



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

Annex B: Light Touch Reviews

October 2021



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Introduction

Our light touch reviews explored project purpose, delivery issues, achieving impact and lessons learnt.



The Visitor Economy



The Tourism Recovery Plan

The Challenge

- Fragmented sector
- Micro-businesses
- Public health issues
- High streets in decline
- Challenges around spaces

1. Purpose

The visitor economy is the primary sector in New Anglia. The pandemic had a severe effect on tourism. The Lockdown meant it quickly entered severe stagnation. The sector is made up largely of smaller firms. Many smaller SMEs were immediately cash-short, a significant number of lifestyle businesses were therefore more fragile. The region needed a plan to address the short and medium-term implications

In normal times, the LEP has the strategic aim of encouraging young people to think of a longer-term career in the sector (instead of viewing it as a seasonal short-term opportunity). The move to shorter contracts had severe effects in the area with immediate effects on the young workforce and this also demanded specific responses.

The LEP see the High Street as part of the sector and many shops – now closed - had no web presence to attract sales, let alone the ability to transact online. They needed help.

As the pandemic progressed many firms were forced to extend their reach, introduce new products or services, or move online. There were many businesses which didn't have the capability to book online and some with no web presence. All of these challenges required specific support.

2. Delivery

Published in August 2020, the Norfolk and Suffolk Visitor Economy Recovery Plan was an aid to restarting the visitor economy through the delivery of a model developed by partners to drive collaboration, promotion, and new programme activity.

Tourism was perhaps the hardest hit aspect of the region's economy and is vital to local success with the sector providing 89,000 jobs (11% of the LEP area workforce), 7,000 businesses and contributing £2.5b to the local economy. Whilst overseas tourism will not quickly recover, the increased demand for staycations in 2021 and beyond provides the LEP with the opportunity of positing the region as the best rural and coastal destination in the UK. This recovery plan is the result of collaboration between New Anglia LEP, Visit East of England, Local Authorities, and destination organisations.

The LEP team acknowledges that it only provided the leadership in pulling partners together – much of the work was delivered by partners.

The LEP already chaired the pre-existing Visitor Economy Group which has managed the local Tourism Action Plan. The group brings together all the key partners including Visit East of England. It was originally established for bidding purposes, but the group decided to pivot its work to help deliver support to the sector.

There was immediate recognition that given the circumstances, all parties needed to work more closely together, they needed a focused action plan which they developed and launched in August 2020 during a visit by the Minister for Tourism. The LEP team believes they were amongst the first regions to act in response to the pandemic.



The LEP decided to use financial support to enable businesses to adapt to the new conditions – providing help with introducing new technology or processes.

The regional response addressed many of the business issues via training offers on marketing, relevant skills, and processes. The plan included delivering training on how to exploit marketing opportunities on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram etc.

The sector has recently bounced back with the boost from staycations during 2020 and 2021.

3. Impact

Managing this response has strengthened the local infrastructure supporting the tourism sector, making everyone involved aware of the need to join hands and recognise the fragmented approach of the past.

4. Lessons Learned

Collaboration exploits the strengths of everyone involved.

What worked well? During discussions participants mentioned furlough and the rate relief mechanisms as important interventions, the latter providing resources for business support (via direct cost reductions and resources to supply grants). The support around introducing technology and promoting digital adoption was also praised.

What hasn't worked well? A number of interviewees mentioned there is a risk of individual areas moving back to working alone.

Experience FCE

The Challenge

- Low tourism numbers out of season
- Moving to sustainable tourism
- Hotels and restaurants diversifying
- Challenges of online delivery and digital capabilities

1. Purpose

Managed by Norfolk County Council, Experience FCE is a transnational multipartner €23.3m project co-funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England (FCE) Programme. It has 14 partners along the south coast of England and northern coast of France, including Councils, private sector companies, third sector organisations and universities.

