



Interreg France (Channel Manche) England: C-Care Evaluation for Norfolk & Suffolk

Annex A: Deep Dive Reviews

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Introduction

We were asked to analyse 10 individual interventions which were specific responses to the crisis. We opted to explore each project's purpose (defined purpose, issues addressed, ambitions), objectives (aims, design, influence on policy), inputs (the people, finances, process and suppliers involved), activities (such as acquisition, delivery and quality of service), outputs (the defined targets, outcomes, and value and progress monitoring), controls (monitoring, management and governance) and lessons learned (what worked well, what didn't work, areas for improvement, ideas for shaping future support).



Business Support



New Anglia Growth Hub

1. Purpose

New Anglia Growth Hub is funded by the ERDF Business Growth Programme and delivered by New Anglia LEP in partnership with Suffolk Chamber of Commerce. Prior to the pandemic the Growth Hub offered local businesses a central point of contact to access a wide range of internal and external business support. It is estimated that 90% of leads were generated internally pre Covid-19. However, the onset of the pandemic changed this dramatically. The purpose shifted from an outward-bound function which focussed on connecting businesses to growth programmes, to an inward bound organisation, focussed on supporting companies to stabilise and survive.

2. Objectives

The pandemic (and specifically lockdown 1) saw the Growth Hub team instantly switch from being a one-stop-shop for business support to a central point of contact for businesses on Covid-19 related matters.

SME managers focus was instantly changed from growth to survival and with a constant flurry of new information, often hourly at the start, the business community required clarification and reassurance. The key objective of the Growth Hub became ensuring businesses could access the specific Covid-19 related support and help them navigate the pages of guidance and information produced by UK Government.

Many organisations, including the Local Authorities, were signposting towards the Growth Hub with the team receiving 2,784 enquiries, 37% of the year's total enquiries in March and April 2020. This put a tremendous amount of pressure on the team as they were

understandably overwhelmed by the sheer volume and nature of enquiries as the Government launched its Covid-19 interventions.

3. Inputs

The team made use of the Business Support Script (BSS) which was developed to ensure the LEP and partners had the answers to all questions businesses and individuals might ask. This joined-up approach ensured everyone in the network had the most up to date information and had reassurance that it was 100% accurate and fresh.

The Growth Hub received support from other organisations in the wider partnership and its own in-house advisers to ensure enquiries could be taken and businesses received the most up to date and correct information.

On top of the existing members of the team, the LEP brought in additional people to support the management of enquiries, and all Growth Hub Advisors switched functions to also answer phones and respond to enquiries.

4. Activities

Some advisers found working with companies during the pandemic was easier than before and less problematic. Prior to the pandemic Growth Hub advisers would support companies on a wide variety of topics but once Covid-19's impact became apparent the cohort of advisers were specifically helping beneficiaries access both local grant schemes and the large UK Government initiatives. This simplified what is normally quite a complex support landscape.

The goal was to get grants to businesses as quickly as was



humanly possible to ensure the company had the funding they needed, and advisors were freed up to assist other companies.

The nature of enquiries shifted significantly compared with the pre-pandemic situation, where general business advice and support had previously accounted for almost a third of enquiries – the need for this advice almost completely disappeared after March 2020.

5. Outputs

We have had access to the enquiry data which shows 7,378 enquiries were made by phone, and 1,547 by email between September 2019 and August 2020 – a total of 8,925 (not necessarily unique clients). We believe this to be an increase of 100% on enquiry traffic in previous years – even taking account of the level of overlap which might occur. There was a clear increase in enquiries from March onwards due to Covid-19 and the national lockdown.

Most enquiries came after Covid-19 struck in March, with just 33% (517) of email enquiries and 16% (1,202) of phone enquiries occurring in during September 2019 and February 2020. March and April

were very busy months and highlight the heavy strain the team would have been under during that period. 37% (2,784) of all calls came during those 2 months, over 1,582 more than the previous 6 months combined. In total, 84% of all enquiries were received between March and August.

6. Impact

Covid-19 meant advisers spent less time traveling and more time helping clients online. One adviser was able to fulfil his duties even whilst being out of the country for long periods of time.

Given the nature of the Growth Hub delivery model as enablers (connecting businesses to external support) advisers and the wider Growth Hub team do not actively participate in impact collection, so rarely know what has happened to a business unless they continue to work with them in the future.

7. Controls

As part of the Business Growth Programme, the Growth Hub already has established monitoring, management, and governance structures in place. The management team handled the complex expansion and restructure of the team very well.

Relationships with local partners, including the LEP, are very strong. Internally, the team could benefit from a more structured cascade of information and have lost some of the connectivity that naturally occurs when working under one roof.

At a strategic level, the Growth Hub Manager meets with the LEP every week, and also attends monthly Operational Board Meetings and Partnership Board Meetings.

8. Lessons Learnt

The initial volume of enquiries was almost unmanageable. Partner organisations were signposting direct to the Growth Hub. The Growth Hub would have benefited from extra support from those organisations to cope with the volume of enquiries, but partners were often coping with capacity issues themselves.

As an example, the Business Support Script has been highly praised by numerous individuals during our evaluation activity. It is clear this tool turned amateurs into experts regarding all aspects of Covid-19. Should a similar situation occur, organisations should explore ways to provide non-specialists with the same level of comprehensive information to pass onto others. This does not only apply to times of crisis, with the same theory being easily applied to other situations such as adequate briefing of individuals regarding EU-Exit. So whilst they might not be familiar with the subject, they can easily reference a document and provide clear and concise information should it be required.

Not everyone is tech-savvy and the pandemic presented severe issues to businesses who did not have access to zoom.

Business Resilience and Recovery (BR&R) Grant Scheme

1. Purpose

Launched in May 2020, BR&R was a timely intervention. Existing grant schemes were predominantly funded by ERDF to support growth and innovation and teams delivering those projects were still working out how they could adapt to the crisis whilst still delivering their contracted outputs. With these ERDF schemes, and other grant programmes such as the Growing Business Fund premised on the creation of jobs in the economy, there was a real need for the quick launch of a scheme that was relevant to the current needs of business.

Therefore, the Business Resilience and Recovery Scheme was established by the LEP to directly address a gap in provision of support and help support short term business resilience projects which would safeguard jobs and longer-term recovery and diversification. Originally funded by the Growth Deal, funding was topped up by the Getting Building Fund.

Alongside the grant scheme was a separate BR&R Consultancy scheme which paid for private sector consultants to work with businesses to build long term resilience.

2. Objectives

The aim of the scheme was to award grants of between £25,000 and £50,000 to SMEs to deliver one or more of the following:

- Support for the manufacture of products to tackle the Coronavirus outbreak
- Support for Coronavirus related research and development
- Development of new technology or innovation and productivity improvements

- Short term manufacturing diversification, for example to support production of PPE
- Longer term development for future recovery and diversification
- Identification and mobilisation into new markets

BR&R grants are discretionary. There are several benefits of this:

- Application and Appraisal tests the commitment of the business
- It encourages targeting by Growth Hub advisors
- It increases the likelihood of supporting the right businesses
- It allows control over geographic and sector distribution

There was an objective to be well connected to Growth Hub Advisors and Economic Development Officers across New Anglia, and to ensure that information and knowledge was fed back into those individuals to equip them to have better conversations with companies. This connectivity between teams has had a knock-on effect, with two of the Local Authorities now using the LEP as grant administrators for their own Government-funded Additional Restrictions Grants.

