

# Raising Economic Prosperity Through Partnerships

## Background

Unique and sustainable solutions to tackle the challenges of raising economic prosperity through partnership have been developed by us over the last four years.

As we are serving a diverse Lancashire economy, the key to this achievement and progress made is through our developed and strengthened partnership approach. These partnerships range from heavily funded regeneration investment programmes in the most deprived parts of Lancashire to lighter touch programmes in the more prosperous parts.

A distinctive aspect is that we have successfully used mainstream publicly funded services to sustain our programmes. Elements of this approach have the potential to be adopted across the whole of the public sector to improve access to learning and work opportunities for people at a disadvantage in the labour market.

The recession has brought its own challenges, but our approach means that we can sustain our programmes and are well placed to use funding opportunities like the Future Jobs Fund to improve employability for almost 1,500 people younger and older unemployed people in Lancashire for the next 18 months.

## Apprenticeships

As part of Lancashire County Council's commitment to helping young people access opportunities and balancing the age profile of its workforce it significantly extended the apprenticeship programme. Now the recruitment of apprentices is a corporate priority. The authority encourages well-qualified young people to apply for jobs at the county council which has resulted in the recruitment of apprentices increasing from 16-268 over two years.

Most of the apprenticeships are in business administration, but other positions are available in specific areas, for example customer care.

Apprenticeships at the county council are National Vocational Qualifications and our apprentices are supported to gain NVQ level 2 and 3 qualifications over two years.

To support this, the county council also redesigned its vacancy management process allowing front-line jobs to be offered, on merit, to those completing an apprenticeship. This helps with the retention of a highly motivated workforce, enables career progression and talent management and also saves money in recruitment costs. Importantly over 90% of all apprentices appointed choose to stay with the council as they continue their careers.

## WorkStart

Lancashire County Council developed and implemented the first public sector trial known as WorkStart, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus to create a route back to work for long-term welfare recipients.

WorkStart helps people who are actively seeking work and have been claiming income support as a lone parent or employment and support allowance for six months or more.

WorkStart provides the opportunity for people to get back to work by offering 30 day placements to help them to gain experience, update their skills and improve their confidence in the workplace.

Those who take part in WorkStart are often highly motivated people who are trying to help themselves return to employment and can continue to receive benefits during their placement.

## Future Horizons

Lancashire County Council founded the Future Horizons pre-apprenticeship programme aimed at

young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Whilst recruiting to the apprenticeship programme it was found that some looked after children and NEET young people were not ready for an apprenticeship at that time. Future Horizons addressed this problem by giving the skills and knowledge needed to apply for an apprenticeship in the public sector. Working in partnership with the North Lancashire Training Group it provides employability qualifications, basic and life skills, career information and advice and a structured eight week placement (which can be extended) at the county council or with a partner organisation – an essential stepping stone in securing an apprenticeship.

## Worklessness

Lancashire County Council, working closely with Jobcentre Plus, partners in District Councils and the Voluntary Faith and Community Sector developed and implemented a simple and effective approach to achieve the stretch target. Through this extensive partnership network, the target was exceeded by 1% which translates into 480 long-term Incapacity and Lone Parent benefit claimants gaining sustainable employment.

Over a period of 22 months, the authority contacted 14,000 longer term incapacity and lone parent claimants and invited them to attend local events. Over 30 of these events were held resulting in over 2,200 people expressing an interest in working and 520 people were placed in sustainable employment. All this was achieved with a unit cost of an additional £28 per person.

The council approach placed the emphasis on the individual with a community focussed partnership approach, concentrating on outreach and accessible provision.

## Social Enterprise

Lancashire County Council recognises the value of the social enterprise business model as an effective way of directing wealth creation back into prosperous and sustainable neighbourhoods. Because of this, the county council's economic development department, Lancashire County Developments Limited (LCDL), work with partners in the social enterprise sector to develop efficient business systems.

To achieve this LCDL undertakes a business diagnosis of social enterprises across the county resulting in an agreed set of development goals customised to the needs and opportunities of each organisation.

LCDL have also developed a Tender Readiness

Audit Kit (TRAK) to help organisations to prepare for public sector tendering. This is supported by Business Link, NWDA and SELNET (the county wide trade body for the sector).

LCDL have also developed a programme of social enterprise loans that are repaid through a mix of financial repayments and output achievements. In response to the impact of the Credit Crunch, LCDL has provided funding for five social enterprises to recruit five new business managers (recently made redundant from the private sector), to strengthen the business controls and commercial drive of their organisations.