The project started in June 2019 and was designed to increase out of season experiential tourism via a marketing approach that promotes experiences unique to the participating areas. The goal of the project was to sustainably increase tourism in the participating areas with a focus on attracting people out of season and during the spring months.

The Project was only six months into delivery when Covid-19 stuck and the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector was severe with all businesses shut down overnight.

2. Delivery

During the pandemic numerous Experience project staff were redeployed to frontline roles such as handling enquiries, some needed to work reduced hours due to caring commitments, some were sick with

Covid-19 (including symptoms of long Covid) off work with stress or affected by bereavement.

When the pandemic hit, the vast majority of tourism businesses shut up shop. Many business people were resigned to a period of closure and instead of panicking about something which was out of their control, they looked to focus on ways to attract tourists back in later 2020 and during the following year when lockdown restrictions were expected to ease.

Some businesses used Government schemes and most businesses in the sector could not operate as there was no market at the time. Some restaurants (and even hotels) could switch their business model and offer takeaway food. However, this was not possible for all as demand could be high on just one or two days of the week and operating these services was not a sustainable business model in the circumstances.

The New Anglia area has a community of wealthy landowners, farmers and those who have the means to make large scale investments at the drop of a hat (even during a pandemic) and this enabled some to diversify quite quickly. However, this was not realistic for most businesses in the tourism sector and the Experience team focussed on facilitating networking between smaller businesses to create new opportunities. This included simple, cost-free solutions such as offering cream teas to walkers/hikers and connecting yoga teachers to stand up paddle board instructors. Linking individuals and companies together enabled them to develop ideas and turn a series of activities into an experience.

At the outset the project attempted to hold large online conferences, however it found these to be ineffective and therefore switched to offering beneficiaries one-to-one sessions instead. This enabled the

team to take time to really listen to SMEs to establish their needs and wants and build strong relationships. This meant staff costs increased, however the positive results and impacts of these interactions were observed from an early stage in project delivery.

A key focus of the project's efforts to adapt to the circumstances was to diversify and seek out non-traditional stakeholders in the tourism industry. These included poets, wood workers and cycle tour guides. These businesses were approached with a simple message 'how can we help you?' and the team identified how simple advice and support would help them come back better and as soon as possible. The success of the project's adaptation is now directly attributed to listening and building strong relationships with businesses and non-traditional stakeholders.

In the beginning, supply chains totally collapsed, external expertise was not available. In the case of construction projects, companies could not get the materials needed to undertake projects, there was a few months when there was no concrete anywhere in the LEP area. Materials increased in price. The tremendous amount of uncertainty meant suppliers found it difficult to work effectively. This increased prices and the higher risk could only be mitigated through factoring them into contract costings. The situation was exacerbated by a lack of skilled workers and the need to adhere to strict social distancing measures.

Local Councils are not known for their employment of new technologies. Prior to the pandemic the Council was holding occasional online meetings, but this was not commonplace. As a result of the pandemic the Council has become more agile. Teams are now allowed to use some technology without the need for prior approval, for example: Zoom which is more commonly used by SMEs rather than Microsoft Teams.

The team and the Council have learned the positive aspects of online delivery:

- It provides more flexibility in delivery
- More can be done during online meetings
- The use of blackboard applications and Zoom polls (mini live surveys) has speeded the collection of evidence for decision making
- Some people are more open than they would be in a formal meeting situation

The online environment is not good news for everyone. It can be potentially hostile for individuals who are neurodiverse, those from the d/Deaf community and anyone with a visual impairment.

The Project Team

The Experience project team is located in the Environmental Services Department of Norfolk County Council. The team consists of 15 individuals:

Role	Staff
Project Manger	1
Finance & Admin.	4
Business Trainers	3*
Product Development	3**
Marketing & Promotion	2
Data & Sustainability	1

*+ Creative Giants Agency **+ A Consultant

Data monitoring and reporting is being achieved through collaboration with the University of Surrey including resident surveys and visitor perceptions.