3. Inputs

The scheme has a total value of £6.1m, with £3.5m of Local Growth Fund money and £2.6m of Getting Building Fund money being made available.

The Growth Hub Advisors and Local Authority Economic Development Officers provided the acquisition function of the project, with most

advisors connecting to the scheme at some point – those who are more familiar with the LEPs other grant schemes tended to be more heavily involved.

The scheme was managed by due diligence and programme specialists in the LEP team, who also performed the due diligence of the Application Forms. This role has since moved across to Finance East who also perform due diligence on several other LEP schemes.

The Due Diligence team would prepare a weekly bulletin for advisors updating changes to the scheme, ongoing issues, or trends. This was very effective and would create a clear line of sight between guidance, advisors, due diligence, and the panel.

A Panel approved applications and included the Chief Executive of New Anglia LEP, Chief Operating Officer, and the Head of Programmes. The Panel worked very effectively and efficiently, appraising applications remotely and providing decisions and in-depth feedback within a week of receipt. They would also make decisions on whether to offer companies the full grant as requested, or only part of the grant.

The speed of processing was critical and enabled the team to manage somewhere in the region of 14 or 15 grant applications in a month – this was particularly important in the early days of the scheme.

Once an application was approved, the company was immediately notified, and the application was passed to Suffolk County Council to manage the offer and payment – a function they already performed for the majority of LEP grant schemes. From the point at which the panel made a decision, the receipt of an offer was just 3 days. Offers were made along with 50% of the grant money – providing a serious cash flow benefit to the company (and something which is not normally

present in most grant funded schemes). If there were doubts over the company's long-term survival, then grants were offered on usual deferral rules (payment in arrears).

4. Activities

With the Growth Hub inundated with enquiries for funding, programme marketing wasn't a problem, although the team still utilised social media and case studies to get the message out to businesses. There have also been articles in newspapers and a profile on Look East which has helped make businesses more aware of the landscape.

The various teams (Advisors, Due Diligence and Panel) were well connected and regularly communicated on issues in a swift manner to ensure minimal delays for business. Initially this tended to be a confidence thing – with advisors checking with Due Diligence, and Due Diligence checking with the Panel, but over time, as people became more confident and policy issues were agreed this was not as common.

The team designed and implemented a very efficient application and appraisal process which had a clear focus on minimising the burden on businesses and speed of service. The team wanted to design a model that felt familiar to Growth Hub Advisors, so they built a process similar to existing grant programmes in the area. An online process was considered but it was felt that a more traditional paper-based process would enable the advisors to provide more wrap around support to companies and would also help control the flow of applications.

BR&R used the same application form that was being used for the Small Grant Scheme and the Growth

through Innovation scheme. However, there were a number of areas where the team felt that delivery could be improved, and as such, a number of elements were designed to increase how business friendly the scheme was:

- Good quality guidance for companies and partners. This is not exclusive to BR&R, but not all guidance is created equal, and the team made a particular effort to try and develop guidance which was as clear as possible for both businesses and advisors. The knock-on effect of this was that it eliminated the need to rework application forms.
- Fast appraisal and approval service – Application forms were processed as soon as possible and emailed to panel members who appraised independently. Companies were receiving offers within 1-2 weeks of submitting an application form.
- 50% of grant payment were made on receipt of offer – this allowed companies to cash flow their expenditure and was of huge benefit.

Although starting with an initial intervention rate of 50%, this was lowered to 40% to allow the scheme to support more companies.

5. Outputs

There were 140 businesses who received a BR&R grant and all 140 have completed their project with no clawback. In total, 24 applications were rejected, generally because the projects didn't fit the criteria – i.e. there was a hotel looking to redecorate. Determined businesses would have their application sent to panel but the panel were diligent and would not approve anything they felt didn't fit the criteria.



Jobs Safeguarded and Created are captured by SCC, however one of the key drivers for the intervention was diversification, and it will be interesting to understand whether this was captured.

6. Impact

Utilising the Growth Hub can add value to the business in several ways. Not only do they support the application and provide a conduit between Due Diligence and the business, but they can open the door for other support that companies may be able to take advantage of. Some have secured their position through BR&R and are now looking at growth through other local programmes. This also happened at Panel – where an applicant would be made aware of

another initiative that may be suitable by a member of the panel.

Another unintended impact was the ability to unlock barriers for a business that they may not have otherwise been able to without the supply side stepping in. A hotel was having planning issues, and the CEO of the LEP was able to contact the CEO of the Council to try and unpick the issues and progress the application. These kind of network benefits can be invaluable to businesses.

7. Controls

During the height of Covid, there was a regular Covid response meeting which captured all regional level data, district splits, number and value of grants and B&R fed into that

group. There was also monthly reporting back to government of the volume and value of grants and the related activities.

The process was designed in conjunction with LEP Head of Programmes to ensure that the two key functions (Due Diligence and Panel) were aligned in their thinking.

8. Lessons Learnt

With any capital purchase, there are often a number of associated revenue costs, including staff training, consultancy, or professional fees. Allowing companies to include a small proportion of these revenue costs could make investing in capital purchases even more attractive.

Most grant schemes have 3 months to get up and running, with time to polish the process. If BR&R happened again, the team would like more time to liaise with the Growth Hub, host Q&As and raise their profile as enablers of the process. They would spend more time with advisors to build their understanding of the process and the various eligibility and suitability criteria.

The various functions and the experience of the individuals in those teams worked very well. The panel knew what they wanted and operated fast and effective processes to approve applications. SCC used experienced people with tried and tested processes. The Growth Hub advisors were all familiar with the process, and the Due Diligence team performed their role exceptionally well in managing

the other parties and ensuring all processes were efficient and put the business first – the “wheels were always oiled”. The process was so well established that Finance East were able to take over the Due Diligence process with no disruption.

The Advisors and the Due Diligence team both operated based on geography – with Norfolk and Suffolk teams. But there is a feeling that having sector specialists and playing more into individual strengths would be a better approach. Some advisors are highly experienced at managing grant applications and are well connected to certain sectors – others are not and that can mean that they don't operate as smoothly as others. Due Diligence have at times had to contact companies to track down information where advisors have failed to do so.

Start Up Programme

1. Purpose

The Start Up Programme is an established initiative providing free tailored advice and workshops to entrepreneurs, micro-business, and pre-starts. This key aspect of New Anglia LEPs ERDF Funded Business Growth Programme (BGP) is delivered across Norfolk and Suffolk by NWES and MENTA who are delivery partners to the LEP.

2. Objectives

The onset of the pandemic and the Covid-19 Lockdown created an immediate and significant increase in demand for Start Up and self-employment support with a doubling of applicants from the same period in 2019. However, during the pandemic the delivery partners experienced a 15% drop in unemployed individuals seeking Start Up support in Norwich and Ipswich.

