



Economic Development Committee

Minutes

Monday, 07 June 2021 at 18:00

Councillor Plant (in the Chair); Councillors Candon, Cordiner-Achenbach, Freeman, Lawn, Mogford, Price, Talbot, Wainwright, B Walker, C Walker & A Wright.

Councillor Annison attended as a substitute for Councillor P Hammond.

Mr D Glason (Director of Planning & Growth), Mrs M Burdett (Head of Inward Investment), Mrs V Mallender (Economic Growth Manager), Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager) & Mrs C Webb (Executive Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Hammond.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cordiner-Achenbach declared a personal interest in item 6, Kickstart Programme update, as she had a Kickstart placement at her business.

However, in accordance with the Council's constitution, she was allowed to both speak and vote on the item.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2021 were confirmed.

4 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received and noted the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the Forward Plan.

5 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Committee received and considered the report from the Head of Inward Investment and the Economic Growth Manager.

The Head of Inward Investment reported that there was a clear need to establish and sustain an interface between the Council and local businesses – an ongoing dialogue that would a) inform Council policy, prioritisation and strategic decision making in respect of the local economy, b) identify opportunities for Council intervention (e.g. inward investment facilitation) at an enterprise level, c) pulling in and signposting/facilitating as much of the business support out there, locally, as possible, and d) identifying gaps in provision, barriers to growth.

The Head of Inward Investment reported that this paper presented to Members an overview of and introduction to a Business Engagement Plan, setting out the objectives and priorities in establishing and sustaining an interface and dialogue with local businesses. Outputs for activities would be monitored and reported to Members against on an ongoing basis in line with regular reporting against the Council's Economic Growth Strategy.

Councillor A Wright reported that the Council had disbanded the Great Yarmouth Marketing Initiative (GYMI) which had provided a similar conduit when it had been introduced in the 1990's, it too had been business lead and had consisted of five core strands. Councillor Wright was pleased that common sense had prevailed and a business engagement plan would be undertaken and he congratulated the officers on an excellent report. The Chairman reported that he had been instrumental in the demise of GYMI when Enterprise GY had been launched.

Councillor Price reported that he welcomed the report which was very sound and he congratulated the officers for producing an excellent report. He recommended that the Councillors should not dwell on the past but should look forwards. Councillor Price reported that the input of one-man bands and small to medium enterprises would be key to the development of a successful business engagement plan.

The Head of Inward Investment reported that these groups would be included in the plan as they could provide a wealth of intelligence, especially in regard to the tourism and hospitality trade.

The Chairman referred to page 15, paragraph 7 of the report, which highlighted NWES as a body to be engaged with. The Chairman asked for the reference to NWES to be removed, as they were encountering issues in the west of Norfolk.

The Chairman referred to page 15, paragraph 9 of the report, which highlighted the risk implications. The Chairman reported that the issue of furlough was indeed a risk and asked officers to consider how to best support residents back into work.

Councillor Wainwright reported that he agreed with Councillor Wright and he welcomed the report. However, he was concerned that one-man bands would not have the time to become involved in the formation of the business engagement plan. Councillor Wainwright reported that the shortage of chefs and bar staff was the direct result of Brexit, as opposed to the pandemic.

The Head of Inward Investment reported that the intention was not to replicate a body to act as a conduit but to create a format to get information across to businesses which was relevant to their needs, for example, funding streams and sectorial policy changes.

Councillor Candon commended the officers on an excellent report and welcomed the positive steps forward on the path to Covid19 recovery.

The Chairman asked that the current unemployment figures for the town be circulated to the Committee as this would be useful information. The Head of Inward Investment reported that she would ask the Funding and Regeneration Manager to forward the statistics.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 10.1 of the report and highlighted that the

officers should take the views of the committee on board when finalising their next steps. The Head of Inward Investment highlighted that the plan would be business lead and would feed in to initiatives such as the Levelling-Up fund. Comments from the Committee would be taken on board and when all the strands had been pulled together, the plan would be brought back to the Committee for endorsement.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee have reviewed and commented on the content of the Business Engagement Plan.

