

BROADLAND ECONOMIC SUCCESS POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Economic Success Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Monday, 15 April 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: A Tipple (Chairman), J Harvey (Vice-Chair), P Auber, J Bailey, S Catchpole, J Copplestone, A Crotch and K Vincent

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: M Booth

Officers in Attendance: G Denton (Assistant Director of Economic Growth) and J Hammond (Democratic Services Officer)

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of Minute Item 19: Business Builder – Midpoint Review: A Disclosable Pecuniary Interest was received from Cllr Auber, who advised that his business had received a grant from the Council’s business builder scheme, but that no money had been received to date. He confirmed that he would leave the meeting during the consideration of the item.

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Members requested that an update regarding the Broadland Food Innovation Partnership be provided to the Panel and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

19. BUSINESS BUILDER - MIDPOINT REVIEW

Cllr Auber left the meeting prior to the consideration of this item.

The Business Development Manager presented the report, which updated members on the progress with the delivery of the Councils “Business Builder” business support programme.

Members were reminded that the Business Builder support programme launched in October 2020, following the Council being awarded £428,573 from the Norfolk Strategic Fund. The programme was designed to provide a wrap-around business support package that would incorporate; business advice, access to training, mentoring, signposting and grants to help facilitate business growth.

Further funding became available from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund and in July 2022, Cabinet and Norfolk County Council approved a revised package of support, to be delivered by June 2025. The revised support included:

- Online business training, one-to-one start-up advice and other non-financial support for pre-startups (Foundation support).
- Smaller grants of up to £1,000 for entrepreneurs in their first two years of trading (Build-Up Grants).
- Grants of up to £5,000 to help support the growth plans of businesses that had already been trading for at least two years (Development Grants).

One member raised concern that, given the current level of funds awarded, the full funding would not be allocated by the deadlines. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth, reassured members that he was not concerned as the volume of applications currently in the pipeline would fully cover the funding amount.

It was queried whether there had been any amendments to the parameters by which each application was considered. The Panel was informed that the parameters remained within the scope set by Cabinet. Any changes to the parameters had arisen from conditions placed by the funding providers.

The fairness of the application and judging process was raised by a member. In response, the Assistant Director of Economic Growth highlighted that ‘fair’ was a subjective term. However, he was of the opinion that the application and judging process was fair, as each application was assessed on a merit-based scheme, which looked at the business structure and the likelihood to succeed.

The Business Development Manager explained that, to date, more than 182 businesses had been supported by the Business Builder support programme and that 81 grants, totalling £341,952 had been awarded to businesses in the district. He added that part funding had supported business growth as well as enabled businesses to become greener.

Discussion turned to ways in which the Business Builder Support Programme had been promoted to reach the 10,000 businesses within the Broadland district,

especially smaller businesses and those most in need. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth noted that the Team was always looking at new ways to promote the Programme. At present the promotion methods utilised, had been:

- Business Support Newsletter – with 3,000 businesses subscribed.
- Business breakfasts – held each quarter, with 100 different businesses in attendance.
- Social Media (LinkedIn, Facebook, X)

With regard to the newsletter, one member queried how businesses could subscribe and whether Councillors could be added to the subscription. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth explained that anyone could subscribe to the Business Support Newsletter via the Council's website. He also agreed to look into getting all Councillors added to the subscription.

Members further queried whether the newsletter could be sent to all businesses currently active on the Council's Business Rates system. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth reminded members of the Council's responsibilities relating to GDPR and that the Council could not send the digital newsletter to businesses that had not consented to their data being used for that purpose.

Members queried whether the content of the Business Support newsletter included case studies to show examples of what the funding could be used for. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth agreed to add case studies in future newsletters, if they were not already included.

It was highlighted that the future of support to businesses was currently uncertain as existing funding would cease by 30 June 2025. As such, the Economic Growth Team would explore funding options to continue to provide an evolved business support package under the umbrella of 'Business Builder', post June 2025. An options appraisal was due to be presented to Cabinet in February 2025.

Following the discussion, members felt that it would be appropriate for the Panel to consider and input into the options appraisal before it was presented to Cabinet. The Panel unanimously agreed that the recommendation to Cabinet be amended to reflect this.

It was then,

RESOLVED

TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET that an options appraisal for the future of the 'Business Builder' support programme be presented to the Economic Success Policy Development Panel prior to consideration by Cabinet in February 2025.

(The meeting concluded at 6.38 pm)

Chairman