3. Inputs

According to the New Anglia BGP Evaluation Year 5 Report 2020, the Start Up programme cost approximately £717k to run between September 2019 and August 2020. This includes all related costs of delivery partners such as management of the programme, marketing, trainers and the delivery of workshops and one-to-one support.

4. Activities

MENTA and NWES quickly made changes to the delivery of their services to mitigate the effects of Covid-19. This saw workshops and one-to-one support moved to online platforms such as Facebook and Zoom which enabled the effective

delivery of support whilst capturing programme outputs.

The pandemic presented the Start Up Programme with several opportunities including engagement with a variety of individuals/businesses in a wide range of sectors, and reengagement with previous beneficiaries who were looking for Covid-19 support. The pandemic also stimulated an increase in 'hobby businesses' which were not always viable, the Start Up programme enabled those engaging in these activities to realise this early on and avoid wasted time, resources and money.

Both methods, along with targeted marketing (aimed at those on furlough) were used by both NWES and MENTA during the pandemic to engage with potential beneficiaries and connect with the expanded audience.

The trainers who previously delivered face-to-face services were utilised to deliver new online workshops and support. These were based on the original designs and modified to ensure suitability for digital delivery.

5. Outputs

The demand for services of this nature increased throughout the pandemic, with demand doubling – however that did not always translate into outputs, which reduced by almost 50%. This was likely due to the difficulties in individuals achieving the full 12 hours required to meet the threshold. The Start Up Programme targets were not modified for delivery during the pandemic and any shortfall would be accounted/budgeted for during the remainder of delivery of the BGP. Whilst on paper this could be viewed as a failure, both teams demonstrated



considerable tenacity to overcome the obstacles and make significant shifts in the delivery model whilst ensuring minimal interruption to beneficiaries.

6. Impact

By moving delivery online, the Start Up Programme benefited from more participants in their activities than had been previously achieved. Some Workshops hosted as Facebook Live events were attended by up to 4,000 individuals. The benefit of this was twofold; (1) a wide audience of people were receiving support and (2) those who were eligible (based in New Anglia) could be supported further through the programme/ counted as project outputs.

There was very much an open-door policy regarding online delivery with an emphasis on helping those who needed it and worrying about capturing eligible outputs later.

The impact of the pandemic was clear in relation to job creation which became a real challenge for this aspect of the BGP. Both NWES and MENTA experienced significant amounts of promised jobs from beneficiaries which understandably failed to materialise.

7. Controls

The BGP and Start Up Programme already has an established reporting and monitoring mechanism which continued to be utilised during the pandemic to assess activities contribution to output targets.

The pandemic meant the need for effective communication within the partnership has been heightened. Both NWES and MENTA report having an increased level of communication with the LEP and Growth Hub and are now benefiting from an improved reciprocal relationship.

8. Lessons Learnt

What worked well, what didn't, areas for improvement, ideas for next time

The pandemic has enabled both NWES and MENTA to realise they are able to deliver the same quality of service through a viable online delivery model. The popularity of this method presents a huge opportunity to reach an extremely wide audience through social media channels, saving significantly on travel time for both trainers and beneficiaries. The latter possibly seeing travel as a barrier.

Having successfully made this change, both delivery partners have been able to provide their services to collect programme outputs and actively monitor the ongoing effects of the pandemic on their beneficiaries.

The success of online delivery means both NWES and MENTA are considering introducing this as a central pillar of their delivery model moving forward. With a shift towards predominantly online delivery with options for beneficiaries to request face-to-face sessions should they be required.

Go Digital

1. Purpose

At the start of 2020, Norfolk County Council commissioned a feasibility report to investigate how productivity could be improved if companies adopted new digital technologies. The pandemic accelerated the need for Digital support for SMEs, especially to those not used to operating online.

With Go Digital being designed in the background - its purpose, objectives and activities were influenced by two major engagement events. The first, in June 2020, was aimed at the tourism and hospitality sector called 'Tourism and Tech' and received widespread support from Tech East, Visit East Anglia and several digital advisor companies who shared best practice. Over 50 businesses registered and shared their experience of how they had adapted during the pandemic and the technologies they had used to maintain operations. A second event in September, 'RISE' targeted the food and drink industry and agri-tech. At the time both sectors had major supply chain issues.

The purpose of both events was to raise awareness of digital technologies, SEO, general web improvements and to use best practice from businesses to inspire others. What came out was a clear need for one-to-one support, with SMEs often reluctant to share in a one-to-many setting, particularly through covid.

This level of customer engagement in the design process is close to best practice and should be commended.

2. Objectives

The aim of Go Digital was to support 1,000 SMEs across Norfolk to make better use of digital tools – both to overcome the damage to operations

caused by the pandemic and to help them grow.

Delivery has had a positive effect on wider policy. The team have seen improved collaboration with the districts, who all indicated it was something they wanted to support, with 'top up' funds being provided by six of the districts and other looking at ways they can invest.

National government support has also been announced although this will likely be provided by some major software providers. The strength of Go Digital is that the advisors and contractors are all local businesses – meaning the investment stays in the area and supports the growth of not only the beneficiaries but also the providers. There have also been conversations with Suffolk to see whether there is the potential to leverage additional funding to broaden delivery, and there are best practice discussions with Kent County Council.

3. Inputs

There was limited resource to run the programme - £50,000 which covered the cost of the support, project management, vouchers, the development of a CRM, marketing and a small evaluation. The team wanted to strike a balance between giving the right level of support and reaching enough businesses. A pilot to support 43 businesses which included 9 hours of 1-2-1 support along with a digital audit was very successful. Advisors sought to understand which digital tools might be required, gaps in the existing digital model, software requirements and more. Companies were also allowed to apply for a £500 voucher towards the costs of developing their digital offer. The pilot was oversubscribed within a week.

The team did an excellent job of engaging with the district councils, and this helped to generate more

interest, with 100 businesses on the waiting list. As a direct result of this, the team were able to convince most of the districts to allocate additional resource to be able to reach more businesses.

The original pilot had one part time Officer, which quickly increased to one full time and an additional part time. Within that, there was an overhead charged to each district of £3,000. The project now has a full time Project Manager and a full time Project Officer.

4. Activities

The team have had no problems with acquisition – Go Digital is a project that sits perfectly in terms of demand, need and timing, etc. They have utilised the district connections well, with additional social media and PR activity supplementing this. The launch event ensured an initial pipeline which has triggered word of mouth referrals.

Whilst the initial paperwork process was fairly burdensome, the team have worked to streamline this and in turn have reduced admin time. The investment in the CRM has also helped, with some level of automation built in to gain even more efficiencies.

The application form takes approximately 30 minutes to complete for the company. Once submitted, the team promise a decision within three days. After the initial eligibility check is complete, if a company is accepted, the process of allocating a company to an advisor begins.

All advisors have different specialisms. Matching isn't too long a process and normally, within a week a company has been matched and contact has been made between the company and the advisor.

The business then dictates the duration/time frame of the engagement. Some individuals might take a couple of days out of work and get the work done straight away, others may take a few weeks as they're trying to fit the work into the day job and personal life.

The most difficult part for the team is chasing the audit and action plans from advisors. There is a RAG rating on businesses and weekly get together to check progress. Any amber or red companies are then chased to ensure projects are progressing.