The project has a remit to ensure any

marketing undertaken is a minimum 33% to promote accessibility and inclusivity. This includes marketing to unrepresented groups such as LGBTQ+, BAME, those who don't have families and those with dementia through appropriate imagery, language, and case studies.

A major tourism market for Norfolk and Suffolk is the London and Cambridge, both of which are ethnically diverse. The project has commissioned the University of Surrey to better understand why underrepresented groups are not currently visiting the area. This includes the design of events that could be relevant to ethnic minorities such as the Festival of Light and working with organisations such as Black Girl Bikes.

The audience for stimulating out of season tourism in the area is wide and includes couples of all ages and 60+ retirees.

When the project team started to formulate a response to the pandemic, the relevant local and national Covid-19 strategies were yet to be published. No formal strategy existed and so the team engaged SMEs, third sector organisations and individuals relevant to experiential tourism development to help inform the most effective courses of action. The team approached a range of stakeholders who had never been consulted in this way - a project of this nature would normally be built around a consultation with organisations on the LEP database and those sitting on regional boards. The team also engaged Norfolk residents to establish how they felt about tourism, how it could be reimagined, how it could be increased and what makes the area special (or slightly different) from others in the UK. This was a fresh approach. The response was shaped by these individuals rather than economic information and data. The 'small guys' who are rarely engaged or consulted on such matters, but



who, in this case, were the direct victims of the negative impact of Covid-19.

3. Impact

The pandemic has afforded both the team and beneficiaries more time to prepare and establish the connections that would otherwise would not have happened, working with individuals who would not have had time to cultivate these relationships under normal circumstances.

The project has been able to develop some cutting-edge activities through collaborations with Innovation Incubators including virtual reality digital interpretation, a dark sky observatory, the Deep Coast History Shelter and kinetic sculpture.

4. Lessons Learned

The Experience team is extremely proud of the project's achievements and the way in which they modified and adapted their original remit to increase the project relevance during the pandemic.

The constant conversation with strategic organisations, local/international partners and non-traditional tourist sector stakeholders helped strengthen the actions taken.

Engaging with entities and individuals who would not normally be involved in a project like this has brought 'fresh eyes' and different perspectives.

Moving delivery online has enabled the project to have a greater reach. Digital content can be used again and there is the potential to have high profile guest speakers attend events virtually from anywhere in the world.

Allowing extended development and gestation periods, the pandemic gave the team longer to focus on bigger and better projects.

Whilst the pandemic meant the project team had to become flexible, they felt the Managing Authority lacked flexibility and were reactive. They gave little room for manoeuvre regarding project spend, only allowing limited changes and these required a huge amount of administration and unjustified bureaucracy. There is a feeling that FCE in particular are more interested in enforcement than facilitating solutions. There is a need for greater flexibility and an a much more open perspective in both MHCLG and FCE.

The Visitor & Wider Economy Grants Schemes

The Challenge

- The worst period of business suffering ever known, especially for those in the visitor and wider economy
- Effected sectors (hospitality, retail and tourism) shut down overnight

1. Purpose

The Visitor and Wider Economy Grant Schemes (known as VEG and WEG) was part of a direct UK Government response to the challenges faced by small businesses in the visitor and wider economy (retail, hospitality and tourism). This scheme was rolled out nationally and undertaken by participating LEPs and Growth Hubs at a local level who were given the autonomy to deliver it as they saw fit, so long as the activity was within guidelines and Government/ERDF rules.

Nationally, the schemes delivered revenue grants covering 100% of project costs, up to a maximum of £5k. New Anglia LEP decided to cap the grants at £3k to enable leeway as unlike other ERDF projects, this scheme did not allow any match funding of activities e.g. if a company purchased anything that was over the £3k, it would have to provide separate invoices to be compliant under the rules. This £2k headroom also enabled companies to claim the grant should they go slightly over when making purchases or be subject to things out of their control such as inflation.

The scheme also supported areas of the economy not normally eligible under ERDF including restaurants and retail – sectors where there is a high likelihood of displacement.