6 KICKSTART PROGRAMME - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report from the Economic Growth Manager.

The Economic Growth Manager reported that the Kickstart Scheme was a national government £2 billion scheme to create hundreds of thousands of high quality 6-month work placements for young people aged 16-24, who were claiming Universal Credit. It was launched on the 4th September 2020, after the Chancellor announced the Kickstart Scheme as part of the Plan for Jobs. Businesses of all sizes who were registered with Companies House or the Charities Commission looking to create quality jobs for young people could apply to create new 6-month job placements for young people who were currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. The job placements should support the participants to develop the skills and experience they need to find work after completing the scheme.

The Government provided a wage subsidy to cover National Minimum Wage and national insurance for a minimum of 25 hours a week for 6 months, which was approximately £6,500 for the 6 months and employees were eligible if they were either on Universal Credit or at risk of being long-term unemployed. Employers could choose to engage directly with the scheme or could use a representative 'Gateway' organisation. The scheme approval was effectively an eligibility test on the basis of; was the role new and not replacing an existing role, and were they providing sufficient wider employability support. Approved intermediaries/companies would share job descriptions with DWP, who took responsibility for sourcing possible candidates based on employers' requirements and available talent. Companies then interviewed to make the final hiring decision. A £1,500 grant was paid to the employer per employee, to support setup costs, support, training and wrap around employability support to assist the placement to gain employment following the placement. A £300 fee per placement, was available to representative organisations however, no fee was paid if the application was made directly. The DWP might make periodic assessments, including how far employability support was being provided.

The Economic Growth Manager reported that at the October 2020 Economic Development meeting, Members resolved not to act as a Gateway as an authority but to endorse the schemes' active promotion by council officers and, these arrangements were formalised shortly thereafter. Due to the extremely high levels of interest in the Kickstart initiative, the lead body managing the scheme (the DWP) had been overwhelmed with applications from Gateway bodies. As such, both DWP and Gateways were recording two sets of numbers; approved placements and live vacancies. Officers were working closely with all the key chosen Gateways to maximise all potential borough opportunities and promote the wraparound training service offered by East Coast College.

The Economic Growth Manager reported that there have been 3 Gateways approved as part of the Kickstart scheme in Norfolk – these were Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, Norfolk County Council and East Coast College. Officers were working closely with the chosen Gateways to maximise all potential borough opportunities and promote the wraparound training service offered by East Coast College. The scheme was launched locally on 22nd December 2020 with officers providing regular and continued promotion to the borough's businesses through a wide range of communication methods. Webinars had been conducted in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and East Coast College and feedback from attendees had been positive.

The Economic Growth Manager highlighted that officers, in conjunction with Gateways, had been supporting businesses throughout their Kickstart journey, this engagement had been vital to ensure the appetite to offer placements remained high, as delays with the DWP in processing applications had been frustrating for the businesses.

The Economic Growth Manager reported that there were two sets of recorded data. Norfolk had achieved a good level of interest as a whole, and as such, the Gateways had achieved the following recorded up to and including April 2021:

- Norfolk Chambers of Commerce – 423 approved placements
- Norfolk County Council – 210 approved placements
- East Coast College – 108 approved placements
- University of East Anglia – circa 100 placements.

Confirmation from the key Gateway bodies indicated that Great Yarmouth had around 120 approved placements with circa 67 being live (from 61 businesses). As placements take around 2 months to become live from being approved – a 50% conversion rate was a good achievement.

Continued efforts to actively promote and educate the key benefits of Kickstart to businesses within the borough with an aim to increase number of positions remained key and only achievable through comprehensive engagement and communication activity aimed at identified businesses to ensure the

opportunity and benefits were fully understood. Partnered engagement, marketing and webinars with East Coast College would ensure those targeted, would be most suited to the scheme and highlight the wrap around support and training available for local businesses.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council currently had 6 applications with the DWP for customer service roles, with a view for the successful candidates to be identified as more department specific at the next stage. The suggested departments would include customer service, housing, inward investment, human resources, marketing and communications. Applications were made via East Coast College which processed smoothly but delays with the DWP approval system meant processing time would far exceed the current 4 weeks.

The Chairman reported that he had been informed that the DWP had taken on extra staff to deal with the Kickstart backlog of applications. However, he felt that there was an area of concern in regard to the young person having to contact the prospective employer by themselves as they might not have the confidence to do this alone.

