to the economic problem save that we do need to keep public spending down. He commented on some Government policies and the achievements of the coalition to date.

NP finishing by saying he ran his own small business and therefore he knew the problems that everyone in the room was facing. He was grateful to be there and would listen carefully to what each had to say.

#### 3. Speaker – Huw Davies, Director of Curriculum and Innovation at Petroc

Huw Davies (HD) informed BFMD that decision making was either logical, lateral or gut instinct.

HD reported that Petroc had a £35m turnover and 1,000 staff. Petroc was 80% reliant on government income and that over the next few years that would be cut by 25%.

HD said further that BFMD members should look at the latest texts of Malcolm Gladwell. He believed that the decision making is the core of leadership and management responsibility. He stated that risk taking is a part of the decision making process.

HD then informed BFMD members about the Law (legend) of Pareto.

Everyone should focus on the 20% that is the important activity to effect 80% of output.

Gladwell said that the decisions people make in the first 2 seconds are not gut instinct, but rational decisions.

HD also explored the views of Edward de Bono.

HD said his tips were:

- To understand the decision
- Understand the process
- Gather information – remember the 80:20 law
- Remember that gut instinct is rational but not always right
- Always be decisive

#### 4. **Question & Answer Session**

JE commenting generally that decisions are not normally black and white but can be measured in shades of grey.

JE put forward an experience he had had when he was working some years before. JE reminded BFMD members that sometimes it doesn't matter what solution is chosen but rather that people have the confidence and commitment to believe they can resolve the problem.

Q of NP from Chris Prentis - Too many rules and regulations – There was an EU directive which was 20 pages long but is now 400 pages after GB got hold of it. What is the government doing to curb these excesses?

- These should be subject to scrutiny. If a new Regulation comes in, an old one should go out. We should have someone in to make sure these are sensible and adequate. We should cut down the regulations and review industry by industry.

Q of NP - Is the Government making life easier to hire and fire?

- It's about balancing genuine security but not burdening businesses. Some flexibility is required. There needs to be

sufficient rights as is reasonable, not so much as to inhibit employment. The right balance is to get 40% of employment from the public sector. There is a problem with the age 65 rule, hence why the Government has doubled the apprenticeship scheme.

Q of NP – Paul Brain said he had set his business up in the last 3 months in renewables, things of the future, defeating fuel poverty. Cheaper bills, construction, so why delay?

- It's gone from 31.5p to 8.5p. Reduced too much? The figures do need to be reduced and enforced. Too much subsidy for anything is not good.

Q – There is no support from the Banks, they all seem to say no

- Do need agreement with Banks. Problem with banks is they've drawn in back from the business. They must loan too.
- JE commented that to be fair to banks they were damned when they loaned too much and are now damned for too little. Striking a balance always takes time.

Q for HD – James Marshall is an external assessor, and told not allowed to fail people. Please comment

- This is a disservice to all and he will look into this. Vast majority are external assessors. He would consider this a disciplinary offence and they will speak afterwards.

Q – Enterprise Zones

- What are local enterprise partnerships for? Link into BFMD – work towards helping. Believer in self help – take it to the Minister.

Comments – George Osborne, Telegraph Event

- Concentrating on SME's, employ 12 – 100. 90% of small business have less than 10 people. In Europe this is 250 people . Perhaps de-regulate smaller companies more than bigger ones. . In a constituency like Mid Devon, small business are very important. Hard to tackle. Helping lower paid by reducing tax. Need to do more to stimulate businesses to invest.
- JE added that if very small businesses took on one extra person then unemployment would be solved. Very small businesses needed to be categorised as such and not included as SME`s.

Q – Why called Petroc?

- Wanted to move away from old concept of the College to create a new beginning.

Q – Peter West of Westex Computers. He undertook a straw poll of customers. The outcome was that their view was that Councils and traders did not work together. Perception is key. How to overcome?

- Peter Hare-Scott responded that Economic development is here to support local businesses and joining BFMD is a good way to influence future policy. MDDC are trying to improve job prospects. Join BFMD and help to make a difference.

5. **Introduction of Babs Preston**

Babs has been involved with a College to try and get funding for community care and plastic surgery at hospitals. Babs has brought together a number of local providers under the banner “Aspire in Cullompton” with a meeting on Friday. Leaflets were available.

JE added that it shows how one person with commitment and drive can make a difference.

6. **Close of BFMD**

JE asked all attendees to complete the questionnaire from BFMD and from Mid Devon if possible.

JE reported that BFMD had very little response for the printed directory and as such the Executive Committee decided that it was not needed at this time. An electronic version would be available on the website.

The next meeting is to be held on 29 November 2011.

**Seminar – Marketing on a small budget.**

(Subsequently also agreed that there would be a debate on the good and bad effects of Supermarkets)

**Please do invite other local businesses you know.**

CLOSE at 8.25pm. Many stayed on to network further.

Kim Knox, Secretary.