2. Delivery

Effective delivery of the scheme was a major logistical exercise as the pandemic meant there was a need for almost 100% of it to be delivered remotely.

The scheme was implemented over a very short timescale and included full ERDF compliance with no relaxation of the rules. This presented a challenge as the Government had chosen one of the most bureaucratic funding streams for such a simple grant scheme. This caused confusion with beneficiaries, who were getting ready for EU-Exit at the same time as applying for European Funding. Due to the nature of the scheme being under ERDF, existing Small Grant Scheme monitoring and application processes were adopted..

In total there were six individuals in the VEG and WEG process in both the Growth Hub and LEP.

A member of the Growth Hub team was responsible for due diligence, with applications then being passed onto the LEP for approval, checking and sending of offers, claims and the subsequent payments to beneficiaries. It is estimated that at the peak of delivery, it took one member of staff 75% of their time on due diligence, a day a week on approvals and half a day a week on checking and sending offer Letters. The LEPs Programme Manager received permission from Suffolk County Council to sign and send offer letters on behalf of the Council to make the process quicker.

Efficiency gains were made by having all seven generic pages of the offer letter printed centrally and kept as 'stock' with the four additional beneficiary specific pages printed at home (saving on ink, time and costs as only an Inkjet was available whilst working remotely). Most importantly, the team attached a clear 'before you do anything – read this' page which gave



beneficiaries all the steps required to remain compliant through the process. This system was highly effective and worked well for the duration of delivery.

Whilst the process on average took three weeks from application to payment, the slick process from the Growth Hub and LEP teams meant this was possible in just seven days, a considerable achievement considering the constraints presented by the pandemic and the bureaucratic nature of ERDF grant schemes.

The LEP implemented an EOI as gateway criteria on the LEP and Growth Website to screen out/ separate:

- Ineligible businesses
- Larger SMEs
- Eligible small businesses who had already received funding
- Eligible small businesses

This enabled the team to create a traffic light system and ensure the eligible small businesses from the priority sectors were served first and those who were eligible but had already received funding were put on to a waiting list. Larger

businesses and those who were ineligible were informed accordingly and signposted to other relevant pandemic responses.

3. Impact

In terms of Governments (and consequently the LEPs) ambition to support hard to reach smaller businesses in hard hit sectors, the scheme was a success. In total the LEP approved 131 VEG and 95 WEG grants.

The LEP saw a great benefit in the programme and its popularity with target businesses, and consequentially over profiled the scheme which meant it had to provide £40k to ensure all beneficiaries were paid their grants. This was viewed as a small price to pay to support businesses that are traditionally harder to reach.

4. Lessons Learnt

There was confusion amongst businesses around the level of bureaucracy involved with the award of a £3,000 grant through VEG and

WEG, compared with the relatively simple distribution of Government Rate Relief Grants of up to £25,000. Some frustrated businesses even contacted their local MPs. Managing expectation of companies around the award of public money is important. But it is also important that schemes minimise the level of bureaucracy involved with grant administration.

Whilst the LEP team have discussed the use of DocuSign prior to the pandemic to streamline application processes, the need for compliant digital signatures was highlighted when speed of delivery was a focus. Efficiency would have been significantly increased had digital signatures been adopted in the VEG and WEG process.

The team tactically delayed the launch by two weeks to get a feel of how other LEPs and Growth Hubs fared with delivery. This was highly effective, and the New Anglia team learnt from mistakes made elsewhere including one LEP who had advertised the grant through social media and had become quickly overwhelmed – hence the creation of an EOI gateway.