Councillor Wainwright asked for confirmation that the Government has recently announced an increase in the start-up grant from £1500 to £3000. The Economic Growth Manager reported that she was unable to confirm this but would make further enquiries after the meeting. he also asked for confirmation as to how much funding was available in total and how long the scheme was proposed to run. The Chairman reported that the investment amounted to £2 billion. Councillor Wainwright reported that this amount would not last for very long across the whole of the country.

Councillor Wainwright reported that a family member had registered to take on a Kickstart placement but had only received one application to date. He asked whether the Gateways talked amongst themselves or whether they operated in isolation. The Economic Growth Manager reported that the gateways met regularly and that the pound per value placement equated to between £7-8k.

Councillor Cordiner-Achenbach reported that in her experience, the process had worked well. However, businesses were only able to advertise their roles through the Job Centre. She asked if the Council could step in and provide support young people to access this scheme after being unemployed for a long period of time and lacking in essential skills and confidence to access the job market.

The Chairman reported that it was the remit of Children's Services at NCC to support the 16-24 year olds. The Economic Growth Manager confirmed that the Gateways supported businesses and not the applicants through the placement process. However, she would feed these comments back to the Kickstart District Account Manager.

Councillor A Wright asked if there was a breakdown of providers, i.e. businesses or charities. The Economic Growth Manager reported that unfortunately this data could not be shared due to GDPR regulations.

Councillor Wright referred to the LGA Prosperity Report and urged all Councillors to read it, as it was sobering reading as Great Yarmouth was ranked 376 out of 376 in adult skills. The Chairman agreed that the level of deprivation in Great Yarmouth, Thetford, Kings Lynn and parts of Norwich was a really big issues and a conundrum that had troubled their Councils for at least twenty years. he asked whether schools were teaching the correct curriculum to prepare local young people for what local employers were looking for.

Councillor Talbot agreed with the Chairman and asked whether the Council could work more closely with the local education providers to ensure that school leavers knew how to write a CV and to give them interviewing experience. The Chairman reported that there were hundreds of well paid jobs in the town but, unfortunately, local people did not benefit from them as they went to qualified people who lived outside of the borough.

Councillor C Walker asked if Skills Nights or Jobs Fairs could be re-introduced by the Council and hosted at the Town Hall. The Chairman agreed that this suggestion should be further considered going forward.

Councillor A Wright suggested that the amalgamation of colleges to form East Coast College had been to the detriment of the town as it had resulted in loss of locality and connectivity. The College offered less courses and the catering offer had moved to Lowestoft which was a disadvantage to local students who were unable to travel to train due to their financial situation. The Chairman agreed that the loss of the catering college and Ambitions Restaurant had been a blow to the town.

Councillor Talbot agreed with Councillor Wright and the Chairman and was concerned that other courses may be moved fro Great Yarmouth to Lowestoft, for example, hairdressing and that young people were being stripped of their education choices and local talent was not allowed to develop or emerge.

Councillor Price highlighted that no local trades such as plumbing, bricklaying, carpentry or heating engineering was offered at Great Yarmouth and that apprenticeships should be the way forward. Councillor Annison agreed with Councillor Price as he had undertaken an apprenticeship through the YTS scheme in 1987 and had been in employment ever since and now owned his own company. Councillor C Walker concurred that apprenticeships were the way forward and were not pushed hard enough. She also stressed that the job market must encompass people with learning difficulties and employers must look at the bigger picture.

Councillor Cordiner-Achenbach clarified that high quality placements that were required for Kickstart to give youngsters a firm building block for future employment.

Councillor Candon reported that it was imperative that young people had a supportive arm around their shoulder to enable them to access the Kickstart scheme and that the waiting time for the DWP to confirm placements was

reduced.

Councillor Wainwright asked for confirmation as to how many Kickstart placements had been advertised at the Job Centre and how many applicants had viewed them. He also asked for confirmation as to the timeline of how the £1500 funding was released to employers to cover their set up fees and wages. Councillor Cordiner-Achenbach explained how the funding had been released to her business.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their comments on the Kickstart programme and asked the officers to take them on board.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee have reviewed the progress on the delivery of the Kickstart Scheme by Council officers to date.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that there was no other business being of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration at the meeting.

The meeting ended at: 20:00