



Federation of Small Businesses
The UK's Leading Business Organisation

Stroud Branch Annual Report – November 2009

When taking on the reins of chairman in November 2008 I never thought that we all would be faced with the financial downturn that we all have experienced to date. The recession has had a major impact on our lives. Many good businesses have had to close leaving our district very much the poorer. However on the positive side a number of businesses have prospered.

I am pleased to say despite the recession that our membership continues to grow and I must thank our recruiter Dave Battrick for his support over the year. This also shows I believe that businesses can appreciate the benefits and service's the FSB continues offers its members.

A branch committee is only as good as its members and I am proud to say that the Stroud Branch committee is a dedicated and forward thinking group of individuals. Without their hard work and support over the past 12 months my job would have been so much more difficult. When a new chair takes over it can sometimes be a turbulent time but the committee has embraced my ideas and suggestions taking the branch forward in many directions, I would like to thank all of them for their support and hard work.

During the past 12 months we have increased the number of times we send out our newsletters from twice to four times a year and we continue to look for new ideas and articles from the membership. Particularly, good news stories and businesses that have some to say. Recently we have had an offer of help from Beth Whittaker, Director, Viva Communications Limited and we look forward to taking the newsletter to new heights with her ideas and support on our future editions.

Also during the year we undertook the decision to survey our members to ascertain how the committee could better help, understand and support the members. The survey made very interesting reading; of the 782 surveys sent out a 112 members responded, so thank you them.

It appears that a large number joined because of the benefits received from the membership services. A number of the responses stated that they wanted to have more networking opportunities.

Some members indicated that they would be happy to become more involved with the branch and I look forward to working with these individuals in the near future. Overall the survey returned a clear view where we need to concentrate our efforts and these responses will help us focus on the right type of future events.

Following on from the survey we started a series of business support and networking evenings starting in September to give members the opportunity to network and receive sound business support and ideas, and I am pleased to say we have had good feedback and they have been well supported. I would like to say a huge thank you to Mark Stallard & John Moss of Independent Financial Services in Stonehouse, Nigel Jew of Action Coach, Steve Powell of Powell Hartley and Stroud College who have helped to make the events a success.

We also attended the Stroud Show during the summer and had a fun day meeting members and talking with potential new members. Our new members evening at Rocco Gardens was also a great success and we will continue provide these types of events as long as the membership continues to support them.

Some other success achieved:

1. The branch has forged closer ties with other local business organisation to try and achieve more co-joined activities; in particular we are working with the Stroud Business Club, Stroud Chamber of Commerce and Vale Business Forum. It is hoped that other Chambers will join us soon.
2. Keep Trade Local continues to be driven forward and it is hoped that more events will be organised to allow businesses to tell other business that they exist.
3. Step Up Stroud, lobbying on Education, skills and Training is another area we are working on in conjunction with Carol Garfield of 3 Sector Match to get colleges and schools to talk more with business to ensure

that the right skills are being taught inline with local business requirements. The first event was held on the 8th July and we are looking forward to next one early next year.

4. Closer ties with Stroud District Council have been forged to work closer with them on matters that affect small business in the district. In particular we have arranged a “meet the councillors and officers” evening later this month.

I would also like to thank Terry Morgan and Susie Haigh for their dedication and hard work lobby on behalf of the branch and the region. This can be a thankless and extremely challenging task and without their persistence and hard questioning; many organisations and councils would just ignore the needs and concerns of the small business. They have many successes over the year.

It is always difficult to know where to concentrate our efforts as there always seems to be another challenge in front of us; however I have been inspired by the positive attitude of the many business owners that I have met over the previous months. Times are difficult; but in the Stroud District we are certainly a resilient bunch of business owners.

Before I close I would like to thank a couple of committee members that are standing down firstly Gordon Pearce who has been our Secretary for the past year, despite difficult times he has managed to supported us by attending meetings and sorting our correspondence.

Also Mark Clarke who is stepping down as treasurer, Mark has been with the Branch for great number of years and has done a fantastic job at keeping the finances on the straight and narrow. At times it has been a thankless job but Mark has continued to give his support. Mark will be sadly missed by the branch and me we all wish him every success with his future endeavours.

Thank you.

Dave Middlemiss
Stroud Branch Chairman