Community & Voluntary Initiatives



PPE

The Challenge

- A drive to connect existing and potential suppliers to local care homes and HMG

1. Purpose

At the start of the pandemic there was a need for care homes to procure significant amounts of PPE for their staff. The problem was fourfold:

- Whilst care homes did procure PPE items, they were typically only be awarding a couple of contracts per year and Covid-19 meant they had undertaken multiple procurements quickly
- PPE was scarce at the beginning of the pandemic and conventional supply chain routes were not working
- Care homes were under pressure with other issues and did not have the capacity to trawl through a seemingly endless number suppliers of PPE locally, nationally, and even internationally
- Even if they could find products, there was no way of them to confirm they were the right quality

At the beginning of the pandemic, a proposed solution was for either Norfolk County Council or the LEP to bulk buy PPE, stockpile it and supply care homes (charging them if needed). The facilities for this were already in place as the Government had set up PPE dropping points for the NHS. This was the approach adopted in Suffolk at the start of the pandemic.

However, the only way for a care home to obtain PPE from Government PPE drops was for them

to be able to demonstrate they had no way to source the consumables themselves. As PPE was readily available on the market (even if it was overpriced or unverifiable) this was almost impossible and highly time consuming for under pressure care home staff.

There was a clear need for a frontend system which could list PPE offers of verified suppliers. The system needed to ensure care homes had the option to procure PPE as and when they needed it from trusted suppliers.

2. Delivery

In Norfolk, the County Council took the lead. They were not sharing intelligence with care homes at the time and so built a rudimentary list of social care contacts. The first iteration of the system was Excel and Word based with care homes having to fill out an electronic form which was then added to a master excel database. Knowing the scale of the challenge, the team initially spent two weeks sourcing information.

In collaboration, the LEP agreed to support the creation of an online system and moved to appoint a contractor. The direct cost of the PPE Supply Chain System was circa £24.5k and the contractor Free Rain was engaged to develop the system which could be accessed via the LEP website.

Developing the system was a full-time role for the LEP appointed lead who was provided with help from the wider team and part time Growth Hub capacity undertaking interface trouble shooting. The team poured hours into the making the system a reality during March and April 2020, working most nights and weekends. All the data captured by NCC had to be manually entered into a back-end CRM. It is estimated this process took three NCC staff two months taking about 80% of the

time of those involved.

The LEP implemented validation checks to ensure potential suppliers were legitimate. LEP staff from accounting, grant schemes and audit undertook the background checks.

There was a prioritisation for PPE suppliers within the LEP area, those who supplied this market and companies who had repurposed to either make or distribute PPE.

There was a need to register only legitimate care homes on the system to avoid any third-party sellers infiltrating and buying/reselling these products elsewhere for unethically high prices.

In the early days there were some issues with access to the system as there was a period at the start of the pandemic when Microsoft was experiencing severe service issues. This meant that for a time, the system was sending out user activation emails which could be delayed by up to 10 hours and this had a big impact onboarding.

Suffolk joined the system in July 2020. Once conventional routes in the PPE supply chain were established again during summer 2020, the system became redundant almost overnight.

3. Impact

Actual tangible impact is hard to establish as neither the LEP nor NCC had any role in the commercial transaction. The system did however track new registrations and website visits. It was decided on balance that the care homes did not need any more barriers to impede them as they already had to formally register for the system and there were potential GDPR implications in the direct collection of impact data.

The system started supporting care homes as early as 24th April 2020. A

major achievement. All care homes were emailed in a joint effort by the LEP and NCC to raise awareness of their PPE Supply Chain System. In the beginning 26 care homes registered having the choice to procure products from 215 verified PPE suppliers. By August 2020 there were around 900 users – the vast majority being care homes but some being individual carers who also required PPE. At that time there were 306 verified suppliers providing a total of 1,363 PPE products.

The project has been able to secure testimonials from 10 care homes who are confirmed purchases from suppliers on the system. In all cases feedback has been highly positive.

The team acknowledges that the lack of impact information makes it very difficult to evaluate the system, but it was always intended a quick-fix short term measure.

The system was built with future proofing in mind and could be easily repurposed should the need arise in another unforeseen emergency (for example - severe flooding). Essentially, the front end can link any registered party with the products or services of verified suppliers. There have been initial discussions about using the system for the Offshore Wind Sector. However, the team believe it might be hard to convince companies to list services on a closed portal outside of a crisis. This has not deterred them. They are continuing to come up with innovative ideas to utilise the system in future.