There have only been two or three occasions where the match between the company and advisor wasn't good, this was mainly due to a lack of information from the company. The team organised a quick rematch with another advisor and resolved the situation.

There are rarely issues with the business – the web forms appear to be very smooth. Having a single, focussed Project Manager is helping ensure the project progresses, and each member of the team has access to the EconDev inbox (where enquiries and applications are sent to) so no company is kept waiting too long. The main barrier is around encouraging the advisors to book the first meeting with the business and pin down that time.

There is also a current challenge to keep those companies on the waiting list happy. Again, the team are handling this very well, constantly updating companies on progress and ringing once a month to ensure they're still interested. Unfortunately, not all districts topped up the funding pot, and as such there are a large number of Norwich City businesses waiting for support. These will be supported once C-Care funding comes through – which should allow for 600 additional companies to be supported.

5. Outputs

The only fixed outputs for the scheme are the number of companies supported. The table below shows the targets for the Pilot and Phase 1 of delivery.

Stage	Companies Supported	Vouchers
Pilot	43	34
Phase 1 (District Council SLAs)	150 (117 Complete)	120

There are currently 200 companies on the waiting list, and with the C-Care phase of delivery now underway, the scheme already has a third of the companies it needs to meet its target of 600 by March 2023. Some of the districts have already offered to top this up post C-Care.



6. Impact

The team have established a steering group with the districts and that group have engaged an independent evaluator to look back over the first two phases of delivery to pick up on the impact and some of the softer KPIs. This report is imminent and included 40 interviews with beneficiaries.

There has also been an impact on the advisors. The scheme has contracted with 17 businesses and 29 advisors. One of those advisors has reported that they have taken on their first member of staff due to the impact the scheme has had on their business.

7. Controls

The team are well connected to across the network – a signal that points towards why this scheme continues to grow in popularity with both businesses and partners. There are regular reports to the districts on the number of businesses supported in their area and weekly reports for EDOs, and the Norfolk and Suffolk Economic Development Officers Group.

Internally, the team report to the Management Team, portfolio holder and contribute to members briefings. Progress on the scheme has also appeared in cabinet reports.

On top of this, updates have been provided to the LEPs Business Growth Board – which includes partners across the region, including NWES, MENTA, Hethel Innovation and all the local business Intellectual Property Centres.

8. Lessons Learned

The project has not had to do much direct engagement – mainly because word of mouth has been so prominent. The EDOs have also been a great way to reach companies, and close relationships with the district teams have helped this.

Scaling the scheme, at pace, has presented its challenges, and the team required their own digital improvement – automating systems and building a CRM.

There is a point where the process can get blocked – and it is where a company has been allocated an advisor. The team have learnt not to wait for the advisor to make contact, but to call them and ensure contact will be made.

The CRM has helped – and flags up any company which hasn't had any recorded activity for 14 days. The team worked with advisors to understand how many companies they could manage in a month

(agreed on 10) which has meant they can manage expectations of those on the waiting list and allowed for forward planning.

The current focus is on where to take it next. The sense is that e-Commerce is becoming an important theme, and the team are looking at creative ways to bring a specific e-Commerce offer to companies.

Thematic Conclusions

- cash flow
- Independent appraisal – 2 out
- Paying businesses in advance of need – huge impact on cash flow
- Independent appraisal – two out of three to agree. Any challenges happened by email in first instance with an online meeting if required. This sped up the appraisal process, delighting customers. Companies receiving offers/ payment in 1-2 weeks.
- Creating good quality guidance for businesses and advisors is crucial – it reduces/ eliminates errors, and the need for constant reworking of forms.
- Improve collection and dissemination of impact. It helps us understand whether a scheme is working, and it provides us with content (case studies, statistics, benefits) for marketing the scheme to others.
- Combining revenue and capital can help ease pressure on companies, because it's almost impossible to make a capital investment without consuming revenue costs.
- There is a preference to have more time during design to liaise with partners, host engagement or Q&A events with businesses, and spend more time with advisors to build understanding of the process.
- Using experienced teams, with established processes – or working with teams in advance to ensure all processes are understood results in a more efficient project.
- Different advisors have different strengths – and we should play more into those strengths. Advisors who are good at managing grant applications can make all the difference to a smooth application process. Alternatively, train advisors in the application process properly before the project starts.
- Businesses would have benefitted from an even more joined up approach to business support. Different organisations were sending out different messages or were hosting duplicate events.
- Go Digital hosted two engagement events (attended by nearly 100 businesses) to understand need and help shape delivery. This not only helped design a programme that overcame the barriers, but also helped with acquisition – and the programme has always been oversubscribed.
- The Go Digital team have worked closely with the district teams, maintaining good relationships. Most districts have provided top up funds to the scheme.
- The Go Digital team spend time on matching advisors to companies. They also listen when a match goes wrong and are willing to rematch where necessary.
- Online delivery of business support has increased attendance levels at workshops and events. Different types of companies/ individuals are attending – it overcomes some of the key barriers (time for businesses, transport for individuals) and has engaged more rural businesses. There are drawbacks – networking has decreased, and the interaction with peers – but this can and has been managed through good use of software, break out groups, and careful management.





Skills & Employability



The Employer Training Incentive Programme (ETIP)

The Employer Training Incentive Programme (ETIP) is part of the Bringing Employment and Skills Together (BEST) programme, an umbrella for two schemes used to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and delivered by Norfolk County Council.

1. Purpose

The Employer Training Incentive Programme (ETIP) provides grants of up to £1,500 to cover up to 75% of business training costs. The initiative was set up as a direct response to Covid-19 and due to its success, is continuing.

Given the circumstance, many firms needed to pivot, diversify, and even learn digital basics. The scheme empowers employers to select a relevant training provider to fulfil their training requirements. The managers in the applicant businesses decide how to best support themselves or their employees. Smaller companies have no HR departments but have on-going training demands. Effective training programmes not only upskill staff, but they can also help retain them.

2. Objectives

The scheme was designed to assist employers who had become exposed due to the challenging trading conditions. A priority was to provide support to key sectors of particular concern, including the food and drink, tourism, and the visitor economy. It also aimed to assist firms in the digital sector, which is predominately made up of micro businesses, where many of their clients had decided they could not afford digital services at the time.

Some companies needed to train in order to survive and a large number of small firms were not digitally literate. For these SMEs especially, diversification in their offers could be a challenge.

ETIP acts as an incentive for all Norfolk businesses (including those in rural areas) to embrace digital technology, improve working practices, HR management and marketing, with the strategic aim of protecting jobs and securing growth.

Some key sectors have faced major challenges (exacerbated by the pandemic) in enabling time for training, perhaps at the most critical in the Social Care sector.

3. Inputs

The scheme is run by a Project Manager, with three part time Engagement Officers and a Project Officer:

Role	Total FTE
Project Manger	0.3
3 x Engagement Officers	1.5
Project Officer	1

Given the severe impact on the local economy, the BEST programme secured just over £540k of funding from the Norfolk Strategic Fund, with around £170k made available to deliver ETIP.

4. Activities

ETIP launched on 1st June 2020 and there was immediate interest which resulted in uptake. Firms in the Visitor Economy in particular were keen to ensure employees were

trained and ready for the summer reopening.