All of these activities are helping to develop a more sustainable social enterprise sector, ensuring that successful business models are able to generate wealth which can then be reinvested into our neighbourhoods with most need.

## Credit Crunch

Lancashire County Council has demonstrated a clear leadership role in working with partners in responding to ongoing effects of the global Credit Crunch.

Much of this builds on long term partnerships with district councils and LAA (Local Area Agreement) frameworks for economic development. We have also worked closely with the MAA (Multi Area Agreement) groups and our neighbouring unitary authorities to understand and reduce the impact on businesses, individuals, communities and their surrounding environment.

A lot of the authority's initial focus has been to agree shared guidelines and co-ordinate communications to show the public sector speaking in a consistent and positive tone that will encourage companies to maintain confidence in the Lancashire economy. Specifically in terms of assisting businesses in Lancashire, LCDL has developed a series of roadshow style events called Find Your Way. Aimed at small businesses and new starts, they provide a wide range of free business advice, with a strong emphasis on guiding enquiries through the maze of different assistance available, to ensure they receive maximum help for their specific needs. Each Find Your Way event is designed to progress a conversation with the private sector – partly about promoting the support offer from LCDL and our partner organisations and equally about listening to the comments and feedback (positive and negative) from businesses' own experience in the recession. In response to comments from the private sector, LCDL is now able to provide additional assistance; e.g. free membership of Chamber of Commerce to companies we invest in, free advice and tuition in re-

branding existing products, as a gateway to NWDA's high growth supports, increased access to micro-loan products and increased support for Social Enterprise and Rural Enterprise.

All of LCDL's response to businesses in the Credit Crunch is based on our strategic partnership with Business Link and the Business Support Simplification process. In this context another key platform in our joint working has been the collaboration over the NWDA Intensive Start Up Support contract for emerging new businesses. LCDL has agreed co-funding for all 12 districts, increasing the contract scope by almost 50% and placing an increased emphasis on new enterprises becoming investment ready for business finance whether through mainstream products (e.g. banks and private finance sources), LCDL's Rosebud Finance or Business Link's various products. The County Council website now includes Business Link 'In a Box' as an embedded facility providing instant access to up to date Business Link information and support.

### Rosebud Finance and Micro Credit

Lancashire County Council has offered loan finance to new and growing businesses through Rosebud Finance over the last 20 years.

Through this experience Rosebud has now become an award winning, self sustaining business finance product. Investments are made on a competitive, commercial basis assessed against the strength of the business case and the drive of the entrepreneur. Assessments, due diligence and follow up are all provided by an external Investment Managing Agent to inform LCDL of the risks involved in each proposed investment which involves equity finance and loans. Repayments on agreed loans (usually over a 5 year period) are then reinvested into future business investments.

Rosebud has become a highly valued tool for the County Council in supporting jobs and businesses across Lancashire. It also has a strong track record in contributing to key economic indicators such as jobs, GVA and private sector leverage. More recently LCDL has added specific incentives for businesses in growth sectors such as Tourism, Creative/Digital and Environmental Technologies to encourage growth in these areas.

Working with Business Link and NWDA, the county council has also been able to change elements of the Rosebud product to maximise the offer during the credit crunch and ensure a strong integration with business finance available through "Solutions for Business" (Support for NW Business). One example of this is the development of a fast track process for micro-loans up to £5000, providing easy access to

repayable start up finance. LCDL agreed a facility for up to 60 such micro-loans during 2008 and nearly all of these were taken up with the first 6 months.

Over the last year Rosebud (excluding micro-loans) has invested over £1million from LCDL and leveraged £1.7million from other sources. This has helped to start 35 businesses which have created 108 new jobs and safeguarded another 30 jobs.

### Rural Business

Lancashire's rural economy has developed across the county based on a rich farming heritage.

The recent continued decline of the agricultural sector brought its own unique set of challenges for these areas and with it a need to broaden the economic base.

Lancashire County Council, working with partners, established a package of measures to assist this process whilst continuing to support our long-established farming communities. A Rural Lancashire Steering Group comprising partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors meets regularly and works collaboratively to support businesses through Co-ordinated Actions for Rural Lancashire.