4. Lessons Learned

Working with a trusted supplier saved a great deal of time and energy.

The interaction between local and central government was a challenge with the team constantly having to predict questions the Civil Servants

might ask and regularly encountering additional requests. Both NCC and SCC overestimated the ability of care homes to undertake procurements of this nature. As it turned out, they had little procurement or financial awareness and often did not have budgets to buy PPE.

Opportunities for Government to order PPE from reputable companies were missed. There were several established companies in the region who had repurposed production lines to manufacture PPE. NCC was able to order 100,000 units from one local plastics company making plastic aprons. HMG was informed that the company had both the capability and capacity to produce these items, but the opportunity was never acknowledged or picked up. Uniserve in Suffolk repurposed to make face shields at the behest of Government which then failed to order anything from the company.

Numerous local companies had standards which were close to those required and who were ready to manufacture PPE, and whilst the Government had the authority to commission this activity it was never clear around its policy in relation to this.

A simpler solution would have been to procure these products centrally, stockpile them and distribute to care homes as and when required. The infrastructure was already in place at the start of the pandemic with the Government having supply drops and the capacity to store large amounts of PPE. The initial cost could have been underwritten by the LEP, NCC or SCC and could have been recouped from care homes at a later date.



Business Support





The Food Supply Chain

The Challenge

- When the pandemic struck, and lockdown was enforced, the entire hospitality industry closed down overnight
- Food producers across the region had warehouses full of perishable food

1. Purpose

The LEP asked Flavours Connexion, the organisers of Local Flavours – the UK's largest food and drink trade show, held in East Anglia – to try and help rebuild the supply chain. The smaller wholesalers were still able to supply farm shops and small delicatessens who were remaining open. But the scale of the challenge relating to large suppliers was huge – one company in Fakenham had

£11m of food in a warehouse which was meant to go to cruise liners.

Some supermarkets stepped in – Morrison's, Tesco and East of England Coop, who are good with local producers. Some food went into freezer stores. But fresh food was a big problem – and production didn't stop – you can't stop chickens laying eggs.

2. Delivery

Flavours Connexion have a database of thousands of buyers and 800 producers. They got in touch with the producers to see if they were struggling – and as they have good relationships with many, they could talk openly about what was needed.

Then they got in touch with the thousands of buyers to see who needed what. Some things were in high demand, for example, buyers took all the yeast they could get because of the shortages of Flour.

Over the course of the next few months, Flavours would regularly contact producers and suppliers, mainly via telesales or email and social media, and become the conduit between the two – making connections where there was a match. It was a buyer's market, and there was little margin in it for wholesalers, waste was significantly reduced.

There were five FTE working on it in the first few weeks and it was a 24/7 operation.

3. Impact

There are no impact figures available due to the urgency of the response. But the team regularly reached out to over 800 producers and thousands of buyers to reconnect the supply chain. The Local Flavours website was used as a host site where all available produce was listed.

4. Lessons Learned

The response had to happen so quickly that it wasn't all successful and it wasn't all perfect. But the team knew the industry very well and had strong connections – so it was a very good decision to engage with an expert outside of the LEP.

There was an excellent community feel about the intervention. The newsletter was very useful and actually could have gone out daily. But it was the phone calls that made the difference because they generated an instant response.

There wasn't much resource for the team to work with, and on reflection – with more money they could have done a lot more to extend reach and develop a more sophisticated response.

The Business Support Script (BSS)

The Challenge

- Business people were confused and distressed - not knowing where to turn
- Practitioners facing extremely high volumes of enquires that needed urgent responses
- Inconsistent messaging from HMG, hourly announcements often without supporting details
- Front line business support staff needing information, struggling to keep up
- Danger of inconsistent and incorrect interpretations Local council officers inexperienced in working with businesses

	March - May	June - July	August - October	November - January
Person Hours/ Days	3 Hours Per Day 5 Days Per Week	2 Hours Per Day 2 Days Per Week	2 Hours Per Day 1 Days Per Week	2 Hours Per Day 4/5 Days Per Week
Total Hours	15	4	2	15
Frequency of Updates	Daily Updates*	Twice weekly Updates	Weekly Updates	(Almost) Daily Updates*

*Weekend updates were undertaken when necessary

ensure everyone in the network had the latest information and a reassurance that the associated advice was accurate.

