

**Minutes of a Meeting of the External  
Partnerships Select Committee held at  
Surrey Heath House on 2 March 2021**

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- + Cllr Robin Perry (Chairman)  
+ Cllr Morgan Rise (Vice Chairman)
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|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| + Cllr Dan Adams        | + Cllr Shaun Garrett     |
| + Cllr Richard Brooks   | + Cllr Emma-Jane McGrath |
| - Cllr Vivienne Chapman | - Cllr Pat Tedder        |
| + Cllr Sarah Jane Croke | - Cllr Helen Whitcroft   |
| + Cllr Paul Deach       | + Cllr Kristian Wrenn    |
| + Cllr Tim FitzGerald   |                          |
- + Present  
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Rodney Bates (in place of Cllr Pat Tedder)

Members in Attendance: Cllr Valerie White, Cllr David Mansfield, Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam and Cllr Victoria Wheeler

Officers Present: Jayne Boitout, Louise Livingston, Damian Roberts and Ben Sword

**16/EP Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2021 were confirmed by the Committee to be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

**17/EP Enterprise M3 Growth Hub: Local Enterprise Partnership**

Rob Dunford, Director of Business Delivery, gave a presentation in respect of the work of Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the economic impact on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Area, and EM3's recovery plans.

The Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was a public/private partnership which had been set up to support and sustain economic growth within the M3 corridor. Since 2014, the M3 LEP has acted as a facilitator to promote economic growth and bring businesses and local government closer together. The LEP spends, secures and supports various streams of funding to help start-up businesses and to promote business and enterprise in the area. The partnership has also emerged as an advocate and champion of the Local Area.

The social distancing measures which were imposed as a result of the pandemic had notable consequences for the economic state of the LEP area. It was outlined by the end of October 2020 7% of employees resident within the EM3 area had been furloughed, which was in line with the other nearby LEP areas. In addition the LEP area now suffered with a 4% unemployment rate. However the EM3 LEP area had a Universal Claimant Rate of 5.2% which was notably below the national level of 6.3%. In particular it was highlighted that there were 7265 16-24 year olds as being out of work with a youth unemployment rate of 4.8%.

The downturn in aviation had meant a significant negative impact on the LEP area with the area being bookended by Southampton and Heathrow Airports. Overall passenger numbers were down by 60% and passenger level were only at 3% of normal levels during the national lockdowns. In addition a study by KMPG had identified Bracknell and Basingstoke as being in the top 10 Town Centres which were most vulnerable to the long-term effects of the pandemic. Compared to the last economic recession, the economic pandemic had brought about notable negative impacts on the area's EM3's higher innovation industries, such as advanced manufacturing and aviation. In addition significant job losses had been made by significant employers in the EM3 area such as McClaren and Stannah Stair lifts.

EM3 had funded a £4.5 million programme to deploy gigabit-capable fibre along an initial route between Guildford and Basingstoke, and promised to create more than 4250 jobs in the digital and creative sectors. Furthermore £2.2 million had been invested to help boost the digital infrastructure for 7,000 learners across six further education colleges in the Enterprise M3 area. This aimed particularly at upgrading colleges' digital assets and aimed to help equip young people for employment of the digital industries of the future.

EM3 were prepared for significant challenges as a result of Brexit. Whilst the amount of enquiries from businesses in respect of Brexit-related enquiries were not as high as expected, there was evidence that these enquiries were building, and that there was significant stockpiling and that the port of Dover was working at only 60% capacity. There was evidence that country of origin issues and the fulfilment of supply chains were the biggest issues resulting from Brexit which companies in the LEP area were facing. In addition there were new protocols which needed following in respect of the loading of trucks and the completion of documentation.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- There was an opportunity for the Council to harness greater support from EM3 in respect of its 5G Town Centre Project. It was emphasised to the Committee that the project was in line with the LEP's aim to facilitate a faster roll out of 5G throughout the area.
- The EM3's Kickstart scheme aimed to give unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds new opportunities and aspirations by providing funding to employers to create new six-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. In addition EM3 were running a scheme with those who had lost their jobs at Heathrow Airport in order to adapt their skills to the film and TV industry.
- Enterprise M3 only employed 30 members of staff and relied on partnership working in order to tackle wider initiatives and realise wider goals.
- Despite EM3 figures which suggested that Runnymede, Spelthorne, Test Valley, Winchester and Basingstoke and Deane had the highest indices of deprivation in the LEP area, it was highlighted by Members that areas in Surrey Heath such as Old Dean had high levels of deprivation especially in the domain of Education and Skills.

