



NORWICH City Council

Committee Name: Scrutiny
Committee Date: 17/03/2022

Report Title: A sustainable, inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19

Portfolio: Councillor Waters, Leader of the council

Report from: Executive director of community services

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

For the Scrutiny Committee to evaluate how the Council is supporting a sustainable, inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19

Recommendation:

To determine any recommendations Scrutiny may wish to make to Cabinet.

Policy Framework

The Council has three corporate priorities, which are:

- People living well
- Great neighborhoods, housing and environments
- Inclusive economy

This report meets the Inclusive economy corporate priority.

This report helps to meet Equality, Diversity and Inclusion adopted policy of the Council.

This report helps to meet Supporting the most vulnerable objective of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

Report Details:

Background

In setting its work programme, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to include an item on how the Council was supporting a sustainable, inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19.

At its meeting on 3 February 2022, members of the Committee requested that the report focused on two areas, the work of the Good Economy Commission and the cost of living crisis (including the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme).

Norwich Good Economy Commission (NGEC):

Scope:

1. The NGEC was founded in 2020 as a two-year project to create a forum for our community to come together and address some of the problems in the city's economy. It aimed to generate a space for sustainable, innovative projects, backed by consistent research and evidence, with a mission to "explore how we can achieve an inclusive and sustainable economy that enriches all of our lives". It ends in June 2022.
2. Partners involved in the Commission are:
 - Norwich City College
 - UEA
 - Norfolk Chamber of Commerce
 - Norwich Business Improvement District
 - Norwich University of the Arts
 - Norwich Opportunity Area
 - New Anglia LEP
 - Norfolk County Council
 - Your Own Place – representative of Social Enterprises
 - Future Projects – representative of voluntary sectors
 - Norfolk Community Foundation
 - Norwich City Council

3. The NGEC has been successful in securing funding for its work:

Norfolk Strategic Fund:	£ 90,000
Innovative Projects Fund (managed by New Anglia LEP)	£ 50,000
UEA	£ 10,000
Norwich City Council	£ 10,000
Total:	£160,000

4. This funding has been used on:

Grants for research and pilot projects:	£ 95,000
Staff costs:	£ 50,000
'Diverse voices' engagement and comms:	£ 15,000
Total:	£160,000

5. In addition, NGECC has secured match-funding to extend some projects under the Digital Inclusion and Skills workstreams (see below).
6. NGECC is a member of the City Vision Partnership, playing a key role in helping shape the city on its journey to achieving the 2040 City Vision. In particular, its work contributes to the Fair City theme, which commits to Norwich being a place where the health, wellbeing and life chances of all our citizens will be improved – where barriers to achievement are removed and a high standard of living will be enjoyed by everyone; and the Dynamic City theme which commits to Norwich being a place where entrepreneurs, social enterprises, national and global companies choose to provide good jobs, prosperity and success by 2040.

Progress to Date:

7. Since its inception, NGECC has held quarterly meetings, at which commissioners receive progress updates from Norwich City Council officers (as the secretariat) and make decisions on next steps.
8. The commission established a number of key principles to guide the development of its approach and assess the projects it developed:
 - **Impact** – was there the opportunity to provide significant benefit to Norwich residents, businesses, or other organisations? Would this impact be targeted at those most excluded from current economic benefits, based on local data and evidence of what works?
 - **Gap** – Was there a clear gap or role that the NGECC could play which would complement or support what was already going on? Could we build on assets within communities and the wider system to join up and add value for the longer term?
 - **Innovation** – Was there scope to innovate and test out new approaches? Could we look differently at issues and take a broad perspective on participation in the economy that values a range of assets and contributions?
 - **Diverse voices** – Was it informed by a range of views or perspectives, including those which are often under-represented? How could we work with a range of communities and perspectives to understand, build on and respond to local strengths and opportunities?
 - **Learning** – Would it provide learning that can inform wider practice or develop our understanding of what makes a good economy? How could we learn from and build on evidence from other initiatives within Norfolk and more widely?
9. Commissioners decided that the work of NGECC should focus on several workstreams, where there was particular interest or opportunity for progress in Norwich. These are:
 - a) **Digital Inclusion** – NGECC worked with partners to identify five challenge areas on digital inclusion in Norwich, recognising that there is already a lot of good work ongoing in the area. We have funded five community projects which are due to finish by end of March 2022. Details of the funded projects are published on the NGECC website:

