

Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce

The Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce acts to promote the interests of its members in matters affecting the economic welfare of the area, particularly economic regeneration, planning, development and transportation.

Its directors meet regularly with local decision makers and opinion formers such as leaders of local councils and M.P.s to discuss matters of vital importance to our members. They also work closely with and meet regularly with other business organizations and other local Chamber of Commerce to discuss issues of common concern and to share best practices.

General Presentation

Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce is an independent non-political organisation whose prime purpose is to act on behalf of the business community. It works to represent members' views and to support their interests. Their membership is drawn from all kinds of business ranging from manufacturing, processing and distribution to the supply of professional and other services.

In today's ever changing world with increasing technological development and uncertain economic climate, the Chamber has a vital supportive role to play. It is active in every walk of business life, encouraging relationships between companies, helping to develop market interest in Watford and South West Hertfordshire products and services and representing members' views to three local authorities, County Council and other public bodies whose decisions can have far reaching effects on the local economy.

Its directors are highly experienced local business men and women who are fully conversant with the many benefits and any problems associated with the area and we represent members' interests when attending meetings and sitting on a variety of

committees including Watford Town Centre Partnership.

The Watford Chamber continues to be one of the fastest growing Chambers of Commerce in the country having recruited over 300 new members during the last few years. Our membership which now totals well in excess of 500 businesses includes such well known names as Camelot, The Grove, Arsenal Football Club, Total UK Ltd, Taylor Woodrow Construction and Loans.co.uk.

The Watford Chamber provides the Members with a regular programme of **business events** running throughout the year with high profile guest speakers which give the Members the opportunity to network and to make those all important new business contacts.

Recent speakers have included Claire Ward M.P. for Watford, Lord Sainsbury, Steve Norris former Minister of Transport in the last Conservative Government and Keith Edelman, Managing Director of Arsenal Football Club.

The Chamber runs a series of **Business Seminars** covering topics such as Sales Techniques, Essential Export Skills and Tax Advice.

The Women in Business Group provides the happy combination of excellent speaker subjects and great company. 'Women in Business' is a sub group of the Watford Chamber of Commerce. Run entirely by members of the group itself, the aim is to provide a regular forum for women to network, meet like-minded colleagues and provide support and advice to each other.

The group was founded in 2002, and has been developed entirely in accordance with members' wishes and needs. There is an elected council to organise events and steer the activities of the group. Meetings are held every two months, and offer a mix of networking and informative presentations on topics chosen by members. A special area of focus is mentoring and exchange of skills; we aim to allow members to benefit from

the enormous pool of talent within the group.

To assist local businesses The Chamber provides them with a wide range of **financial information** including data bases and company searches. They are also able to undertake mailshots to Members of the Chamber.

The Members Directory on this website is proving to be a valuable resource, allowing users to search for products and services offered by creditable member companies.

Social activity

The Watford Chamber also takes part in and promotes local **business award schemes** which identify and give publicity to local businesses. The Watford & North London Business Award Scheme has been running for three years, during which Chamber Members have won numerous awards.

The Chamber has strengthened the links with key players such as the Watford Council, One Watford, The University of Hertfordshire and the Chamber currently chairs The Watford Town Centre Partnership.

They work closely with **local charities** and a recent Golf Day raised over £2500 for The Prince's Trust. The sellout Big Breakfast meeting networking meeting at the end of last year raised over £2000 for the Watford Mencap.

Publications:

The Chamber also provides its Members with an interesting quarterly **Chamber Magazine** which carries articles about the Chamber, our forthcoming events and our Members activities. It also gives its members the opportunity to advertise and publicise any new product or service.

They also produce a **Chamber Yearbook** giving full details of our Members and a **Chamber Diary**. Both of these publications provide the ideal opportunity to promote the businesses within the area.

Export Documentation

The Chamber's International Department provides a full documentation service together with help and advice on all aspects of exporting. The export documentation service is used by an increasing number of companies seeking a fast and efficient service. The Chamber is authorised to process Certificates of Origin for all countries of the world including the Arab League States with Chamber Members receiving discounts of up to 50%.