- EM3 had the potential to assist the Council in promoting greener lifestyles and a greener economy. It was noted that EM3 had a Clean Growth Specialist who could work with the Council's Economic Development Team to achieve a carbon net zero economy.
- Members had found that a digital divide existed within Surrey Heath with some businesses benefitting from significantly higher internet bandwidths than others. There was potential for the EM3 to potentially facilitate a conversation with internet providers around the issue.

The Committee thanked Rob Dunford for attending and providing an informative presentation.

## **18/EP Camberley Job Club**

The Committee received a presentation from Janet Ward in respect of the work and services provided by Camberley Job Club

Camberley Job Club had the goal of helping the long and short term unemployed back to work. The Job Club aimed to achieve this by rebuilding clients' confidence and identifying market relevant skills to employers. The Job Club worked with clients to develop their CVs, covering letters and interview technique as well as by providing support to organise job searches and give appraisals of client's career direction. During the 2020 calendar year the Job Club saw 152 clients, of which 21 clients gained some form of work and 29 which were referred onto other partners.

The Job Club worked with school leavers to over 65s to find paid employment, as well as part-time and voluntary work. Moreover clients included those from a range of ethnicities and many whom English wasn't their first language.

After 5 weeks of working with the Job Club, clients attended a 6 week review, with 2 Job Club advisors; and worked together to set 3 clear objectives. After 11 weeks of engaging with the Job Club, advisers met with the clients to assess progress towards their 3 set objectives and consideration of other opportunities towards their job search. In addition to these job search-focused services, the Job Club also provided workshops assisted by partners, on Debt management benefits and universal credit; and wellbeing and health and nutrition.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- The Job Club encouraged all its clients to make best use of online jobsites and to engage with recruitment agencies. The organisation also encouraged its clients to bolster their CVs with volunteering placements; and had previously partnered with Frimley Park Hospital to place volunteers.
- The Job Club was funded to the sum of £16,000 a year by the Council, whom the organisation received the majority of its funding from. It was opined that this equated to approximately £105 per client seen, which was high in comparison to other organisations which also received a Council revenue grant. On the other hand it was important to temper expectations as the Job Club's services were provided by one paid administrator and 12 volunteers.

- On an average day, pre-pandemic, the Job-Club saw between 18-20 clients at its in person service at High Cross Church.
- Many of the Job Club's clients were referred via Job Centre Plus or had heard about the service via the Job Club's regular newsletter.
- The demand for the Job Club's services were going to get progressively higher as the economic downturn continued and it was important that the Job Club had a certain amount of resilience in its model to cope with the increased demand.

The Committee thanked Janet for her insightful presentation.

## **19/EP Basingstoke Canal Authority**

The committee received a presentation from James Taylor, Strategic Manager, in relation to the work of the Basingstoke Canal Authority.

The Basingstoke Canal Authority (BCA) managed and maintained the 32 milelong canal which served Mytchett, Deepcut, and Frimley and Camberley (4.5km of canal was within the borough), and historically linked Basingstoke Markets to the London Docks. The canal was a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) and formed a significant part of the local blue/green infrastructure of the borough, providing recreational benefits to residents such as walking, cycling and kayaking.

The BCA undertook the day to day management of the canal and worked alongside The Basingstoke Canal Society to enable projects on the canal, ranging from new moorings and paths to events and boat rallies.

The Canal Authority undertook the day to day management of the canal, which promoted safe recreation along the canal, whilst balancing this with the necessary detailed inspections, conservation and maintenance programmes. This work was undertaken in front of the backdrop of the need to maintain the canal's unique character which was reflected in the Canal's status as a planning conservation area and a SSSI. Furthermore the Canal acted as part of the local drainage system which meant the Canal Authority had to carefully monitor water levels and pass on water to other local waterways during the winter months.

