

Boss takes up challenge of living on just £71

A CHIEF executive of a computing firm today (Friday) begins a charity challenge to abandon life's luxuries to live off the equivalent of a week's out-of-work benefits.

Inspired by the 1980s film of the same name, starring Eddie Murphy and Dan Ackroyd, the Fredericks Foundation's annual *Trading Places* challenge runs from today to March 8 and sees participants live off just £71 – a single person's job seeker's allowance (JSA) payment.

The challenge is aimed at giving people in high-power business positions a glimpse of the difficulties faced by people struggling to get by while trying to find work.

Vin Murria, CEO of Cobham-based Advanced Computer Software Group, is one of those to try living off the allowance while also donating £71 to Fredericks Foundation.

Vin said: "This is a real challenge but I believe passionately in helping people to help themselves which is why I support this event and this charity."

Fredericks Foundation is a non-profit organisation that provides vital microfinance support to those wanting to start their own business but who have no means of financing it.



Vin Murria

It aims to foster the growth of small businesses, which are said to be vital to the economy.

Paul Barry-Walsh, chairman of Fredericks Foundation, said: "This challenge will hopefully demonstrate how hard it is to save capital to start a business when you are out of a job. The more people that get involved, the more people we can get back working again and off ISA."

Cameron's pledge on EU vote creates uncertainty for companies

SURREY companies may be abandoning plans to export their services at a time when this is most needed, following the uncertainty over Britain's future membership of the EU.

Brian Farrugia, chairman of business-led economic development company Surrey Connects, has expressed concerns that an in-out referendum on the EU that has been heavily suggested by Prime Minister David Cameron could put off the county's business leaders investing in export activity.

Surrey Connects was launched in June last year with the aim of doubling the Surrey economy to £52bn by 2030, with a key objective to secure a future in the global marketplace. One of the eight priorities outlined at the launch was to stimulate international trade and exporting activity by Surrey companies.

However, Mr Cameron's pledge to seek the view of Britain's public, was seen as a blow to these plans.

Mr Farrugia, who has international business experience himself, said: "Exporting is a vital part of the local economy, and



Brian Farrugia

research shows that exporters achieve higher levels of business growth and job creation.

"However, a firm's decision to export will be strongly influenced by the perceptions of risks as well as the benefits.

"My concern is that uncertainty about the future of Britain's relationship with the EU may lead to

companies postponing their investment in export activity at a time when it is greatly needed."

He added that he feared some global firms that have located in Surrey could decide to consolidate their European operations if the current situation changed.

Mr Cameron, under pressure from some Conservative members, did suggest more recently that a referendum would only take place if the coalition government in place now became a Tory-only one.

The Liberal Democrats have strongly opposed cutting Britain's ties with Europe.

As an EU member, Britain is part of the biggest single market in the world and businesses benefit from a lack of customs duties and tariffs and the fact they need only adhere to one definitive list of trading rules.

Businesses are therefore able to tap into strong demand for certain products in foreign countries with relative ease.

In the third quarter of 2012, exports to the EU from the South-East were worth £10.2bn, up from £9.9 billion a year earlier.

One Surrey company doing just this is Dorking-based IT firm NaMax DJ, which has made a success of exporting its programmes into growing global markets.

Rather than EU members, though, the company has targeted countries such as Oman, the UAE and Kenya, and CEO Charles Brewer said he believed the company may actually gain if government links were instead set up with sub-Saharan Africa or south-east Asia.

"Essentially, we decided that Europe was pretty much moribund for our kind of product," he said.

"The UK's traditional focus on global trade could be the beginning of a new era of export-led prosperity to the growing world economies.

"I understand from senior contacts in Oman that as a result of David Cameron's visit late last year, not to mention that of the Queen a while ago, that our national stock is very high in the region, and that the benefits of close and continued contact in the Gulf Cooperation Council in particular are potentially very great indeed."