The ETIP approach is to empower the business managers to identify their specific needs and then engage with any UK based training company to provide training courses from themselves or their staff.

The pandemic stimulated an increase in entrepreneurialism amongst affected businesses, with managers keen to come up with innovative solutions to their current situations. Training has enabled employers to open food trucks and to even undertake drone training.

Whilst there has been a focus on diversification and innovation, the team has also supported some mandatory training such as Health and Safety, First Aid and Food Safety. This was particularly useful to businesses that had staff on furlough which had a clear need to ensure staff could come back into the business equipped with the skills they need to meet the demands of the reopening. Training could also enable full compliance of the new rules and regulations imposed because of the pandemic. 37% of ETIP projects involved mental health and leadership and management qualifications/training.

The scheme has enjoyed positive promotion through word of mouth, with one beneficiary beauty therapist was reported talking to their clients about the benefits of ETIP support.

The team collaborated with other projects such as the Youth Pledge and Go-Digital. They helped with upskilling project teams around the scheme and its benefits and encouraged them to inform their network about the grant. ETIP was also viewed as a natural next step for beneficiaries that had completed their support with those projects.

Following over 200 initial enquiries it was clear that every sector was struggling in different ways. As a

result the team submitted a Project Change Request to allow the scheme to provide support to all sectors.

The scheme has consistently broadened the types of training it will support. This means it can now fund accredited training up to and including Level 3. Another ad-hoc change made during delivery was an alteration to the grant payment terms. Some employers were struggling to find £1,000/£2,000 - a big ask for some micro businesses at the time. The team changed the offer from 50% upfront and 25% on completion to payment of the full 75% of eligible costs, which helped a number of employers.

Even now, in September 2021, there is still a huge demand for this initiative.

5. Outputs

The ETIP project did not have any formal outputs beyond ensuring all funds were spent on eligible activities.

6. Impact

The feedback from beneficiaries has been very positive. The inclusion of a wider range of sectors was also welcomed by Norfolk's engineering and manufacturing businesses who were originally deemed ineligible.

In three months, the team had received applications from over 100 businesses applying for grants. In total the scheme will enable over 440 individuals to be trained. In some cases, support has been provided for one-to-many sessions. For example, a larger organisation used their grant to train 28 people at the same time.

7. Controls

From launch, the team decided to create a spreadsheet which could be updated periodically to include all Norfolk private/public training providers and their offers. This was grouped into broad themes and enabled the team stakeholders, and potential beneficiaries to navigate to a provider in the training field relevant to their needs. This detailed approach to provision mapping also helped mitigate some of the challenges faced by digital access and the rurality of Norfolk.

8. Lessons Learnt

Active collaborations: there is a benefit to streamlining offers in this arena to maximise the positive impacts on local employers and ensuring everyone in the network has the tools and information to promote initiatives to business.

Flexibility for employers: Empowering business to decide on how to best meet internal training needs has been particularly popular. They can assess their own needs and how they want their teams to develop and grow.

Listening to employers and understanding needs: The scheme made several changes based on consultations with businesses in a wide variety of sectors acting on the feedback to further refine the model and maximise impact.

Recruit, Retain, Reward (RRR)

Recruit, Retain, Reward (RRR) is part of Bringing Employment and Skills Together (BEST) programme, an umbrella for two schemes used to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the thematic area of Skills and Employability, and delivered by Norfolk County Council.

1. Purpose.

Recruit, Retain, Reward (RRR) was designed prior to the pandemic to mitigate market failure in the region regarding the four-year long declining trend in regional apprenticeships. This trend worsened during the pandemic and Norfolk County Council sought to ease the impact on local businesses ability to take on and retain apprentices.

The scheme supports any non-levy paying business (organisations with a payroll under £3m) in the Norfolk County Council area with grants of £1,000 to either recruit or retain an apprentice aged 16-24.

At the start of the pandemic New Anglia LEP estimated there were around circa 2,000 apprenticeships that could have been made redundant as a result of the disruption.

The pandemic stimulated a significant decline in Level 2 and 3 qualifications, which had a major impact on social mobility, affecting 16-18-year-olds the most.

2. Objectives

The team designed the project around data from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) which clearly demonstrated 16-24-year-olds were hardest hit group in relation to having access to apprenticeships in the Norfolk area. This data is constantly reviewed and shows the situation continues.

The scale of the issue in the 16-24 age group is demonstrated by year on year decreasing trends with an 11% drop in apprenticeships in the year to March 2020, rising to 50% at the height of the pandemic.

The grant was specifically designed to stimulate demand for new apprenticeships and help those becoming redundant, which clearly became an ever more challenging issue during the pandemic. Even with Furlough, there was a massive reduction of apprenticeships starts across all sectors.

While the RRR scheme was being launched, Government was designing new national apprenticeship initiatives. Shortly after its launch the Employers Incentive scheme was implemented and that meant the team had to ensure the grant complimented this national activity. This was done via its focus on a specific age group and non-levy payers.

As the effects of the pandemic are subsiding and Government support is stopping, the team continue to look for opportunities to fill gaps in the provision of grants for apprenticeships. At the time of this report, a Project Change Request was under appraisal with the aim of making the scheme more flexible moving forward.

3. Inputs

The initial Recruit, Retain, Reward (RRR) project budget was made up of repurposed funds to enable the design of an intensive programme of support to incentivise businesses to take on apprentices. The shape of the scheme has evolved significantly over time. The original funding pot enabled the team to deliver 125 grants. Further support has been made possible through the Norfolk Strategic Fund.



- Recruit Reward Retain Original Funding - £125,000
- Norfolk Strategic Fund - £312,000
- Total: £437,000

The RRR team at Norfolk County Council has typically involved 3 staff spending about 15 hours in delivery per week.

During the initial stages of the scheme, the team were able to leverage sponsorship from the Ambassador Network who provided £3,000 to support marketing activities.

RRR is also now benefiting from C-Care funded staff and able to provide further support for activities and aid the development of the RRR offer further. This includes looking at individuals who have been through the Kickstart programme and working to place them in a relevant apprenticeship. In this way, the support for individuals continues, hopefully avoiding the potential to return to Universal Credit and securing their engagement in the job market.

4. Activities

Unlike its ETIP counterpart, the RRR is very specific in nature. Both programmes have collaborated actively and the RRR team has used the links with ETIP training providers to successfully promote the RRR.

Whilst the project has no formal delivery partners, local (and to some extent national) training providers were identified as project stakeholders. These have been the primary source of the schemes applications and been vocal champions of the scheme to the local business base. The key public sector stakeholders were the District Councils, New Anglia LEP, Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, and the local FSB. All stakeholders were invited to a preview meeting held for the public sector. Another more detailed event covering aspects such as the application process was held with training providers.

Project T&Cs had to be tweaked very early in delivery to ensure the scheme would not be abused. This included capping the number of grants per business and the introduction of a mechanism to ensure businesses were not claiming for a position that had been created months ago.

5. Outputs

RRR was designed using repurposed funds with targets of 125 from legacy funding and 312 from NSF, 437 applications in total.

6. Impact

To date, RRR has awarded a total of 206 grants, 71% of which have been for apprenticeships for the hardest hit demographic of 16-18-year-olds.

