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Mr Graeme Finch
Chief Executive
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2 August 2007

Dear Graeme

Thank you for your letter dated 11 July entitled Changes to the Enterprise Gateway network in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

There are a number of concerns from the point of view of the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership:

Faringdon Enterprise Gateway

- Successful business support initiatives which, as far as we are aware, have been successful in fulfilling its prescribed outcomes.
- The Gateway's impact has been wider than just Faringdon itself, many businesses in Oxfordshire have benefited from the services.
- The exit strategy has not been robust and there still seems to be uncertainty, certainly amongst colleagues and partners, about what will happen to the Faringdon Centre following the end September.

Flawed Policy

- There is an understandable urge with limited resources to focus attention on what could be seen as underperforming areas. The logical conclusion to this is that SEEDA itself should hand back its funding to Government so that it can be reallocated to regeneration projects in the north of the Country. However this is not the argument that is used, rather one of supporting successful areas such as the South East as the powerhouse of the economy.
- The key to driving forward an enterprising economy with successful new businesses is to support people who are trying to start a business of their own volition to increase the business survival rate. It is the focus on the business survival rate that has ensured Oxfordshire has the strong and diverse economy it currently benefits from. One of the demonstrated best ways of achieving this is through one to one mentoring and counselling – one of the fundamental services delivered by Faringdon Enterprise Gateway.
- Ironically, the closure of Enterprise Gateway coincides with the closure of Oxfordshire Business Enterprises (OBE) – the only other organisation in Oxfordshire to offer the mentoring and counselling service. These services are about far more than just advisors

giving businesses advice. It is about encouraging people considering setting up businesses to ask themselves testing questions. It is about passing on experience, local knowledge, being able to introduce people into local networks, knowing local people who can help – whether it is potential suppliers, clients or specialists. It is as much about encouraging people who do not have good business ideas, plans or just the right acumen to think again. Helping people with badly thought through business ideas to see reality and not start the business is as much of a success as helping someone to start the next multi million pound venture.

Zones and Outreach Worker

- Along with our colleagues around Oxfordshire we are deeply sceptical about what an “Enterprise Gateway Zone covered by outreach workers” actually means in practice. How many of these outreach workers will there be? What business experience will they have? How much local knowledge will they have? What is their remit? How will this work in practice and how will it be promoted to businesses in a language they understand?
- We are unclear about how this new model with 10 Enterprise Gateway zones echo's the priorities identified in the RES. Our understanding is of targets to increase the business stock and increase the number of Enterprise Gateways to 20 by 2007.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter, we at the OEP, hope that this will result in improved engagement and discussions with Business Link and SEEDA into the best way forward. We hope that in the future, plans that impact on our economy so fundamentally can be discussed with local partners at an earlier stage rather than presented as a seeming *fait accompli*.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jean Mitchell
Executive Director

cc Frank Nigriello
Jeff Alexander
Deborah Wharton