

Notes of the meeting of the DEAL AND WALMER Neighbourhood Forum held on 27

April 2009 at the Town Hall, Deal at 6.30pm

Present:

DDC Councillor Kit Smith (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)
KCC Councillors Mike Eddy
Terry Birkett

Other Town and Parish councillors and 11 members of the public.

An apology for absence was received from Town Cllr. Ben Bano,

1. Chairman's welcome

Cllr Kit Smith welcomed those attending and the Notes of the previous Forum were approved. There were no matters arising or declarations of interest.

2. Special Constabulary

PC Simon Ashford of Kent Police spoke briefly about the work of Special Constables who work alongside regular Police Officers and contribute their local knowledge and individual expertise. Special Constables are volunteers and more were urgently needed to work for 16 hours per month and attend regular training. Information was available in the room for anyone who was interested and Special Constable Ronald Stevens also gave an illustration of the kind of duties involved.

3. Beating the Crunch

3.1 Sheila Tait, Community Development Team Leader from Dover District Council, spoke about the work of the Health & Well-Being Team in the current financial climate, the expertise of its 6 officers and the ways in which team members contact the public including surgeries, home visits, and working within agencies such as CAB, Pension Service, Next Steps, and Primary Care Trust. Advice and guidance is given on:

- Benefits – assessing entitlement, pension credit, Council Tax and housing benefits, completing forms, direction to Job Centre plus, Job Seekers allowance, and a follow-up service to ensure advice had been acted on.
- Redundancy – advice for individuals and businesses, guidance on DDC services and Job Centre Plus services, professional help with c.v., etc.
- Business Support – connection with Business Link
- Debt – Citizens Advice Bureau general support
- Volunteering – vacancies and opportunities with local organisations and community groups
- Health – liaising with PCT and EK Health, walks for fitness
- Retraining – KCC opportunities for re-skilling, improving literacy/numeracy,
- Migrants – language skills and citizenship

- Family support – Sure Start centre in Dover also covers Deal; pension service officers visit homes over 60s to advise on benefits, practical services and community centres.
Roadshows had been held and future ones would be advertised on the Council's website with supporting leaflets.
- 3.2 Jane Langstaff and Stephanie Hayman of The Prosperity Network Ltd. and Best of Dover, Deal and Sandwich, gave advice on inflation-proofing businesses:
- keep in touch with customers; know what they want; ask for feedback by survey monkey (electronic), customer emails, paper questionnaires with reply paid envelopes; use your customer list and compile a list if you don't have one
 - build business relationships with special offers and regular contact
 - increase average customer spend by introducing special extras; offer value for money as perception is everything
 - make the most of opportunities, think laterally, use local events to promote business e.g. restaurants in Deal provide pre-concert suppers which raises profile of restaurant and supports concert; other events include golfing, cycling, fishing.
 - show what specific services your business can offer
 - diversify – identify new needs, make changes, analyse skills, look for niche market opportunities e.g. care industry needs to recommend fully accredited tradesmen available 24 hours offering reliable service and accepted payments in instalments.
 - make use of public procurement – councils must invite tenders; get professional help with tender process if necessary
 - don't be a control freak – outsource some tasks or get help to make best use of your time; use virtual offices, build relationships; pay per hour for services.
 - take care of your image – premises, literature and personal; invest in sound promotion, use good quality.
 - hard work – will take more hours than regular employment but can be fun; think outside the box and collaborate
 - tourism: building networking events with council and local companies, meetings held on Wednesday evenings, looking at collective efforts; invitation to attend.
- 3.3 Jane Spurgin of the Learning and Skills Council gave a presentation on Keep the South East Working which explained the work of the Council in the present economic situation:
- as at April 2009 in the South East 142,000 people claiming Job Seekers allowance, 20% increase in last month and 104% over last year; 25,000 unemployed, 25% increase in 16-24 age group; over 20,000 have management/professional skills; 37,000 vacancies notified to Jobcentres.
 - challenges include unprecedented job losses including rising volume of executives unemployed for first time and long term; meeting demand for information and support; increased number of initiatives; matching employment and skill strategies to meet changing economy; training today for tomorrow's jobs using Government funding.
 - partnership working; principle of joined-up support available across the region
 - target groups: those at risk of redundancy, newly redundant, further away from labour markets, companies and individuals

- Business Link to support businesses, offers business health check and access to funding; individuals helped with pre-employment skills e.g. cv, interviews, new Novas, management skills, Real Help Now – local signposting
- Government funded training: recent Budget allocates more money for young unemployed people, Train to Gain used up all allocated funds; local colleges received extra funding for redundant adult learners; £7m of European Social Funding for re-skilling; £2.4m secured in Kent through Job Centre Plus to identify employment opportunities, skills needed, training for individuals and businesses
- training opportunities for industry – Deal and surrounding area is well served with Thanet, Canterbury and S Kent Colleges; support for apprentices at risk of redundancy to spend 4 days at college and 1 day with employer during financial crisis.
- contact numbers: 0845 601 2001 – local Job Centre plus
0800 195 4700 - Next Steps
0845 600 9006 - Business Link

4. Discussion session

The Forum split into three groups for discussions with each of the three facilitators in turn. Points resulting from discussions included:

- Deal is seen as poor relation to Dover
- Deal needs a Job Centre which could share premises on one day a week to save costs e.g. local library, Landmark Centre, SureStart centres. **Jane Spurgin to investigate.**
- Job Centres need correct facts to give correct advice.
- Sole traders and small local businesses could use apprentices to mutual benefit but were often put off by paperwork involved; niche role could be created to help and advise trades people but would need to be government funded to be attractive and followed through.
- Effect of Dover's regeneration on Deal need to be understood to plan for future jobs and skills.
- Students need work experience; one day a week over a period rather than one or two weeks at a time.
- A better name for Health and Wellbeing Team would be The Help Team.
- Why is DDC not funded by government for the team's work?
- Internal and external communication can be improved e.g. communicating with carers as well as customers of Care Line about relocation of service.
- Traders need to provide value for money to compete with out-of-town businesses, offer high standards and keep reputations; people prefer to use local services.
- Many young people do not want to travel outside Deal for further education; Deal needs facilities.
- Transport providers to be asked about enterprising travel provision for students and business people needing connection to High Speed Rail Link.
- How businesses can co-operate and work together in order to attract more businesses to Deal.

5. Summary

“Hand holding” is important: helping sole traders/small family businesses with apprenticeship schemes; helping reticent customers with problems to seek advice by accompanying them to CAB meeting etc. and following up; making home-visits; providing a known face to help with issues.

6. Future Forum topics

- 6.1 Dover Plan – what does it practically mean for Deal with regard to services, entrepreneur, training and skills.
- 6.2 Patrick Acarnleys experiences with apprenticeship scheme.
- 6.3 Green/environmental issues (building on previous Forums)
- 6.4 Green spaces, play provision, open spaces: how to improve the provision for young people, teenagers, dog walkers, etc.

The meeting ended at 8.43pm