The International Services Department provides a full documentation service together with help and advice on all aspects of exporting. Thousands of consignments have been exported to countries throughout the world using documents processed by the Chamber. The Export Documentation facility is used by an increasing number of companies seeking a fast and efficient local service which has been enhanced still further by the introduction of Electronic Certificates of Origin (e-cert) for which no additional charge is made. The Chamber is authorised to process Certificates of Origin for all countries of the world, with Chamber members receive discounts of up to 50% on European Community Certificates.

Affiliation possibilities and implications

The Chamber has for many years enjoyed a successful working relationship with the **Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce** in respect of the foreign documentation work that they undertake for us.

Of present interest is the fact that The Chamber has recently been approached by them (they are an Accredited Chamber with over 1600 members) with a view to building on these existing links and working together more closely in the future for the mutual benefit of our business communities.

What they are proposing is that The Watford Chamber links up with them to become an Associate Member which will greatly enhance the benefits that the latter are able to offer to our members.

Some of these additional benefits would include:

- * Joint events which would mean even better opportunities to network
- * The opportunity to offer additional benefits to our members such as fuel cards, healthcare, AA membership and Chamber Travel all at discounted rates.
- * Chamber Market Place whereby special deals are negotiated between members.
- * Regular updates, media articles, awards details and newsletters from the British Chamber of Commerce
- * A much stronger voice when it comes to lobbying as we would be speaking on behalf of over 2,000 businesses.
- * Chamber Helpline which would be available 365 days per year covering such matters as employment law, health & safety and VAT.

The Watford Chamber has also received a second offer this time from the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce which is based in St Albans. This is currently being considered by the Chamber Board and once they have reached a decision as to which offer represents the best deal for the members, they will be let know in writing. The Chamber would also in the meantime welcome the member's views so please with regards to this subject.

Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce Business Plan:

With regards to:

New Members:

- Minimum of 8 New Members per month
- 4 New Members (250 +employees) per annum
- Concentrate on larger firms (11/49 section)
- Ask for business
- Incentive to introduce New Member
- Positive press
- Web site
- Best practices HCCI
- WENTA references
- Testimonials (Jim Poptani)
- Recommendations

Prices:

- £90K up from £80K
- Database – the same
- Mail shots £ 250 mail boxes increase in cost for more members – Fay
- Banner links
- Events – fee increased to £22
- Sponsorship (events, Year Book/Diary, WCCI folder)
- Sponsors on Website/Magazine
- Magazine
- New Member
- Advertising our services in the magazine (eg: Mail Shot, Events, Banner Link, Databases,)

- Foreign charges - Fall in line with HCCI
- Increase in Subs
- Increase in general prices

Costs:

- New accounting packages -
- Up front payment for all goods and services
- Streamline – Credit Card payments
- Collection of debts
- Increase Direct Debit – Campaign in the New Year
- Re-think suppliers
- Analyse expenditure – easily available with new Sage Accounting

Events:

- House of Commons
- Trip to Emirates / Wembley Stadium
- 4 New Members Buffets
- 11 Networking events
- Golf day
- Evening Networking Club
- Speed-networking
- Christmas Charity Event
- Sponsorship
- 6 Women In Business
- AGM
- Greater use of emails – communication with our Members

Retention:

- Survey – What our members want

- Best practices HCCI v WCCI
- Follow up phone call for Resignations
- More use of the website for members
- Visits to members

MISCELLANEOUS

- Answer phone Machine or Voice Mail
- Add another line
- Update leaflet to include Direct Debit form
- See HCCI chambers
- Subs increase starting the 1st January – Year Book
- Email - WCCI logo on our emails
- Internet banking:
 - Statements can be obtained daily.
 - Current position of finances at your fingertips.
 (thus will also make a difference to charges)
 - A proper statement once a month.
 - Payment of bills by bill payment cheaper and more efficient than writing and sending cheques generally.

A strong and proactive Chamber of Commerce is vital in any business community. The more members they have, the stronger their voice when representing the members interests on those matters which are so important to those who do business in the Watford area.

Established for over 100 years, the Watford and West Herts Chamber has helped to establish South West Herts as the major commercial centre in Hertfordshire.



WATFORD & WEST HERTS
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PROGRAM FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Leonardo da Vinci

**AND THE BRITISH-ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY,
BUCHAREST**

PROGRAM: LEADER

Students Leadership for Business Administration

Company: Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce

Student: Oana Lungu