

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economic Success Panel** held by video link on **Wednesday 22 July 2020** at 6pm when there were present:

Cllr J Copplestone – Chairman

Cllr S Beadle

Cllr A Crotch

Cllr N Harpley

Cllr P Bulman

Cllr S Catchpole

Cllr K Vincent

Cllr K Leggett and Cllr G Nurden were also in attendance.

Also in attendance were the Director of Place, the Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth, the Business Support and Promotion Team Manager, the Tourism Officer (CG), the Democratic Services Manager, the Democratic Services Officer (LA) and the Programme Director for Better Broadband for Norfolk (Karen O’Kane).

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

Member	Item	Declaration	Interest
Cllr S Beadle	6 – Economic Recovery in Broadland	Director of a Company in receipt of a Business Support Grant.	Other
Cllr J Copplestone	6 – Economic Recovery in Broadland	In receipt of a Business Support Grant under the Tourism sector.	Other
Cllr K Vincent	All	Norfolk County Councillor	Other

21 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Mancini-Boyle.

22 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

23 MATTERS ARISING

Minute No: 17 Matters Arising

The Chairman referred to minute 17 from the last meeting, which had

recommended to Cabinet that the Council's hardship fund be used to assist residents in rural properties to access full fibre broadband. The meeting was advised that, following a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet had proposed that Council consider whether Broadland District Council should make a bid to the CIL Infrastructure Fund to further invest in Broadband. However officers had since confirmed that the use of CIL funds for this purpose was not appropriate.

24 BETTER BROADBAND FOR NORFOLK – UPDATE BY KAREN O'KANE, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

The Chairman welcomed members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the meeting for this item.

The Programme Director for Better Broadband in Norfolk, provided members with a verbal update on the 'Better Broadband for Norfolk' scheme. She advised that, to date, two rollouts of the scheme had been completed with the most recent one exceeding the levels of coverage expected by the contract. The Panel was informed that the contract dealt specifically with properties eligible for state intervention because they experienced internet speeds of below 15Mbps.

Members were advised that the independent 'Think Broadband' website, which collated information from all internet service providers regarding the available speeds and take up of services, had been reviewed in order to provide an overall view of broadband coverage in both Broadland and also County-wide. The Programme Director confirmed that 95% of Broadland properties currently had access to super-fast broadband but there were approximately 1500 properties (2%) in the area which did not meet the Government's universal service obligation for broadband.

Members were advised that there were several different solutions available for these 1500 properties, the first being the Government's universal service obligation where residents could request speeds of at least 10Mbps and downloads of 1Mb. The Panel was informed that BT, via Openreach, was the provider of this solution in Broadland, but that a cost cap of £3400 applied so, if the costs were higher than £3400 for the property, the resident or business would be required to pay the difference. The Programme Director explained that, to enable costs to remain below the cap, the first course of action had usually been to investigate mobile coverage with hybrid solutions to provide 4G coverage by fixing a special receiver to the property.

Members were advised that a second solution, the Gigabit Voucher Scheme, was available for properties in rural locations where internet speeds fell short of the Government's universal service obligation. The Programme Director explained that grants of up to £3500 for businesses and £1500 for residential properties were available. She clarified that vouchers could be pooled, with a minimum of two properties joining, to increase the value of the pooled grant.

The Panel was pleased to note that Norfolk had benefited by approximately £1.1 million from the grant, and was advised that further information regarding the funding was available in the latest Highlight Report, which would be forwarded to members after the meeting.

The Panel was advised that Better Broadband for Norfolk would be rolling out a third contract later in 2020 which would target properties which did not yet have access to super-fast broadband and, where there was no commercial intention to do so. It was noted that this would be an entirely 'fibre to the premises' solution which would enable some of the fastest speeds to be reached in some of the most rural locations, with an anticipated rise in Norfolk from 95% to 97% in those properties which would be able to achieve super-fast broadband.

The Programme Director advised members that the Government had set an objective that all properties should have access to full fibre and it was expected that approximately 80% of these would be provided via commercial companies such as Open Reach, Virgin Media, and some of the smaller companies throughout the area.

The Chairman thanked the Programme Director for her presentation and whilst she was pleased to note that the level of coverage throughout Broadband was at 98%, she stressed the importance of finding a solution for those who were disadvantaged by poor coverage, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, when many residents and businesses needed to be online.

In response to a question from the Chairman regarding the identification of the 2% of properties which could not achieve broadband speeds of 10Mbps, the Programme Director advised that she expected to complete her data analysis by mid to late autumn and would then be able to provide members with a list of properties, split between those which achieved under or over 24Mbps, (the definition of super-fast broadband) in postcode order. In response to a further question, it was clarified that a split between business and residential properties would not be possible as many small businesses operated from residential premises and did not pay for premium broadband services, so could not be identified by service providers.

Members referred to the Gigabit Voucher Scheme and requested further information about how to signpost residents and businesses to the Scheme. The Programme Director advised that the Scheme was operated by Central Government which specifically targeted rural properties with speeds below 100Mbps. She suggested that the Scheme would be useful for groups of residents but also ideal for concentrations of small, rural business which may wish to explore moving, as a group, to a gigabit connection capable infrastructure as this would permit them to run several varied businesses with shared costs. The Panel was advised of the application process and advised that information and a link to the website would be provided to members after the meeting.

A member enquired whether the Council could help further with funding to achieve faster broadband for the remaining 2% of properties in rural areas. The Programme Director agreed that the Council could consider a grant scheme in conjunction with signposting people to the Gigabit Voucher Scheme, but should bear in mind that the third contract would upgrade some of those areas currently affected. In response to a member's request that officers start to explore funding opportunities at a local level without delay, the Programme Director advised that, as the Gigabit Voucher Scheme was only available to properties where no other public funding options were being considered, the Council would be well advised to wait until the Better Broadband for Norfolk report was published in the autumn so they could assess where the gaps remained. She suggested that the Council could, in the meantime, look to identify suitable rural businesses which could potentially form clusters to share services under the Gigabit Voucher Scheme.

