

ECONOMIC SUCCESS POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Economic Success Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Monday 7 June 2021 at 6pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: A Crotch (Chairman), S Beadle, N Brennan, S Catchpole, D King and K Vincent.

Cabinet Members Present: Councillor: J Copplestone, T Mancini-Boyle, J Leggett and F Whymark.

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors: M Murrell, S Prutton and P Bulman.

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director of Economic Growth (T Armstrong), the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse) the Programme Manager – Economic Growth (D Ballie-Murden), the Economic Growth Administrator (L Kirkum), the Senior Economic Development Officer: Inward Investment (P Chapman), the Community Assets Management Officer (H Sibley) and the Senior Economic Development Officer: Business Support (D Disney)

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

None made.

44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr G Peck.

45 MINUTES

The non-exempt minutes of the meeting of the Economic Success Policy Development Panel held on 1 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

46 SKILLS AND TRAINING PROJECT

The Panel considered the report of the Economic Growth Administrator which asked members to comment on the intended approach to skills and training alongside the potential setup of a central apprenticeship fund. This could be funded by a recurring underspend in existing budgets.

The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families introduced the report to the Committee, highlighting the pandemic's effect on younger people. Members noted that officers had started to investigate what could be done to help with the current situation, and that a full report expected at July's Cabinet meeting.

Officers explained that when mapping the Council's Skills and Training Offer four distinct cohorts had been identified:

- School leavers
- Higher education leavers
- Recently unemployed (including underemployed)
- Individuals wishing to begin their own business (start-ups)

Once the four groups had been identified, an internal and external audit was carried out to identify gaps in the support offered.

Officers referred members to appendix 3 of the report, which categorised the four cohorts into three methods of delivery: Direct Delivery, signposting & facilitating and Advocacy & Influencing. The Panel noted that a joined-up approach would directly deliver results within the community, and that the Council would need to utilise the apprenticeship levy within its organisation.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and welcomed the opportunities listed in the report regarding the Skills and Training Project.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance raised concerns over the joint funding of the central apprenticeship fund, explaining that Broadland Council had allocated money from their share of the left-over Business Rates Pool fund. Officers noted the concerns raised over the money allocated from the Council being distributed across the whole project unequally. The Assistant Director for Economic Growth explained that South Norfolk was looking at alternative funding sources, with any money accessed by the two Councils would be divided equally.

In response to a query raised by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing, members were informed that vacant apprenticeship roles in the organisation could be offered to internal candidates. Officers further explained

that there were difficulties in taking apprenticeships in all areas of the Council. An example was given regarding employing an apprentice within the Planning Area as the nearest course was based in Chelmsford. A suggestion was made that the Council could partner with other authorities to help with training, and further use of new virtual technology could be utilised more.

Further clarification was sought over the training facilities at Carrowbreck and whether this could be optimised to help people in the District. Members noted that a further paper was being drafted on the use of the facility, but officers were looking at direct and indirect methods of delivering training.

A Member spoke of concerns over the lack of help for people with disabilities in conjunction with the rise in unemployment rates. Officers explained that Norfolk County Council provided opportunities and support through schemes tailored towards people with disabilities. It was noted, that there was a specialist team at Norfolk County Council with which the Council could work with.

In response to a query regarding the direction of travel, it was explained that officers were looking to expand into more business training and start-ups. Further information on this would be delivered through an informal session.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development commended the report but noted that some university graduates did not get support from their universities after leaving and returning to the area. She further explained that it was key to keep graduates working in Broadland and highlighted the potential to utilise the connections between the Council and graduates to achieve this. Officers agreed that this was an area that needed to be investigated further.

Conversations then turned to the support that the Council could offer to small businesses to help with apprenticeships, skills, and training. A member of the Panel suggested that the Council could help support local small businesses to fill roles within their organisations. It was noted that officers were currently developing a strategy to look at the best way forward and explained that a central apprenticeship project would help define a suitable approach.

In supporting the recommendations, the Chairman spoke of the importance of supporting small businesses, but stressed the need for allocated money from the underspends in budgets to be ringfenced in the Broadland area to optimise the full potential of the project.

The recommendations were supported unanimously by the Panel, it was then;

RESOLVED

1. To note the impacts on skills, training and the wider economy in South Norfolk and Broadland and note the intended approach to tailor support to specific cohorts of residents and start-up businesses.
2. To comment on the potential establishment of a central apprenticeship fund, funded by recurring underspend of existing budgets.

47 REOPENING OF THE HIGH STREETS SAFELY & WELCOME BACK FUNDS

Members considered the report of the Programme Manager for Economic Growth which invited members to accept the grant funding from the Government and agree to the delivery of the Grant Action Plan.

The Reopening High Streets Safety fund had allocated £50m to Councils across England. The funds had originated from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils had been allocated a sum of £246,044 to provide support to highstreets and town centres across the two areas. Members noted that the funding had been split between the two authorities with £125,889 allocated to South Norfolk and £116,155 to Broadland, each would be monitored separately by each Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance queried why the staffing split relating to the report wasn't in line with the Councils agreed 45% to 55% split. Officers explained that staff employed through the grant funding would work solely on the project within short term contracts. It was also noted that money for the roles was sourced from European Union Funding which would have a different set of boundaries to work with. Officers agree to investigate the funding of staff further and circulate further information to the members after the meeting.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and noted that the funds would be integral in bringing back normality to society.

A Member of the Committee expressed concern over the accounting audit trails, which would result from having two authorities employing staff to carry out separate tasks. Officers noted the concerns raised, but added that regulation needed to be undertaken to ensure the Councils were compliant with the funding regulations alongside service level agreements.

Further clarification was sought over the reclaiming of the Communication Officer's cost being set at £8,325 and not the full salary amount. In response, Officers explained the original proposals made sure funds were subjected to an earlier deadline, resulting in a pro-rata rate of a third being used. It was confirmed that this has since changed, and officers would look to claim the full amount back.

In answer to a question raised on the Risk Register relating to the project feeding into the wider one, officers confirmed that the project would follow through to the Council's overall Risk Register.

In response to a concern raised over the planters used in the last Confident Campaign, the Assistant Director of Economic Growth explained that some were still in operation and others were being stored but could be used if required. Members noted a programme of work was being carried out to explore additional communication campaigns. These campaigns were looking to be community-driven alongside business support funds.

The Chairman thanked the officers for an informative report. Voting was then carried out by a show of hands, and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED

1. To accept the grant funding from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for the Reopening the High Street Safety Funding and Welcoming Back Fund, for the amounts of £116,055 and £116,055 respectively, and
2. Agree to the delivery of the funding in line with the approved Grant Action Plan.

48 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.

49 EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

(The meeting concluded at 6.55 pm)

Chairman