

4th December 2024 Meeting Minutes

Meeting details

- Date: 4th December 2024
- Time: 10am
- Venue: Council Chamber, University of East Anglia
- Chairperson: Nick Steven-Jones
- Minute taker: Helen Wilton

Attendees

Name	Position	Organisation
Mark Gorton	Managing Director	Traditional Norfolk Poultry
Nick Steven-Jones	Chief Executive Officer	Jarrold
Nova Fairbank	Chief Executive Officer	Norfolk Chambers
Robin Milton	Managing Director	Fairer Games
Stephen Crocker	Chief Executive Officer	Norwich Theatre
Charlie Wright	Chief Customer Officer	EPOS Now
Amy Griffiths	Chief Executive Officer	Citizens Advice, Diss, Thetford & District
Prof David Maguire	Vice Chancellor	University of East Anglia
Jerry White	Principal	Norwich City College
Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Leader	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Paul Claussen	Executive Member for Economic Development and Growth	Breckland District Council
Cllr John Toye	Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Daniel Elmer	Leader	South Norfolk District Council
Cllr Martin Booth	Portfolio Holder for Economic Development	Broadland District Council
Cllr Daniel Candon	Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Growth	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Cllr Allistair Beales	Leader	King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
Cllr Emma Hampton	Deputy Leader	Norwich City Council
Paul Cracknell	Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation	Norfolk County Council
Chris Starkie	Director of Growth and Investment	Norfolk County Council
Roberta Willner	Head of Economic Development	Norfolk County Council
Helen Wilton	LEP Delivery Officer	Norfolk County Council
Jan Feeney	Head of Employment and Skills	Norfolk County Council
Scott Cogman	Connected Innovation Manager	Norfolk County Council
Richard Balls	Communications Manager	Norfolk County Council

Item 1 – Welcome and Apoloiges

Led by: Nick Steven-Jones (NSJ)

NSJ welcomed all attendees the meeting and introduced Jerry White (JW) who was deputising for Paul Padda and Cllr Emma Hampton deputising for Cllr Mike Stonard.

NSJ confirmed that apologies had been received from Cllr Mike Stonard, Paul Padda and Denise Hone.

Item 2 – Review of minutes and actions from the previous meeting

The board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2024.

NSJ reviewed the actions from the meeting and confirmed that have all been completed.

Item 3 – Norfolk Local Growth Plan: Action Plan Update

Lead: Roberta Willner (RW)

RW provided the board with an overview of the worked planned to produce the action plan to support deliverables detailed in the Norfolk Economic Strategy. RW confirmed that amendments from stakeholders and the board have been reviewed and incorporated into the strategy which has been presented to MPs at Westminster to reinforce commitment from across the county.

RW noted the importance of continuing partner engagement and advised that joint workshops would be held to draw up the action plan with this external stakeholder engagement starting in January/February 2025. Deliveries will be categorised according to timescales which will aid the identification of the required resources.

Workshops will also assist in formulating deliverables and will aid understanding of how partners are also working to meet the priorities stated in the strategy. A framework will be compiled detailing interventions and the relevant actions.

RW confirmed that this analysis phase will enable the production of the action plan which will be brought back to the board in March.

RW requested the support of the board through their participation in the workshops which will be spilt thematically. The expertise and experience of board members will support the bottom up approach to identifying actions.

RW proposed linking the work to those involved in the new Norfolk Ambassador Programme which will provide a wider network of contacts and proposed using the NCC team to start the work but noted that external consultancy will be employed if needed.

RW advised that some early outcomes were already being delivered such as the investment on the NRP to provide laboratory and office space, the successful bid for the digital Made Smarter Adoption Programme and the extension of the Working Well programme.

Stehen Crocker (SC) queried whether the strategy had been formally launched noting that, without a local launch, stakeholders would only hear of the strategy retrospectively as part of the action plan and any consultation could be viewed as lip service only.

NSJ advised that a launch event is planned for 24th February at the House of Lords.

RW proposed carrying out the internal review in January and February prior to the launch before going externally to speak to stakeholders.

She also asked for input from board members on any of their plans which would effect deliverables.

Alistair Beales (AB) asked how towns funding and town plans would be incorporated.

RW confirmed that the plan will ensure that there is alignment with Town Boards and their actions and that all activity supporting economic growth will be included.

JW asked how the spring spending review impact the plan and how will changes be incorporated.

Chris Starkie (CS) noted that the review is now likely to be in the summer of 2025 therefore work needs to move on now but the place must be flexible enough to incorporate the review. RW confirmed that the plan will be iterative and will be updated on a regular basis.