The Rural Lancashire Development Fund provides access to finance to new and established micro enterprises and farmers to diversify their activities. Funding is provided through a mix of grant and loan and is helping to develop a range of manufacturing and service sector businesses across the county. A study into the operation of farmers markets is also being undertaken in consultation with producers and consumers to identify specific requirements. The aim is to maximise the benefits of the markets and provide key agriculture producers with a viable alternative source of income to enable businesses to be sustained.

### Tourism

Tourism is a vital part of the Lancashire economy. When the Northwest Regional Development Agency took over responsibility for tourism funding in 2003 and decided to strengthen tourism at the sub – regional level by creating the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board (LBTB) for the area, Lancashire County Council was centrally placed to establish it. Setting up a company in partnership with neighbouring Unitary Authorities Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Blackpool Council, and including private sector representation from key tourism businesses on the LBTB board, Lancashire County Council became company secretary, as well as providing financial and personnel services. Lancashire County Council continues to be an active

member of LBTB, being represented on its Board, providing an annual subvention and participation in projects with LBTB which benefit the county's economy. One such project has been the award winning Rural Tourism Undergraduate Placements project which over three years provided 26 Lancashire students on tourism related courses with year long placements. In addition to offering the experience of employment with real tourism businesses that welcomed their input, a strong feature of the project was the added value dimensions of a high level of mentoring and additional training e.g attending Welcome to Excellence courses. As well as improving the students CV's and increasing their future employability the project contributed to graduate retention for Lancashire and, for the tourism businesses the students worked with, provided additional tourism marketing expertise.

## **Rising Bridge Business And Enterprise Village, Rossendale**

The Rising Bridge Business and Enterprise Village project led by Lancashire County Developments Limited (LCDL), in partnership with Rossendale Borough Council and the North West Development Agency involves the remediation of 1.4 acres of brown field land to create nine, high quality offices (over 27000 square feet) as starter units for small to medium size businesses in support of the Jobs and Growth Agenda.

The £7million development will be of a high environmental standard attaining a minimum of BREEAM Very Good Rating (BREEAM is the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method, an internationally acknowledged tool for assessing a buildings sustainability). The project also includes provision for a new wildlife corridor/educational resource area (accompanied by an environmental education pack) on the shared boundary with the local primary school.

The key factors in enabling the project to move forward successfully have been the establishment of a project team with clear milestones and work packages, a comprehensive project planning methodology, strong leadership skills, close partnership working with Rossendale Borough Council's Economic Development Team and Planning Departments, cross Directorate working with County Council colleagues and the support of the North West Development Agency.

The project is a visual sign of commitment to invest in the Lancashire economy during the current economic downturn and will assist in bringing prosperity to Rossendale and Pennine Lancashire.

## **Creative Lancashire**

Creative Lancashire is the creative industries development service for Lancashire County Council, working with Business Link North West, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool unitary councils to provide a joined up service across the region. Its remit is to develop, enhance and promote the environment for creative industries in Lancashire by strengthening existing businesses, supporting new enterprises and working to raise the competitiveness and profile of the sector and the sub-region. Creative Lancashire, Lancashire County Council Communities and Partnerships Directorate and Blackpool and the Fylde Coast authorities have partnered together to create an ambitious culture and sport programme that puts young people at the heart of a 2012 currently entitled 'New Cultural Journeys'. This major youth led culture and sport programme for Lancashire and the Fylde Coast will use Web 2.0 and mobile technology to empower young people as commissioners, participants and creators, engaging them in active lifestyles across Lancashire's 'Routes and Trails'. Funded by the Legacy Trust UK this collaborative project will be applying for the 'Be Inspired' 2012 badge and if successful will be featured as part of the UK 2012 national activities.

Creative Lancashire is working with local creative employers and the Knowledge Transfer Unit at the University of Central Lancashire to develop a programme to equip creative graduates with the skills and experience necessary to work effectively in the industry. The programme will deliver a new Post Graduate Certificate in business skills and will assist local employers in recruitment and encourage job creation.

Creative Lancashire also acts as an advocate for the creative industries in Lancashire working to promote the importance of creativity and design as a key economic driver, influencing public policy through the Local Area Agreements and Multi Area Agreements. In this role Creative Lancashire has contributed to the cultural strategies and cultural asset mapping that has taken place along the Fylde Coast and in Pennine Lancashire and recognises the need to build creative capacity to build a vibrant visitor economy.

**For further information contact  
Lancashire County Developments Limited  
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**For further information on Apprenticeships,  
WorkStart or Future Horizons contact  
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