

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economic Success Panel** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Tuesday 23 January 2018** at **10:00am** when there were present:

Mr S M Clancy – Chairman

Mr J Emsell
Mr I Moncur

Mr C Harrison
Mr G K Nurden

Mrs L Hempsall
Mr G Peck

In attendance were the Head of Economic Development, the Economic Development Manager (KH), the Economic Development Manager (SS) and the Committee Officer (DM).

15 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Mrs K Vincent.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 LOCAL ECONOMY UPDATE

The Head of Economic Development updated Members on the main areas of activity since the last meeting as reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 January 2018.

- The Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant's rate in Broadland at the end of November 2017 was 485 people – this had reduced from 600 in May 2017. This equated to a "0" level of unemployment as defined by the Government. The reason for the reduction could be attributed to seasonal factors and the potential for some claimants to have found work in the tourism or agriculture sectors over the summer months. Officers would continue to monitor these statistics.
- Two Broadland Business Forum meetings had been held since the last update. On 12 July 2017 the event at Sprowston Manor Hotel had been attended by 60+ businesses with the key theme being tourism in the local area. The event on 11 October 2017 had been held at The Cottage in Thorpe St Andrew, attended by 60+ businesses with the key speaker from Archant. Events were attended by a wide range of officers to facilitate networking.

- In March 2017 the 'Buy in Broadland' voucher booklet had been sent to over 58,000 homes with Council Tax invoices to encourage local people and visitors to spend locally. The scheme had been well received with many more businesses coming forward to take part.
- The department continued to assist the Town Teams in Reepham and Aylsham and had been assisting the residents of Reedham to put together a Village Team to look at a number of local issues, including the potential for improvements to the Reedham Quay and the toilets owned by the Council.
- The Choices Group had continued to meet regularly at Carrowbreck to tackle long term unemployment and barriers to work, suggest a range of potential volunteering and work experience options (through contacts with local businesses) that could help gradually ease residents back into work. There was a high drop-out rate amongst male attendees.
- In mid-October 2017, the Council attended MIPIM at Olympia in London. This event showcased potential development and growth areas to investors from the UK and abroad and was an opportunity to build relations with potential investors.
- The Greater Norwich Manufacturing Group (GNMG) continued to grow, both in membership and reputation. Their most recent event held at KLM's facility at the airport in December 2017 was attended by 30+ business and education representatives from across the area.
- The Financial Industry Group (FIG) had hosted its second annual conference in November 2017 at the UEA. Speakers were drawn from a range of industry experts and had been well received. FIG had expressed a desire to engage more closely with Local Government and the LEP and this initiative was being enabled by the Economic Development Manager (Partnerships & Growth).
- The Norfolk Better Business for All (BBfA) initiative had been launched November 2017. Economic Development Officers had played a key part in supporting and promoting the initiative which sought to bring together 'regulators' from across Norfolk and Suffolk to offer businesses a cohesive, consistent and supportive service to enable them to prosper with the minimum of 'red tape'. Broadland's Chief Executive had given the key note speech at the launch and had agreed to act as the Local Authority Lead for implementation of the initiative in Norfolk.
- In December 2017 the Vice-Chairman, Leader and Cabinet Members had joined Economic Development staff to celebrate Small Business Saturday 2017, visiting a number of small Broadland businesses during the day and listening to their experiences of operating in Broadland.

- Tots2Teens –1,452 places had been taken in Summer 2017, 199 places in October half term and 195 places in Winter. The scheme continued to be a popular and valuable service to local communities with excellent feedback.
- Broadly Active - in the third quarter of 2017/18, Broadly Active received another 117 referrals taking the total for this year to over 400. Completion rates were around 30 percent with all completed clients demonstrating an increase in physical activity levels and an improvement of at least one health indicator. Broadly Active continued to work with condition specific groups within the NHS such as the National Diabetes Prevention Programme, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Tier 3 Weight Management Services and Pulmonary rehabilitation.
- The 9th Marriott's Way run, held in October, attracted 450 runners and, for the first time included a 1 mile 'junior' run with 39 young people participating.
- Parkrun - there were now three active Parkruns operating in Broadland in Old Catton, Brundall and Blickling with an average of 700 people across the three runs. Approximately 9,000 Broadland residents were registered with Parkrun.
- Why Weight continued to deliver successful programmes across the District with schemes in Drayton, Blofield and Spixworth and Thorpe St Andrew, focussing on lifestyle changes.
- Repton 200 would be officially launched in Aylsham to start a year of nationwide celebrations coordinated by the Gardens Trust to mark the bicentenary of the death of Humphry Repton, who succeeded Capability Brown as Britain's greatest landscape gardener. Repton first worked as a landscape gardener at Catton Park and was buried at St Michael and All Angels Church in Aylsham in March 1818. A programme of events celebrating his life and work had been planned in Norfolk and around the Country and the Council's Tourism Officer had been instrumental in coordinating and promoting local events and celebrations.
- With regard to car parking, Members noted that an update had been given at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on car parking and Members agreed that this topic should be considered further at the next meeting of the Panel. Officers noted a request for car parking issues in Acle to be included as part of the considerations.