Kay Mason Billig (KMB) advised that the NCC Scrutiny Committee had stated that the plan must include clear measurables. The strategy itself was presented to Minister Jim McMahon to demonstrate Norfolk's ambitions and the plan needs to be progressed to demonstrate results.

The board reviewed the proposed timescales of the work.

NJS suggested having a soft launch in January in Norfolk prior to the Westminster event after which the external workshops would then take place and SC offered to provide a venue for the event.

It was agreed by the board that this would be more appropriate and would engage local stakeholders in the process of producing the plan.

ACTION: NCC officers to organise the launch of the Local Growth Plan

The Board agreed:

- To accept the proposed approach to the production of the action plan
- To amend the proposed timeline to include an initial launch in Norfolk and then holder external partner workshops after the Westminster launch

Item 4 – Norfolk Ambassadors Programme

Lead: Roberta Willner / Helen Wilton (HW)

RW presented the strategic aims of the programme highlighting the need identified in the Norfolk Economic Strategy for the county to have a stronger voice at a local and national level to attract investment and support economic growth.

RW advised that the programme would utilise the experience, knowledge and networks of both board members and other ambassadors, many of whom would be people who had applied to join the board but could not be offered a place due to the restricted numbers. The programme would encompass all sectors, including those not represented on the board such as Health and Social care and would encourage cross sector working.

HW provided the board with details on how the programme would work at a practical level including:

- Engagement in Regional & National Influencing and Advocacy
- Promotion of Norfolk as a place to live, work invest and visit which will be supported by the provision of a comms pack including key facts and figures about Norfolk and its economy, USPs, key contacts for business support, and current funding or training opportunities.
- Attendance at key events across all sectors
- Visits to local businesses to better understand issues and to showcase innovation and investment
- Practical support to businesses across a wide range of areas such as use of networks to promote funding opportunities and training events, mentoring, speaking at events and training.

HW confirmed that the first step would be to contact those representatives who have expressed an interest in becoming an ambassador to ascertain where their interests lie and understand which areas of practical business support they would like to provide.

A steering group of 5-6 people will be established to provide expert support, strategic direction and oversight to the programme. The group will meet early in February to review the initial planned programme of engagement.

The board discussed the proposal and expressed their support for the idea suggesting that the Ambassadors Programme could be raised at the Norfolk launch of the strategy in order to start interest in the concept.

Robin Milton (RM) queried how would ambassadors would feed into the Norfolk Business Board.

RW advised that the steering group would contain a board member who would report back and the programme would be a standing item on the board agenda. A newsletter would be issued to ambassadors on a bi-monthly basis.

Daniel Elmer (DE) asked how ambassadors would be appointed and noted that the job description required more definition.

RW confirmed that the programme is a way of harnessing the enthusiasm from those applicants who could not be accommodated on the board. It will start with around 30 people initially and increase to approximately 50.

The board agreed that the details needed to be refined and the objectives reviewed to ensure sufficient focus on a few key deliverables so that ambassadors are not spread too thin or the message becomes too diluted.

The board agreed that, in order to complete the review and build interest in the programme, the launch should be moved to June 2025.

Daniel Candon (DC) asked who would produce the newsletter.

RW advised that NCC would produce the newsletter and suggested that it should be sent to board members first to ensure they are aware of content in case of future contacts.

RM noted that ambassadors will have many responsibilities and it is vital that they are not stretched. They should be used in a targeted way in order to achieve key objectives.

Nova Fairbank (NF) agreed that the role description needs to be tighter and proposed starting on a small scale and evolving the role. NF proposed that the steering group work to define the job profile

The board agreed that a clear communications plan would be needed to encompass this programme and the launch of the strategy. This should consider social media as well as traditional forms such as the press and newsletter and this would enable the audience to be expanded.

ACTION: HW to arrange the first meeting of the steering group early in 2025 which will then define the objectives and role profile

ACTION: Richard Balls (RB) to produce a Communications Strategy to include the Local Growth Plan, Norfolk Ambassadors programme and the work of the Business Board

The Board agreed:

- To endorse the establishment of the Norfolk Ambassadors Programme
- For the steering group to review and refine the role description to few key objectives
- For timescales to be amended with the review work carried out early in 2025 and the launch of the programme moved to June 2025
- For a comms plan to be produced covering this and the launch of the Economic Strategy. Communications will be added as a standing item to the board agenda.

Item 5 – Chair’s Update

Lead: Nick Steven-Jones

NSJ provided the board with an update on his meetings with Norfolk MPs and also on the meetings held with individual board members.

He noted that common themes had arisen relating to how the Business Board interacts with other groups, how board outputs are measured and what can the board do to add value to Norfolk’s economy.

Board members reiterated that a clear communications strategy was vital to supporting the work of the board including the delivery of the Local Growth Plan and the success of the Norfolk Ambassadors programme in order to ensure it fulfils its potential.