Outside of Economic Development departments, connecting with business was not something many District Council or Local Authority personnel had experience of. A script would provide these officers with 'bullets to fire' when businesses made Covid-19 specific enquiries.

2. Delivery

Development of the BSS was initially extremely challenging, although it became easier once a robust template had been created, tested, and refined.

Updating the BSS was initially a daily task undertaken by a colleague in the LEPs paused CNTC programme. It later became the responsibility of the LEP's Head of Communications.

As of September 2nd 2021, there have been 131 versions of the BSS. The distribution list was initially 44 and has risen to 65, with more local partners hearing about the success of the BSS and asking to be added to the list. All information is presented in an easy-to-follow single hyperlinked PDF document.

Frequency of BSS Updates

From the start of the pandemic and during Winter 2020, updates were daily. As the Governments' and local support schemes stabilised the need for regular updates subsided and has remained lower throughout the majority of 2021.

3. Impact

The BSS has given the LEP team and partner personnel the tools to deal with Covid-19 related enquiries effectively and quickly.

LEP information management skills have been developed, regional networks expanded, and partners understanding of commercial structures and issues improved.

The LEP demonstrated its ability to react to a developing situation, lead and keep up the momentum throughout. This development process has enabled the LEP team and others to broaden their networks and engage regularly with organisations they would not normally have been in frequent contact with. This has positioned the LEP as a go to place up for up-to-date information in the local business support ecosystem. A similar script and method has since been developed for the partnership response regarding EU-Exit.



1. Purpose

The business support script was an interactive PDF document which enabled supply side organisations to provide businesses with up to date, accurate information on how they can access support and respond to the impact of Covid-19.

At the start of the pandemic, businesses were struggling to understand what support was available to them. They were overwhelmed with the amount of information and the vocabulary of the supply side. The LEP and Growth Hub were being bombarded with enquiries from business owners and did not always have the answers to their questions. With daily HMG announcements there was a constant need to keep pace and maintain up-to-date and relevant information.

The Business Support Script (BSS) was developed to help ensure LEP personnel and partners had as many answers as possible to the questions businesses and individuals were posing. A joined-up approach would

4. Lessons Learned

- Learning around business needs and achievability of improved speed of response
- In the past the LEP had no need to proactively reach out to many of the organisations involved in the creation of the BSS and have gained as a result
- The power of multi-disciplinary groups is now better understood
- The LEP team value the benefits of building an audience for other communications now and in the future.
- The LEP is now better positioned to cascade information across the region quickly and efficiently, having learned lessons in relation to the speedy development of content and established a system for dissemination throughout the partnership/ business support ecosystem

The Fisheries Project

The Challenge

- The Fishing sector immediately lost business as restaurants and other customers closed.
- Covid impacted all fishing businesses in a variety of different ways
- Supermarkets stopped stocking fresh fish
- Local fishmongers remained open, but were subject to strict measures e.g. social distancing and additional food hygiene requirements
- The hospitality industry closed completely
- Fish wholesalers were particularly hard hit
- Whilst larger shellfish fleets had better access to chilled storage facilities, the second wave of lockdowns across the EU and far-east reduced orders overnight by an estimated 80%
- The closure of Lowestoft market caused issues for a lot of fishers in the region
- Direct delivery to consumers was attempted but was not viable for most
- Fishing is a small sector and not very well connected to public support processes in the region

Covid-19 impacted all fishing businesses in a variety of different ways, primarily through lost business due to the hospitality industry closing and supermarkets which stopped stocking fresh fish. Some local fishmongers remained open but were subject to strict measures e.g. social distancing and additional food hygiene requirements. At a local level, the closure of Lowestoft

market caused issues for a lot of fishers in the region. Whilst larger shellfish fleets had better access to chilled storage facilities, the second wave of lockdowns across the EU and far-east reduced orders overnight by an estimated 80%.