Members thanked the Head of Economic Development for the update. They welcomed the low levels of unemployment but a comment was made that businesses looking to locate to the area may be concerned about the shortage of workers. In response, officers commented that adjoining districts

did not have the same low levels of unemployment, that there were seasonal variations in unemployment figures and different types of seasonal businesses had peak demands for staffing at different times. Also, there was significant potential housing growth over the next few years. Officers were always willing to meet with potential businesses to alleviate any fears and often larger businesses were willing to support smaller ones with staffing options. Members commented on the need to treat with caution the statistics relating to unemployment and those receiving JSA and ESA (Employment Support Allowance).

In response to a request, officers undertook to report back on the actual unemployment figures for the district, determining the levels of JAS and ESA across the district.

18 NEW ANGLIA GROWTH HUB

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Nigel Best, the New Anglia Growth Hub Manager for the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership. The NAGH employed 10 business advisors across Norfolk and Suffolk to deliver free, impartial advice to businesses. Their involvement included, visiting businesses, discussions with owners, diagnostic assessments and preparing actions for help and solutions.

He commented that Broadland were one of the exemplar districts in relation to Better Business for All.

The Chairman commented that the Council had been critical of the role of the LEP in the past but that relations with the NAGH had improved significantly over the last year following Mr Best's appointment. There was still progress to be made. He gave a particular example of a case where a business had withdrawn an application for funding because of the bureaucracy involved. He hoped Mr Best would continue to reduce the barriers to businesses when seeking help to grow and ensure the support was outcome driven and not process driven.

A Member made a plea for clarity in the advice being given by the LEP in terms of what types of funding/financing were available concurrently as it appeared there was inconsistent advice throughout the Country and securing some forms of financing possibly led to others not being available. He felt other areas of the Country appeared to be more experienced in this area and Mr Best sought examples of good practice which he was keen to investigate.

A further comment was made about the high levels of costs of administration and processes which reduced the funds available to the LEP for redistribution.

Mr Best added that the Business Growth Hub was only one element of the LEP but that he would share these concerns with the Partnership. Mr Best commented that much streamlining of processes had taken place, and would continue, to help reduce red tape and costs. For example, the application form had been reduced from 11 pages to 4. An application for a grant of under £10k could now be processed in a week with grants over £10k being processed in 3 weeks. He reiterated however that this was dependent on applications being complete and meeting the necessary criteria. Much more help was now available to applicants to get ready to make an application, completing the application and ensuring they met the criteria. One issue was that some businesses were not “investment ready” and needed support to get to this stage. The Chairman commented on a case he had followed recently whereby the Growth Advisor had helped to support a business to become ready for investment, assisted with their application and successfully secured a grant for them. Mr Best undertook to supply the Council with a leaflet to outline the process of applying for a grant.

Mr Best commented that the LEP’s target to secure £6.5m match funding by 2036 had now been met, way ahead of schedule. This year the LEP was seeking to secure funding from the European Regional Development Fund for a further 3 years to continue with the Growth Hub.

The Chairman commented on the close working relations between Broadland officers and Broadland businesses and that the Growth Hub Advisors should utilise these links to connect to Broadland businesses and where possible avoid unnecessary expense and duplication. The role of the County Council was much more distant from local businesses, especially SMEs.

In response to a request, Mr Best agreed to liaise with the Council’s representative on the Broads Authority regarding advice on income generation and support for businesses in the Broads Authority Area, particularly in relation to small businesses in the traditional skills industries.

With regard to businesses that were struggling, Mr Best commented that advice and support was available to all businesses including those struggling. An example of which was a business experiencing good and bad times which had been supported with a grant, one of the conditions of the grant was to meet regularly with a Growth Hub Advisor to monitor their financial situation. Efforts were made to support businesses to understand their business better.

A comment was made that, having regard to Brexit, discussions should now be taking place with appropriate government bodies with regard to sources of funding in the future other than ERDF monies.

The Chairman thanked Mr Best for attending.

