

Cabinet Member Report to County Council

15 September 2016

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Colin Noble Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development
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1. Devolution Update

Throughout July and August people across Norfolk and Suffolk offered their views and feedback on the proposed devolution deal. During July and August I, along with colleagues was out and about talking to residents and businesses to hear what they thought about the proposals and to encourage them to give their views via the online survey.

With the consultation now closed, all of the views received have been analysed and a summary sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to help inform his decision making process. The response to the Secretary of State will be published on the East Anglia Devolution website (www.eastangliadevo.co.uk) this month.

Assuming the Secretary of State agrees to lay a draft order (in early October), it will be debated by constituent councils across Norfolk and Suffolk and the LEP in late October/early November. If everyone approves the order, plans will then be put in place for the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority in May 2017.

I am keen to make sure people have had every opportunity to give their views ahead of our council meeting at the start of November. Therefore, people can send any further comments or questions via the following:

Email: eastangliadevolution@norfolk.gov.uk

Write to: East Anglia Devolution, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - South Wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DH

Or call: 0345 6031842

Alternatively, people can get in touch with Suffolk County Council directly by emailing customer.service@suffolk.gov.uk or writing to Suffolk County Council Endeavour House 8 Russell Road, Ipswich Suffolk IP1 2BX.

2. Economic Development

Oil and Gas Task Force

The downturn in the prospects for oil and gas companies in our County remains a concern due to global oversupply and fall off in demand. The price of Brent Crude is still hovering around \$50 dollars a barrel. As a result New Anglia LEP's Oil and Gas Taskforce (on which SCC is represented) has introduced business support measures to try and assist oil and gas companies adjust to difficult (and different) trading conditions.

The first such measure is access to the Growing Business Fund (GBF). Capital grant funding can be obtained to sustain jobs, as distinct from the normal requirement to create jobs, in an effort to identify new avenues for diversification and growth. Linked to this, funding has also been made available from four Councils, including SCC, to fund consultancy support to oil and gas firms that are restructuring, refinancing or entering new markets such as rail, renewable energy or alternative marine opportunities. Applicants are encouraged to apply for this support via New Anglia's Growth Hub, where a specialist adviser helps and advises them through the process. Grants of up to £100,000 are being offered through the GBF route and a maximum of £3,000 for the consultancy advice.

The Oil and Gas Taskforce continue to meet and lobby for measures from central Government to assist the businesses in the sector cope with the downturn. The high capital expenditure and salaries normally associated with the sector mean that the downturn is having an impact on the wider economies of towns such as Gt Yarmouth and Lowestoft. So spend in restaurants, on housing and hotels is being affected by the downturn. It is hoped that as the opportunities from the new windfarms being constructed off the Suffolk Coast become available; many firms will gain new work from this new avenue.

New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership Micro Grants Scheme

August saw the launch of the New Anglia Micro Grant Scheme which is part of the New Anglia Business Growth Programme. With funding from the European Regional Development Fund, the micro grant scheme provides support to small and medium sized businesses across both Suffolk and Norfolk. The grant of between £1,000-£10,000 can be used to support growth and expansion, introduction of new products or services, improvements to productivity and efficiency and may also create new jobs.

The scheme is delivered by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership in partnership with local enterprise agencies, the Chambers and the two County Councils.

A11 Technology Corridor

The County Council is supporting district council partners in promoting the A11 Technology Corridor (working title). The aim of the Corridor is to secure substantial economic growth along the A11 from Norwich through to Cambridgeshire. This is based on the recognition of the A11 as a growth location in the New Anglia LEP Strategic Economic Plan. In 2015, three councils, Breckland, South Norfolk and Forest Heath, funded a comprehensive study in to the potential of 'corridor' sites and also looked at a rationale and business case. The resultant report set out the potential benefits of a corridor focussed project and this led to the setting up of the current A11 Technology Corridor partnership. I am attending meetings of the Stakeholder Group and the other partners include;

- Breckland Council
- East Cambridgeshire Council
- Forest Heath Council
- Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP
- New Anglia LEP
- Norfolk County Council
- Norwich City Council
- South Norfolk Council
- Suffolk County Council

The Corridor will have a specific focus on advanced manufacturing, engineering and agri-tech, together with other target sectors and opportunities of importance to the local economy. The partnership have also recognised the need to align employment growth with a significant increase in housing accommodation within the A11 Corridor to meet the needs of predicted population growth.

For further information please contact: Jai Raithatha; Email: jai.raithatha@suffolk.gov.uk Telephone: 01473 264819

3. Communications and Customer Service

Our website www.suffolk.gov.uk has been awarded the maximum rating of **4 stars** in the 2016 [Better Connected report](#).

The result reflects the work carried out over the past two years by the Digital Customer Service Team, led by Gareth Prosser. In 2014, suffolk.gov.uk was only a 1-star rated website. But in July 2014 the new digital team was created, and

the Suffolk County Council site was completely redesigned and rewritten. Today it is clearer, simpler and easier to use.

Better Connected is an annual survey of local authority websites, carried out by public sector IT organisation [Socitm](#). During the survey, independent reviewers assess websites to see how easy it is to access online services for that council. They also critique website mobile responsiveness, navigation, search, accessibility and A-Z.

Below are some review extracts from Suffolk County Council's 2016 Better Connected report:

- On rubbish and recycling content: "I thought the customer journey on this website was very good, refreshingly jargon-free."
- On school admissions content: "Generally excellent - well-presented info and clear links to checking catchment schools."

On website mobile responsiveness: "It was easy to use the full navigation set to get to where I needed to go. The site performs very well here - well done!"

The new version of suffolk.gov.uk was first released in June 2015, and later updated with new features and improvements. You can read the [feedback people submitted about the new website](#).

For further information email: digitalservices@suffolk.gov.uk

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

The new on-line Comments, Compliments and Complaints process is now live and the SCC website has been updated to include an online complaint and feedback form. This will give our customers a greater degree of flexibility on how they give us feedback on people, practice and services.

All other routes are still available to people who are unable to complete the electronic form. There is the facility to download a feedback form and associated fact sheets if required. There is also an Easy Read version and will be feedback at a glance flowcharts for each directorate.

To find out more look on www.suffolk.gov.uk/feedback

For further information please contact: Simon Higgins Email: simon.higgins@suffolk.gov.uk Telephone: 01473 264388