AB asked whether all Norfolk MPs attended the meeting and were engaged.

KMB advised that meetings with the Norfolk MPs are held regularly at Westminster where issues are raised and requests from the county are presented. All MPs engage or send aids.

CS confirmed that all parties had been represented at the meeting.

Davd Maguire (DM) asked what resources are needed to support the delivery of the Local Growth Plan and queried how will the activities be funded.

NSJ proposed the use of board networks to provide support and also for the board to assist in areas where an individual business or district cannot make something happen. Issues could be presented to the board in order to make something commercially viable or bring partners together to find solutions.

DM queried how large scale funding could be obtained for investment and suggested adding a standing item on opportunities for funding investments to ensure the board is kept aware.

RM noted that it was vital to have key data available is key for businesses to use when attracting investment and submitting bids and asked how this data be made available.

RW confirmed that the data is available on the NCC web site and also that the evidence base can also be added to the Business Board web site.

SC noted that the cultural sector has historically worked across Norfolk and Suffolk and beyond to identify opportunities for collaboration and attract investment. CS agreed that this is also working in other sectors such as offshore wind and innovation,

The board agreed that businesses do not see councils as a place to come for information and this issue further supported the requirement for a Communications Strategy.

ACTION: The evidence base to be added to the Norfolk Business Board web site.

Item 6 – Sectors and Innovation Update

Lead: Scott Cogman (SC)

SC provided the board with an overview of the Connected Innovation programme and its success in establishing clusters and hubs across Norfolk and Suffolk where the programme had brought networks together to leverage funding and raise the profile of these key sectors.

He noted that some sectors have not been covered in the Industrial Strategy and that they were working with Industry Councils to ensure their voices are heard and are included in the responses to Government. They are also bringing in and promoting emerging sub sectors such as gaming and also looking to promote cross sector working,

SC highlighted the Barclays Eagle Labs initiative which is supporting seed companies in high tech and allows local companies such as Akcela to provide bespoke funding and mentoring.

CS noted that the Connected Innovation programme had arisen from the fact that the Norfolk was almost at the bottom of the table of counties receiving innovation funding and was often overlooked by Government. The establishment of the network contributed to the development of the Innovate UK's Plan for Action which outlines the commitment to work with leaders across the UK to develop innovation strategies that recognise the strength of the sector in the region.

RM asked whether the Go Digital project links with Connected Innovation and could business in its network support those involved in Go Digital.

SC confirmed that there is cross programme working including Go Digital and Innovation Grant Mentoring which has opened up a range of mentoring opportunities and made innovation support more accessible to companies who would not historically have engaged.

Charlie Wright (CW) welcomed the successes but highlighted the fact that the percentage of innovation funding coming into Norfolk remains very small and stressed that there is a need to create high value products or encourage businesses which attract high value investment. He also pointed to the need for any communications strategy to include social media as newsletters and LinkedIn do not reach the new developing audience.

Richard Balls (RB) confirmed that he was setting up a LinkedIn account for the Business Board and would investigate other options across social media.

The Board agreed:

- Receive the Sectors and Innovation Update

Item 7 – Norfolk Food Hall Application

Lead: Chris Starkie

CS provided an overview of the project at the Norfolk Showground and detailed the funding request for a £240,000 grant which the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association has applied to Norfolk County Council towards the construction of the new Norfolk Food Hall.

Board members expressed their support for the project highlighting the opportunity it will provide to local farmers in getting the products directly to market and approved the grant.

Recommendation

The Business Board agreed to:

Receive the application from the RNAA
Approve the award of £240k to the RNAA.

Item 8 – Any other business (AOB)

Lead: Nick Steven-Jones

SC asked what is being done to promote Norfolk internationally and asked if this could be added to a future board agenda.

ACTION: A presentation from the Norfolk and Suffolk Inward Investment team to be added to the forward plan.

KMB advised that the Adult Skills Budget was not being devolved to Norfolk at the current time giving the board the opportunity to influence future plans and use of the budget when it does come to the county.

She confirmed that Norfolk and Suffolk have been approached about becoming part of the priority group in upcoming with local government reform and KMB will meet with the minister again shortly. No decisions have been made yet and Norfolk needs to be clear on its requirements for future negotiations.

Amy Griffiths (AG) highlighted the Norwich Unity Hub an initiative at Carrow House which will bring VCSE start ups together in a collaborative hub.

NSJ advised that the next board meeting was in March and asked the board to confirm that they were comfortable with the frequency of meetings. It was agreed that, given the level of ongoing work, this date seemed appropriate.

CS advised that a request for funding would be circulated to board members for approval by written procedures as a decision was required before March due to project delivery timescales.