19 NEW ANGLIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – UPDATE

The Economic Development Manager (SS) reminded Members that the Council had endorsed the Norfolk and Suffolk Economic Development Strategy and had considered how the Council could seek to influence the local delivery and implementation plans. To progress these, an exercise had now commenced to map out what was being done and what needed to be done to identify any gaps. A series of business engagement events were being held to this end. An Economic Strategy Steering Board was also being established and all the appropriate district and county councils would be represented. The role of the County Council was that of planning and prioritising the infrastructure needed and consideration of funding for this, along with addressing skills needed.

The Chairman raised the issue of the shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry and training services for these and invited the Economic Development Manager to raise these concerns at the appropriate forum.

In response to a question about funding coming into the area to support the aims of the strategy, the Economic Development Manager agreed that this would have been affected by the decision to not secure a devolution arrangement for the area. Broadland would however be in a position to demonstrate its collaborative working with South Norfolk and there had been a coordinated response to the Strategy from the two councils which would strengthen any bids for funding.

A Member made reference to the contribution made by the Broads Authority to the economy and stated that it was an important stakeholder in the delivery of the strategy and asked if they were part of the ongoing discussions. Members and officers agreed that the Broads Authority was an important stakeholder and made a huge contribution to the region and should be involved in the process. The Economic Development Manager undertook to seek further information on the position of the Broads Authority in relation to the proposals for the local delivery and implementation plans.

20 BROADBAND AND MOBILE PHONE SIGNALS

The Economic Development Manager (KH) reported on progress with the Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBFN) roll out. Efforts were now being made to roll out fibre services directly to clusters of businesses in harder to reach areas not already included in the superfast Broadband rollout. There had been a higher than expected uptake of the superfast services which would increase the level of clawback to be re-invested in proposals to try and serve the harder to reach areas remaining. It was agreed that Ms Karen O'Kane, Programme Manager for BBFN be invited to the next meeting to update Members on progress.

Whilst the rollout of superfast Broadband was progressing and over 97% coverage achieved, there were still issues with the hard to reach areas and with speeds/data capacities of alternative methods of supplying broadband services. A comment was made that there was still not open competition in relation to the provision of infrastructure.

Members had a role to play in encouraging residents to accept the short-term disruption from the installation of services for the longer-term gain and it was felt an article in Broadland News on Broadband covering some of the myths and facts about the use of Broadband might be helpful.

With regard to mobile phones, the Economic Development Manager reported on her attendance at a meeting of the County Council's Digital Innovation Committee to which representatives of the main mobile phone service providers had been invited and each had given an update of their current developments. There was an anticipated 700% growth in demand for data usage by 2021. The provision of more masts was essential and the County Council had agreed to work with the phone providers to see if sites could be made available. Concerns had been raised by the providers about inconsistencies within the planning system across the Country in relation to the approval of masts. There was also the issue of the conflict of the demand for masts to improve the service but the public objection to the location of masts. Masts proposed in areas near schools or in environmentally sensitive areas were often controversial and whilst the guidelines for such development were clear they were often interpreted very differently. The County Council had now engaged an officer to focus on this issue and liaise with planning officers. They had also commissioned their own survey of mobile phone signals throughout the county via a "van scan" to look at "notspots" and compare these to the data used by the providers. Members welcomed the collection of this data which would provide the evidence to help identify and prioritise improvements needed.

It was noted that statutory undertakers such as Network Rail had certain permitted development rights and were able to simply give notification of their intention to erect similar structures. Mobile phone providers had a much more restricted level of permitted development rights. It was suggested that the current consultation on the Greater Norwich Local Plan was an ideal time to comment on the issue of mobile phone signals associated with new developments. Mobile phone providers should be encouraged to be more open to sharing masts.

A comment was made that the phone signal at Thorpe Lodge was very weak and, if possible, officers should examine the possibility of the provision of a booster.

Members welcomed the update and noted that a further report would be made to the Panel once the data had been collated by Norfolk County Council.

21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The following were included in the work programme:

- New Anglia Economic Development Strategy – future meeting
- New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership – future meeting
- Broadband and mobile phone signals + Ms Karen O’Kane, Programme Manager, BBFN – next meeting
- Car parking – next meeting
- Airport Master Plan – update

The Chairman raised the issue of the consultation on the Greater Norwich Local Plan and the option for the Panel to feed into this exercise. It was agreed that Members would submit comments to the Economic Development Officer (SS) who would consider these in the light of the exercise. However, Members were able to respond to the consultation as individuals.

22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 27 March 2018 at 10:00am but three Members indicated they would not be able to attend this meeting and it was agreed to reschedule the date of the next meeting at a date and time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 12:15 pm