1. Purpose

The fisheries project was the provision of private sector expertise via a consultant to small businesses in the fisheries sector across Norfolk and Suffolk.

New Anglia's fishing industry is small scale, fragmented, competitive and in the most part isolated and not well connected to the public support. North Norfolk fisheries operate on a predominantly seasonal basis. South Norfolk and Suffolk has a number of small 'day boats' targeting a variety of fish types. The LEP area also has an aquaculture sector largely concentrating on fishing for mussels with a primary export market to the EU.

The Fisheries Network in New Anglia consists of 65 businesses and organisations of a variety of sizes. Fishing in the area is mainly undertaken by small independent traders, although there are a few larger companies. There are around 40 associations and wholesale organisations across the area. Local fishers sell mainly directly to restaurants and with the onset of the first Lockdown, they were immediately left without customers and therefore without income. The sector needed specialist assistance.

2. Delivery

The LEP team had had virtually no contact with the sector and as everything happened very quickly there was an urgent need to exploit



local knowledge and research options.

Using existing network contacts in Local Authorities in both Norfolk and Suffolk the LEP team convened both County Councils and the relevant districts.

The LEP decided that the quickest and most efficient way to marshal knowledgeable support would be to offer a modest amount of funding to trigger more financial contributions from interested parties such as the County Councils. This worked and enough resources were assembled to enable Suffolk County Council to employ an experienced advisor.

It was a simple LEP decision to provide a small amount of funding (£2k) as a contribution to the cost of appointing a consultant who could offer a range of help: answer enquiries, network and provide advice wherever it was needed. Enquiries were coming in via local authorities and the Growth Hub and the LEP team also embarked on a short promotional campaign to support the action.

The advisor's contract was put in place for around four months with Local Authorities also contributing toward the cost. The district helped to identify and contract with the successful consultant, who was well-

known in the sector and had highly relevant experience.

The team also found the website Call4Fish, an online web portal for local suppliers of fresh fish. It had been originally developed in Cornwall to help local fisherman connect to retail customers. The site contains a nationwide directory including 14 Suffolk and 10 Norfolk based Businesses who were introduced to the website and then able to use it to conduct B2C business.

The region was lucky in terms of having the Renaissance of the East Anglian Fisheries (REAF), a network managed by East Suffolk Council, with a long-term strategy to maximise the opportunities presented to the local industry by EU-Exit championed by Peter Aldous MP and Paul Lines. Work began in 2018 and is partnership between fishery sector, Local Authorities New Anglia LEP with funding from EMFF through the Marine Management Organisation.

A report illustrating the progress made on network development in New Anglia's fishing industry was produced by East Suffolk Council. This linked to the recommendations made in a REAF report published in 2019.

The interest of Local Authorities and the LEP was welcomed by the industry.

3. Impact

This response had both short term and long-term impacts. In the short term some fishers were connected to potential customers and doorstep deliveries were facilitated. In the long term the interaction resulting from Covid-19 has put marine science and aquaculture on the LEP agenda, and it is now included more in LEP thinking and actions. There is also more widespread recognition

that fishing is a fragile sector with a particular market structure and that many businesses involve individuals who are working alone – which brings particular challenges.

4. Lessons Learned

- The LEP team learned the value of networking to identify key players and networks and generate solutions
- The research conducted improved understanding within the sector and the value of Call4Fish
- A small amount of LEP funding was a catalyst to further contributions of resources
- Using an expert advisor was popular in the sector

The Fisheries Project demonstrated how a small amount of public investment can trigger a high-quality intervention - drawing on sector expertise and existing sector connections within broad terms of reference that allowed for private sector flexibilities in delivery.