Current ESFA data clearly demonstrates that apprenticeships in the target age group have increased slightly (even during the pandemic) with the numbers now moving in the right direction. Whilst there is no explicit evidence of direct impact, the team believe the project has contributed significantly to this uplift.

There was an even spread of grants throughout the County Council area at a district level and the team constantly track the take up in sectors.

The RRR has enabled Norfolk County Council to establish a partnership approach to delivery, working collaboratively with districts and training providers to produce an effective system of support with enduring benefits outlasting the duration of the pandemic.

7. Controls

The team of three have regular meetings to review project progress. The Project Manager provides monthly performance reports to Council management. During the pandemic, the team have intelligently used data to inform decision making and diligently monitor all aspects of project progress including grant awards, acquisition, the performance in districts, qualification levels and supported sectors.



8. Lessons Learnt

The RRR was originally expected to award 125 grants using administrative processes based around a central excel spreadsheet and a word application which needed a great deal of manual entry. The team feel they should have taken a more strategic view from the start and automated processes earlier, using web forms and a CRM.

The team have received a significant amount of praise on the grant and its ability to help halt the decline in the region's apprenticeships. They

are proud of what they have achieved. In particular, the Project Manager has set up a process whereby grant payments are made within three to five working days. This is a significant achievement considering that Council's and most public sector organisations operate on 30-day payment terms. Businesses have been very appreciative of this and have praised the agility of the team.

There is the potential to use the data collected from this project and the ESFA to further refine and target specific businesses in hard hit sectors and areas of Norfolk. The

team acknowledge that their knowledge of sectors could be improved by investigating the sub-sector level.

There is also a clear need to further mitigate the potential impact on social mobility in hard-to-reach groups in LSOAs and other areas of deprivation in County.

The Employment Platform

1. Purpose

The employment platform - <https://newanglia.co.uk/employment-opportunities/> - was primarily developed as a direct response to the staff problems facing the care and agricultural sectors. Delivered by the LEP on behalf of the Workforce Workstream – it would present a wider opportunity to support the large numbers of people who were expected to lose their jobs or were on zero-hour contracts. With unemployment predicted to be around 15% across the country, and universal credit claims expecting to double, the overarching purpose was to ensure that employment figures and universal credit figures stayed as low as possible.

There was no resource (or real desire) to create a recruitment agency, and that market is generally well served. But there was a need for a platform which could advertise positions on behalf of employers and for that platform to provide additional employment support.

From about May/June 2020 the team began mapping training opportunities and developing guidance on mental health and wellbeing, finance and pensions – both for individuals and employers.

2. Objectives

The Employment Platform had 4 key objectives:

- Keep unemployment and Universal credit rates as low as possible
- Direct as many people as possible to practical support
- Support key sectors
- Support mental health

The design of the platform was intended to make it quick and easy to get positions and guidance out to individuals. With Job Centre plus staff processing large volumes of Universal Credit claims, it was important to step into the space. Not everyone was eligible for Universal Credit, nor did they necessarily have a link to the job centre.

With such strong connections to the various Sector Groups, the LEP was able to understand the employment needs in the region potentially better than anyone else could at that time. With this increased understanding of need, it also meant that they could develop stronger connections between the needs of the economy and the various skills programmes – and worked closely with DWP on the Kickstart programme and the 50+ choices pilot, using the platform to get messaging out to individuals and employers.

3. Inputs

Early development involved 5 members of staff – two in developing relationships with sector groups and employers, and 3 members of the comms team – all spending approximately 50% of their time of the platform. As the platform moved into more routine delivery – it now only requires a fraction of that resource across three distinct roles, gathering employment opportunities, updating the website and social media activity. When combined, these roles only take up about 1 day per week.

The platform itself is a series of web pages on the LEPs main website so there is no real outlay in terms of software licenses or development costs.

External support has included Sector representatives who have either spoken to companies on the LEPs behalf or connected the team to employers.

The site also utilised a lot of existing platforms/portals/connections such as linking to the Norfolk and Suffolk Care Support job site. North Norfolk District Council connected the team to local farmers, as did the other district councils across other sectors – including food manufacturing.

4. Activities

The team used traditional methods to reach individuals – social media, press releases and local partners or schemes, including DWP and the Building Better Opportunities programme. The Growth Hub would also refer to the site when talking to companies who were making redundancies, encouraging them to provide details of the site to staff.

Recruitment agencies were keen to support as well – they needed people so would provide links to their sites. They also wanted access to data and information to better

understand sector trends.

Local employment opportunities were generally found through contact with sector leads, Growth Hub advisors and through direct communication with employers. But the team did not just advertise local opportunities – with the aim of giving as many opportunities as possible, they also posted national opportunities. This approach to put people first is another example of how teams were starting with the need of the beneficiary, as opposed to the organisation or policy.

5. Outputs

There was no resource to be able to track the success of the platform other than to monitor the number of visitors – which since its launch has had just over 30,000 views. Whilst this has dipped more recently, it is still one of the top 5 pages viewed on the LEPs website, accounting for approximately 3% of traffic. The LEP are also continuously monitoring Universal Credit rates.

6. Impact

In terms of added value, the platform has helped raise the profile of the LEP and its efforts to support the recovery. It's helped make people aware of the importance of skills – both in terms of acquiring new skills and transferring existing skills. But it's also increased awareness and value from an employer perspective. If a business can't get the right staff, or have staff without the right skills, it creates a critical problem.

The team have noticed a real shift in perspective – a realisation that the FE sector is important. Different stakeholders have realised that recruitment, training, and continuous professional development, particularly amongst the over 50's is important.

It's also got individuals to look at their existing skill set and how they can apply it in another sector. It's made individuals realise that skills are transferable.





7. Controls

Controls are low – the site requires minimal maintenance and there are no databases of individuals to manage. Opportunities get posted on the site and are removed once filled.

On a strategic level, the Workforce workstream was established as part of a wider response to the challenges facing the employment and skills sector, and provided a useful way to promote the Employment Platform and connect to other programmes of support

such as the ESF projects providing employability and apprenticeships support, the Youth Pledge projects and Enterprise Adviser Network, and topics including mental health, wellbeing virtual work experience and digital skills infrastructure and graduate careers support.

The team would report into the Workforce Workstream and then up to the Economic Recovery Group.

8. Lessons Learnt

The site itself is simple, and whilst this is cost effective and serves its purpose, it's not very user friendly in terms of uploading opportunities and cosmetically it's not very attractive. A more sophisticated system would be beneficial if this was to be taken forward.

Good use of case studies can be powerful in encouraging both individuals and employers. Again, a more sophisticated site would be able to showcase these more effectively.

The team made the right decision in not offering more one-2-one support. There are a host of programmes in the region who are already offering employment and skills support, careers advice and support with improving employability. With the Government launch of Kickstart and Restart, there were probably too many programmes in the market, and the real problem was reaching the individuals. More investment in access and reach would be more beneficial than creating new programmes.

There has been limited input from other stakeholders in terms of contributing towards the platform, and opportunities will have been missed because of this.