As a result of the pandemic's social distancing restrictions, many of the income generation activities which the Canal Authority undertook had been cancelled, resulting in a severe lack of income for the authority in comparison to previous years. The authority alone loss an estimated £25,000 by the cancellation of its Santa Cruise event; and the overall loss of income meant the authority would be drawing £83,000 for its reserves in the next financial year. Currently two-thirds of the Canal Authority's budget came from local authority funding, whilst a third came from self-generated means.

Looking forward it was appreciated that Local Authority budgets would be stretched and as a result the Authority were looking at initiatives to become more financially sustainable. This included carefully thought out charging of visitor fees and the widening of the Authority's visitor offering such as increased café and camping facilities. This included the investment in a new facilities block on the canal's campsite. In addition there was also an appetite to explore whether there

was an opportunity to fund improvements along the towpaths with developer contributions.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Following the drawing on reserves for the coming year to the sum of £83,000, there was an acknowledged need for the Canal Authority to replenish its reserves. It was requested that the Council does not cut the organisation's revenue grant of £10,000 a year and that the Canal Authority would entertain a conversation with the Council around the finance of towpath maintenance projects. Moreover, there was general enthusiasm from the Committee to increase the Council's support to the organisation.
- If the Council were to provide an increased revenue grant, the additional funds would be put towards path repairs which would benefit Surrey Heath residents.
- The Canal Authority had recently replaced Lower gates at lock 28 and upper gates at lock 27 near Deepcut and positive works to replace the steps from the Canal onto Deepcut Bridge Road were almost finished. This was in addition to frequent work which was needed to be undertaken on the Towpaths within Surrey Heath as a result of holes being created by dogs jumping in and exiting the canal.
- Whilst it was acknowledged there was some necessity for the Canal Authority to consider the introduction of some charges such as a small parking charge at the Canal's Visitor Centre, this could in turn exacerbate already difficult parking issues in Mytchett.
- The canal authority's cash reserves were just above a comfortable level.
- The Canal Authority desired to install electric vehicle charging points at its visitor centre and already had a charging point in use for its electronic maintenance vehicles. However there were issues in respect of electricity supply which made installation of charging points for the general public difficult.

The Committee thanked James Taylor for his informative presentation.

## **20/EP Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership**

The Committee received a presentation from Steve Bailey on the work of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership was a partnership project between Hampshire County Council, other local authorities and community organisations and worked to improve and maintain the River Blackwater and the many open green spaces alongside. The partnership aimed to maximise the valley's potential for outdoor recreation, landscape, wildlife and healthy living by involving and co-ordinating the work of local authorities, communities and landowners; and undertaking vital maintenance work and conservation work.

The Partnership looked after a total 62km worth of paths including a 37km stretch along the Blackwater Valley. This included vital flood mitigation work, path repair and maintenance, and conservation work. During the last year, despite the Covid-19 restrictions, this included 5,300 volunteer hours over 123 projects, the sowing

of 10.5KG of wildflower seeds and the logging and recording of over 200 species as part of conservation work. Essential footpath repairs and path maintenance continued to tackle the heavy increase in path users. For example the Frimley Hatches nature reserve part of the Blackwater Valley had experienced a 40% rise in visits in comparison to previous years. This was part of a steady 8% increase in Blackwater Valley path users since 2009.

The Partnership worked with the Council on maintaining and the enhancing of its greenspaces. The Partnership worked alongside the Council to maintain paths, and mow grass at sites including Diamond Ridge Woods, St Catherines Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), Blackwater Park and Turf Hill Park. Furthermore the Partnership worked together with the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust to collaborate with organisations such as the Surrey Heath Tree Wardens to promote conservation work. This included work such as the installation of bat boxes at sites such as Windlesham Field of Remembrance and Warren Wood.

The Partnership was in relatively good financial health and was due to post a slight budget surplus for this financial year. A similar very small surplus was also predicted for the next financial year.

Following Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- In comparison to the Basingstoke Canal Authority the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership did not run large-scale income generating events. Instead the partnership worked with third-parties to help run events on the Partnership's SANGs. This included a contract with a housing developer for the provision of events on a local SANG in Hart, which credited the partnership with £10,000-£15,000 a year.
- The Council's Outside Body representatives on the Partnership were always positive about the organisation; and felt that the Partnership was deserving of more local authority support.

The Committee thanked Steve Bailey for attending and his detailed presentation.

Chairman