

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economic Success Panel** held by video link on **Friday 15 May 2020** at **2.00pm** when there were present:

Mrs J K Copplestone – Chairman

Mr S C Beadle

Mr A D Crotch

Mrs K A Vincent

Ms S J Catchpole

Mrs T M Mancini-Boyle

Mr N J Brennan and Mr S Vincent were also in attendance.

Also in attendance were the Director Place, Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth, Governance Manager, Democratic Services Manager and the Committee Officer (JO).

15 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Mr Bulman.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

17 COVID-19 BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

The Chairman advised the meeting that the Government's recently published COVID-19 Recovery Strategy set out the plan for the economic recovery of the Country, which would take a gradual approach to reopening businesses and protecting livelihoods.

The Council had played its part in this by distributing over 2,000 Small Business Grants and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants, which equated to 97 percent of eligible businesses in the District.

It had recently been announced that the Furlough Scheme was to be extended to October and on 13 May 2020 a Discretionary Grant Fund had been set up to accommodate certain small businesses that had previously been outside the scope of the Business Grant Fund schemes. It was anticipated that the Council would receive £1.15m to administer this fund.

The Chairman also noted that the Government had established a Gigabit Voucher Scheme to help businesses access full fibre broadband in rural

areas. She proposed that the Council could also use its Hardship Fund to similarly assist vulnerable residents in rural areas access broadband.

In response to a query regarding the criteria for the awards of the Discretionary Grant Fund, the Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth, advised the meeting that the Council could adopt a flexible approach as the Government guidelines on this were quite wide. Officers from all the Norfolk local authorities were meeting next week to work out a common approach across the County. It was anticipated that there would be a high demand across the District for the grants, which it was hoped would begin to be awarded on 1 June 2020. The Economic Development Team were contacting businesses that qualified for the grant to ensure that they did not miss out on this support.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance stressed that not all local authorities in Norfolk had the same type of business needs and that Broadland should ensure that a bespoke fund was established that met local needs.

The Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth then gave a presentation to the Panel on Operation Beacon, which was a coordinated response by Broadland, South Norfolk and Breckland Councils to protect jobs and grow business in the face of the pandemic.

Operation Beacon was a 'whole Council' response to the crisis. For example, to assist the development sector, £3.6m in Community Infrastructure Levy payments had been deferred to assist builders with their cash flow.

The project was the biggest ever engagement exercise undertaken by Broadland and was being driven by an understanding of the economy in the District, which was forecast to suffer a 32 percent decline in Gross Value Added as a result of the pandemic.

Datasets produced had shown that a high number of the workforce being furloughed were in the accommodation food and leisure sectors, with younger workers being most affected. With knowledge of those areas worst affected a focused and targeted approach could be taken to support the economy.

Operation Beacon was divided into the following three main strands:

1. CLEAN SAFE AND VIBRANT MARKET TOWNS

- Tactical street closures and pavement widening, for social distancing and expanded trade provision
- Floor markings, signage, one-way systems, marshals and Help Hubs

- Accessibility, public transport, cycling and parking enhancements
- Enhanced street cleaning and public toilet adaptations
- Increasing public confidence and safety; including visible signs of meeting government guidelines, Environmental Health support
- Focus on positive (not sterile!) environment / Woonerf Concept
- Increased attraction; including campaigns and socially distanced events

2. TOTAL COUNCIL MOBILISATION

- Pro-growth and pro-business continuity approach to Licencing, including maximising taxi capacity, trading support
- Proactive and proportionate approach to Planning, including pre-commencement deferral, proportionate enforcement etc
- Focused procurement, prioritising local value and jobs
- Targeted Business Rates support, and use of grants
- Leverage Leisure to support employee wellbeing and beyond – mobilising every part of the Council which could support in some way

3. SUPPORTING EVERY BUSINESS

- Biggest-ever business engagement exercise (to inform, and receive input / suggestions)
- Develop 'Unlocked' service, front-door to any company to resolve Covid trading issues
- Individual risk assessment and support plans for key businesses
- Support plans and solutions for most vulnerable sectors
- Skills support to enabled both continued trading, and growth
- Development of robust evidence base and global insights
- Maximisation of investment and financial support to business

It was anticipated that an initial reopening of retail premises would commence from Monday 1 June with a wider retail and leisure return on 6 July. But these dates could be subject to change according to how the pandemic progressed.

The project would be massive and complex and would involve the County Council, as well as town and parish councils and elected Members. The Engagement and Liaison Teams would be contacting Members next week to advise them on this further.

The Leader noted that the project would present the Council with an opportunity to drive forward the economy of the District following the devastation caused by the coronavirus. He emphasised the importance of giving people the confidence to go out, whilst continuing to practice social distancing in order to avoid the danger of a second or third wave of Covid-19. He noted that working across three broadly similar districts would allow for the optimal use of resources to do this.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance commended the proposal and noted that this would be a good opportunity to encourage businesses to locate in more rural areas like Broadland.

A Member suggested that business in the District would be reshaped by the pandemic and the Council had an important role in bringing businesses together to take different business models forward. This could be facilitated through forums and groups that could help businesses to adapt and support one another. The Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth confirmed that the Council would explore setting up a virtual business forum.

In summing up, the Chairman noted the excellent work being done by the Economic Development Team and proposed that supporting Operation Beacon be recommended to the Cabinet, along with the establishment of a bespoke Discretionary Grant Fund and that the Hardship Fund be used to assist vulnerable residents in rural areas gain access to full fibre broadband.

The proposal was supported unanimously by the Panel.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To support Operation Beacon; the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
2. To establish a bespoke Discretionary Grant Fund; and
3. To assist residents in rural poverty access full fibre broadband through the Council's Hardship Fund.

18 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining business because otherwise, information which was exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 would be disclosed to them.

19 EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

The Panel was advised that the bid to the European Regional Development Fund for the Food Innovation Centre had been submitted in late March and it had been expected that the Council would have been notified if the bid had been successful in early June. However, formal notification had been received that the timeline would now slip due to the pandemic and it was likely to be the New Year before any decision would be made.

The meeting closed at 3.12pm.