It was an incredibly time-consuming task, and with other priorities, the team had no time to properly check/vet all opportunities and websites. This was particularly pertinent around the mental health and wellbeing links. The LEP want to ensure that all links and opportunities are credible, but it would need more capacity to be able to achieve this.

Kickstart

1. Purpose

Kickstart was announced by Government in July 2020 as part of the plan for jobs, a package of support which aimed to tackle youth unemployment through investment in traineeships, apprenticeships, and careers advice. The scheme will fully fund placements for 25 hours a week in line with the relevant national minimum wage, with employers free to top up payments, and will also pay employers £1500 to set up support and training for the placement, pay for uniforms, and any other setup costs.

The scheme has a total budget of £2bn and aims to reach 300,000 people.

2. Objectives

The aim was to reduce youth unemployment. Young people didn't have any experience, and there was no way to get any experience because they were locked down at home and there was a lack of opportunity. Government needed a mechanism to try and move them off Universal Credit and into work placements.

The scheme also helps young people build skills in the workplace, gain experience, and improve their chances of finding long-term work.

There is no published ambition around the number of young people expected to be supported via the scheme.

3. Inputs

The scheme is administered nationally, but locally there is no set operating model.

With a total budget of £2bn, there is a national website which links to a government application portal where employers can apply. Employers could also apply via a gateway – where an intermediary (chamber, local authority, community schemes, etc.) would apply on behalf of multiple companies to help them through the process. Once successful, employer vacancies are uploaded to a portal which is accessed via DWP work coaches – who work with young people to find employment opportunities.

Locally, the regional DWP office had the local autonomy to utilise as many people as necessary. There is no firm grasp on the total number of people involved across Norfolk and Suffolk – there is a cohort of work coaches who work with young people, and a small number of local DWP employees who have been contacting businesses.

4. Activities

The process, as set out above, is straightforward – with employers advertising positions either through direct applications or via a gateway. Norfolk County Council acted as a gateway, facilitating the creation of job placements at employers across Norfolk. Work coaches then work with young people (18-24) to apply.

There have been several challenges. The programme was launched very quickly, and employers had lots of technical questions which DWP didn't have answers to. Employers were often unhappy with the hoops they had to jump through.

Employers often had different expectations about people applying for the positions. Some employers didn't understand potential vulnerabilities of applicants or were looking for extremely qualified people (degree standard) which was not really the target market for this scheme.



If a vacancy was too high a requirement the local DWP team tried to contact the employer to manage the problem and see if they could lower their requirements. The objective was about getting young people work experience, not recruiting fully qualified staff.

5. Outputs

Nationally there is a target to reach out to 300,000 young people, but there is no set target for any area. After launching in September 2020, it started slowly. By February 2021, 150,000 positions had been approved, 30,000 were open for application, but just 4000 young people had successfully found placements. At the same time, the number of NEETs had risen by 5.1%. The cause was put down to delays, confusion in the market, and last-minute changes. However, in September 2021, Rishi Sunak announced that the scheme had achieved 60,000 placements.

6. Impact

There is no clear understanding of how the impact of the scheme will be monitored – other than via

tracking the level of youth unemployment and the number of young people on Universal Credit. There does not appear to be a formal approach to capturing the impact on the individual.

At a local level, the DWP team are in continuous contact with employers and look to pick up young people as they come out of placement to see if further support is needed.

7. Controls

Each regional team is managing the scheme differently. In New Anglia, the DWP team have an excellent relationship with the LEP and attend regular meetings and provide updates.

8. Lessons Learnt

There have been a number of elements that have worked really well. The local teams have connected to employers who haven't worked with them before, and young people are getting access to thousands of opportunities across a breadth of different areas. Young people have been looking at things differently – looking into sectors that have been more resilient during Covid.

The scheme could have looked at reaching out to young people who could self-serve and allow them access to the system. Currently that part of the process is carried out by the work coaches – but that means the young people aren't having sight of the variety of opportunities. Young people don't necessarily know what they want to do, with most opting for careers that are in their line of sight. They don't know the hidden sectors – but that's where the work coaches come in, and that's also where having the option to look at opportunities may help.

At first there were teething problems – and there have been issues with the criteria. For example, there was a case where a young person took a short-term Christmas role with the post office but was then excluded from Kickstart because they had work on their record in the past 6 months. This is where the bureaucracy and inflexibility of schemes can cause real problems and don't take account of real-world issues.

Finally, there was little consultation in the market, and with a large number of schemes already in position locally, there was a clash of priorities. One of the key issues that was reported locally was not about the lack of programmes delivering employability and skills support – but the challenges around reach. Some of the issues Kickstart have faced would appear to be the same – there have been lots of opportunities but not many placements. Consideration should be given when designing new schemes into how they intend to reach their target market.

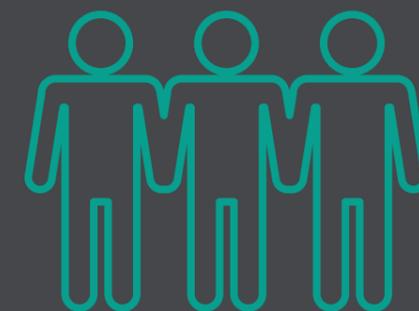
Thematic Conclusions

- The employment platform is simple and effective – but is not very sophisticated or cosmetically attractive. This could turn people off from using it. A better system may be more usable, more accessible, and more attractive.
- There are a host of programmes delivering skills and employability support. The bigger problem is reaching the individuals – particularly those that are the hardest to reach. Investing in that, may be more beneficial than investing in new schemes.
- Collaborating across the partnership would have helped in terms of getting the message out there, but also taking on some of the workload. In addition, collaborating with partners gives a better sense of everyone being in it together.
- Kickstart could have done better at reaching out to young people, and particularly those who could self-serve.
- With Kickstart there was a lot of bureaucracy and early teething problems, including delayed payments from DWP. Young people missed out on placements because of technicalities – which wasn't really in the spirit of what the scheme was trying to achieve. Additional discretion and flexibility would be welcome.
- Kickstart did little consultation with the local areas before launching, and as such created a scheme which clashed with many local offers. Government then put pressure on local partners to refer to Kickstart as opposed to local schemes. All this does is make the support landscape more complex and the partnerships more fractured. Investment in reaching individuals would have been more welcome.





Community & Voluntary



The Food Parcel Project

1. Purpose

The Food Parcel Project was developed as a direct response to the gaps in the governments provision of food parcels. The Food and Medicine Work Stream, which was part of the Community Resilience Delivery Group, took the responsibility to explore various issues that had arisen in the communities.

There were complaints that the boxes didn't cater for vegans and faith-based diets, and that the quality of food was poor. There was clear expectation from Government that it was up to Local Authorities to step in – this quickly changed to an expectation to provide the entire service.

The team knew there was food hardship in the region and that it would get worse.

There was a need in Norwich and Yarmouth – particularly for Halal diets, as well as wider poverty challenges in Kings Lynn, Yarmouth and Thetford.

The team tried to understand the local situation – initially reaching out to district food banks for knowledge and began to build a better picture of the health inequalities of the population who were shielding, particularly in rural areas.

The ambition was a collective sense of responsibility – no-one who needed food went without. That would mean working outside usual hours and taking on a challenge no-one had seen before. This fuelled a real sense of personal responsibility, and a drive to help people and communities. It was also clear that what started out as just a food parcel project, quickly turned into a welfare project.