After a brief discussion, the Chairman agreed to forward the Highlight Report to members and summarised the salient conversation points. She then proposed that, once the Better Broadband For Norfolk report had been received in the autumn of 2020, in respect of the remaining 2% of houses and businesses in Broadland without access to super-fast broadband, officers should continue to explore all funding opportunities, secure additional top-up funding and support the provision of super-fast broadband. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Crotch. Voting was then carried out by roll-call, with 4 votes for and 3 abstentions.

It was therefore;

RESOLVED:

That, once the report from Better Broadband for Norfolk report was received in the autumn of 2020, in respect of the remaining 2% of houses and businesses in Broadland without access to super-fast broadband, officers are requested to continue to explore all funding opportunities, secure additional top up funding and support the provision of super-fast broadband.

25 ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN BROADLAND

The Interim Assistant Director of Economic Development summarised the salient points of his report, which included the four key activities for the recovery of the local economy; the New Anglia LEP Economy Recovery Restart Plan, the three-Council Confidence Campaign, the current initiatives to re-open the tourism sector, and the Local Discretionary Grant Fund.

With much of the work of the Economic Development Team currently being focused on the recovery of the local economy, the report laid out the current findings and responses planned to combat areas such as unemployment and businesses.

Members referred to the New Anglia LEP Economy and Recovery Restart Plan and agreed that although it highlighted the aspirations around recovery, it lacked detail of how this would be achieved. Officers recognised the plan did not detail the implementation but felt this might be difficult to show as much of the activity being undertaken, such as tourism recovery, had separate, specific implementation plans in place. However, he reassured members that he would be able to make any specific implementation plans available to members, if required. In response to a member's question regarding the ability of smaller businesses to access digital and marketing training and support, officers explained that webinars and workshops were being coordinated by the Council and the LEP, and that these were being advertised via newsletters.

The Chairman advised members that Cabinet had considered the Council's business plans with the ambition to deliver economic success in the area and was pleased to report the Council's success in the backing of local businesses and providing advice and guidance to help them to establish, grow and prosper. However, concerns had been raised that, due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, the furlough scheme which was due to end in October, and Brexit impending, it was likely that the area would see an increase in unemployment which would require the Council to fully support communities by offering a range of opportunities, skills and employment prospects. The Chairman therefore proposed that Broadland District Council worked closely with the LEP and other partners to minimise job losses in the area with the delivery of the Norfolk and Suffolk Job Support campaign, as described on page five of the Norfolk and Suffolk COVID-19 Economic Recovery Restart Plan. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Crotch and agreed by the Panel.

Turning to the three-Council Confidence Campaign, officers reassured members that planter boxes were being installed in market towns to replace unsightly barriers. In response to a query regarding the roll-out of COVID Kits, which contained equipment including sanitiser and signage, for local parish and town high streets, the Interim Assistant Director confirmed that all town and parish councils had been emailed at least once but that 31 of these had not yet responded. Members were advised which town and parish councils had responded to enable them to liaise with town and parishes within their areas. Officers advised that they would be telephoning towns and parishes who had not responded and would let members know of any who advised they did not require the kits.

A member thanked the officers who were involved in the Confidence Campaign but expressed disappointment that she had not been contacted by telephone to make her aware of the significance of being involved in the programme. In response, the Chairman reminded members that communications had been emailed to them weekly to keep them informed of any activities. Officers regretted that they were not able to do everything they would have wished, due to significant workloads and limited resources, however they advised that there would be many opportunities for members to get involved with the next phase of recovery.

The conversation turned to tourism recovery and the Tourism Officer summarised the salient points in the report. Members were pleased to note the number of procedures in place to re-establish the tourism sector and were advised that surveys carried out by Visit Norfolk had enabled officers to assess the impact of the pandemic on the tourism industry and to use this information to develop the Visit East of England and Visitor Economy Recovery Group, as detailed in the report. Members were pleased to note that farmers and other supply chains were included within the Plan, as had been requested at a previous meeting of the Panel.

The Chairman thanked officers and was pleased to note that Broadland had received grant funding for tourism and noted that the Government reduction in VAT had been very welcome for tourism businesses within the area.

The Panel briefly discussed Discretionary Grants and was pleased to note that most of the available funding was accounted for and would be utilised by the end of August 2020. It was also noted that officers were making outgoing calls to businesses to further promote funding.

In response to a member's question concerning the Council's refusal to provide Councillors with information regarding businesses who had not applied for grant funding, the Interim Assistant Director of Economic Development advised that the Managing Director had provided this instruction but that he would seek further clarity from him outside of the meeting.

The Director of Place commended officers on their commitment and dedication during the pandemic, advising that work which would usually have taken months to progress had been undertaken in a matter of weeks, to ensure that residents could return to work and businesses could re-open. The Chairman thanked officers on behalf of the Panel.

The Chairman, commended the report to members and stressed the need to recognise the importance of the tourism and leisure sectors in the economic recovery of the District. Members agreed that the support, which the Council offered would be critical to many businesses and supply chains.

The Chairman thanked officers for an informative and comprehensive report. Voting was then carried out by roll-call, and it was unanimously agreed. It was then;

RESOLVED:

(1) To note the contents of the report;

and

- (2) To recommend that Broadland District Council works closely with the LEP and other partners to minimise job losses in the area with the delivery of the Norfolk and Suffolk Job Support campaign, as described on page five of the Norfolk and Suffolk COVID-19 Economic Recovery Restart Plan.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.