The three key objectives were:

- Providing emergency supplies for 'shielded' people to underpin Central Government provision
- Connecting those who can afford to pay for shopping to providers who can deliver
- Supporting those who have become or are economically vulnerable

3. Inputs

Public Health were very involved early on, helping to ensure the boxes were healthy but also catered specifically for any health needs. For example, it was important to provide the right foods for Diabetics – which was the only box to include sweets.

There was also the challenge of not putting too much in – Public Health wanted to add e-cigarettes to try and get people to stop smoking. Others also came to the team with ideas to use it for their own means – but the team felt it was important to retain the priority of getting food to people and declined most of the offers.

There were lots of offers from help from haulage firms and others, but it was essential to remain streamlined and efficient so as not to waste time.

There were lots of uncertainties which effected decisions on how much resource could be invested. Finances were uncertain, and also no-one really knew how long it was going to be needed – making it hard to establish how many people to commit to it.

Norwich City Council became the lead organisation, working closely with the districts. Britvic offered one of their warehouses as a Central Hub, and food was stored and packaged up there, for distribution to the districts, who would then despatch to their local people.

There was a major need in terms of staff, but no-one with any experience. There were however lots of people who weren't working due to Covid restrictions, and as such, librarians, parking attendants, events teams and more were all redeployed into the team.

There was a core team of around six or seven managing the process, There was a large team of almost 40 people, just handling enquiries or making phone calls. A further 12 people worked in the food hub, and there were others delegated to tasks such as collecting data, buying food and delivering parcels, as well as providing some central core services such as finance and HR. It was quite an intensive process, including DBS/driving license checks and the processing of expenses. In total, it is estimated that almost 70 people per district were involved.

In terms of cost, it is estimated that the cost of a food box was around £90. This included around £25 worth of food, and £65 for everything that went into putting it together and delivering it. The price above does not take account of the cost of the call handling.

The team worked with the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub to develop a database of the clinically vulnerable which allowed contact creation for each person and drop-down menus for what they needed. This was iteratively improved as more intelligence was gathered and could be anything from medical requirements to walking someone's pet.

Eventually, the team had a parcel tracker and stock system so they knew every week how many boxes went out, how many were in stock, how many were on order and how much stock was still in the Central Hub.

The team looked to procure wholesalers who could provide fresh fruit and veg and other food to see if they could reduce the cost per parcel – but found no single supplier could provide everything required. Eventually, Morrison's started to do food boxes containing cupboard essentials which were bought in bulk and stored at the Hub.

During Lockdown Two, most council services came back and the team lost some essential resource such as parking attendants and librarians. Community Outbreak Management Funding helped to finance more staff – but that also brought recruitment, interview and training challenges.

4. Activities

There was a single point of contact for the county who took calls on welfare issues. The enquiry team were pro-active and called all those who were identified as clinically vulnerable to establish whether food and medication needs were being met. This is where much of the local learning about different needs happened, which helped inform the team when contacting others. For example, some people needed very specific care items, others were in temporary accommodation and may not have access to a kettle or a fridge. This influenced what went in the boxes, and also triggered lots of purchases of basic kitchen equipment such as microwaves.

The triage teams set out to establish the situation of each individual or

household. A detailed matrix was produced to support this which essentially grouped people as follows:

- Self-Sufficient: Those who can access and had the means to do so, were provided with information, advice and guidance
- Semi-Self-Sufficient: Those who couldn't access but had the means to do so were connected to local support, including volunteers who could collect shopping on their behalf
- Require Support: Those who could access, but didn't have the means, including those who were economically vulnerable. This group were provided with the same support as those who required full support, but with less support for access
- Require Full Support: Those with no access or means, who were provide with emergency food parcels and referred to specific support schemes.

The team created standard boxes and bespoke options. This meant stocking lots of different types of food/essentials that weren't suitable for everyone – i.e. nappies, pet food, dairy free items. It also meant shoppers had to sometimes go to multiple supermarkets to find the right item.

Eventually the triage process (the enquiry team establishing need) had to be become stricter. At first, food boxes were distributed to anyone who asked for them, but they discovered quite a few people abusing the system and others who really needed help but were too proud to ask for it. There was also a lot of 'digital exclusion', with older people not able to buy shopping online.



5. Outputs

The team held data with districts providing a weekly submission on what had been spent and how many boxes had gone out. This information went into a single dashboard. In total, 2,762 food boxes were delivered.

6. Impact

The key impact was ensuring people who needed support had access to food, medicine and any other essential items. But the scheme had a much wider impact. Reputationally, it brought the council closer to the community, and people appreciated that.

On a personal level, the people working on the scheme felt a sense of satisfaction that they were helping people, just receiving a message from someone saying thank you went a long way.

At central and district level, teams proved how fast they could work with devolved responsibility, making quick decisions.

The team pulled on skills of staff outside of their normal roles, for example, the events manager who had organised major events such as the Lord Mayors procession, came in and managed the setup of the Hub, with a full-scale logistics plan, vehicle access, even where the pallets would go.

Relationships were built with new people, and the county and districts came together to work on a shared goal.

7. Controls

The Food and Medicine Work Stream setup internal processes to manage all aspects of the scheme, and sub teams were created covering Project Management, District PoC, Sourcing, Preparation and Delivery. Each sub team had an individual lead.

There was a light reporting process back up to the Community Delivery Resilience Group. Kate Price (Food and Medicine Work Stream Lead)

and Jamie Sutterby (South Norfolk and Broadland Council) met every morning, and there were collective project management meetings twice a week and a wider Work Stream meeting once a week which was attended by all the districts.

8. Lessons Learnt

One major realisation has been that this was more than a food parcel project, and the need was more than just food, it was also about people's welfare. This learning launched a Community Conversations movement to learn about and help people in the community and improve services.

The team also benefitted from being empowered, and from being able to innovate. Trust was devolved, and people thrived on it, making faster decisions, prototyping solutions, learning whilst doing, and learning from failure. Collaboration was key in two ways – firstly, getting fresh eyes on a problem, and bringing in people from different backgrounds brought more insights. Secondly, the sense of a shared vision and goal

inspired people to work together. Those people, whilst back in their roles, are still connected, although behaviour is already starting to revert to what it was before.

In December 2020, eleven members of the team got together to discuss lessons learned, these are captured below and worth sharing here:

What went well?

- The processes for allocating food put in place through NAS worked well
- The speed of deliveries from Britvic and the feedback loop were fantastic
- Loading vans with a holding stock of four food boxes and one test kit each helped the delivery team to give a rapid response
- Demand was a lot quieter than expected. Many users had been able to set up support networks and learned how to access supplies themselves during the first

lockdown

- The whole team had a positive can-do attitude and meetings were well structured as well as being timed well in the middle of the week
- There was joined up working across all elements of the team

What would we do differently?

- Double handling of referrals to Britvic. Could emails come directly from district rather than NAS?
- NAS did not have access to priority slots at supermarkets. If access could be provided this would speed up the process of shopping for customers
- A Comms message of 'don't leave it until the last minute to ask for help' would prevent the number of urgent requests