[Digital Inclusion and Innovation — Norwich Good Economy Commission](#)

All projects applied for funding to offer a solution to one of the following five key challenge areas:

1. How can social housing providers work collaboratively to address digital inclusion?
2. What are the future digital skills? What skills will be essential in the next 5 years? How can we effectively upskill residents?
3. How can we support people who have multiple barriers to going online?
4. What innovative solutions can be found if the private and public sector work together to tackle digital inequality?
5. What new solutions can be found to address the infrastructural issues in accessing online (data, broadband and tech)?

NGEC has also convened a workshop for social housing providers around the theme of digital inclusion, which brought partners together who wouldn't normally share information and learning on the topic. A key theme that emerged from this was the need for better connectivity for people, particularly those in temporary situations or on very low to no income. From this we trialed an Emergency Data Bank in summer to autumn 2021. The findings from this are also available at [Digital Inclusion and Innovation — Norwich Good Economy Commission](#). We have managed to continue this work until end March 2022 through funding from the Household Support Fund.

- b) **Skills** – Commissioners used data and local knowledge to choose a place-based approach to explore the issue of adult community skills in Mile Cross. We worked with local partners active in the area to understand the local needs. From this we created a funding stream and worked with a local partner to provide an information point service. We have funded four community projects which have provided learning opportunities for residents and have been working with the Phoenix Centre as our information point partner (with good support from other local organisations). We have received £25,000 match funding from NCIL to extend the programme into the financial year 2022/23, which will include more information sharing, more activities for residents and some focused work around Good Jobs in the ward (in partnership with UEA). More information can be found here: [Skills — Norwich Good Economy Commission](#)
- c) **Good Jobs** – This workstream has undertaken active research to determine what makes a good experience for frontline workers. Its findings reaffirmed that employee satisfaction and wellbeing are critical considerations in creating high quality jobs. In a good economy, workers feel valued and have access to resources for professional development. Findings have been used to develop accessible and [engaging materials](#) for use with employers and communities with key points summarised in 'the four boosts':

 1. Let me connect
 2. Care about me and my life

3. Have my back
4. Make me part of the conversation

Next steps include:

- Mile Cross skills funding from April – Dec 2022 (as mentioned above). Scoping and engagement in Mile Cross on the four boosts. Investigating the means to manage well for performance, wellbeing, recruitment and retention. Further work will be determined by initial community response.
- Working with the Norwich Living Wage Place Action Group on ways to collaborate and raise awareness with Norwich employers to encourage, inspire and support employers in Norwich to offer good jobs and the real Living Wage.

- d) **Anchor Institutions** – This term is used to refer to ‘institutions who have an important presence in place (such as large-scale employers) and are tied to a particular place by their mission, history, physical assets, or local relationships’ ([CLES](#), the national organisation for local economies). Service areas such as Procurement and HR in some NGECC partners have been working on related concepts around social value and apprenticeships for some time. Building on this, NGECC has convened a range of anchor institutions across the city to discuss inclusive economy themes, including providing some external facilitation and training from CLES at a seminar on 2nd March attended by Norfolk & Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group, UEA, Norfolk County Council and Norwich City Council.
- e) **Diverse Voices** – This workstream has engaged with members of our community whose voices are seldom heard in discussions about the Norwich economy. A new experimental board game, ‘The New Horizon Experiment’, was developed by Norwich University of the Arts as a flexible tool to help encourage these conversations. Community groups that have played the game include New Routes, Voluntary Norfolk, Age Concern, Norfolk LGBT Project, Mind the Gap, Bridge Plus, The Red Cross and Emmaus. The game has proven useful in encouraging and supporting residents to express their ideas and feelings on Norwich’s economy, what is important to them and how this links to what already exists in the city. Emerging themes from these sessions include:
- a desire to make communities work,
 - prioritisation of mental health needs,
 - improving independence through skills acquisition and
 - reducing and recycling to protect the environment.

To encourage contribution and involvement from sometimes underrepresented members of the community, an open doors exhibition was held at The Forum from 28th February to 5th March. This showcased a gathering of stories, ideas and artwork from Norwich residents, drawn from the engagement under this workstream, describing life, aspirations, hopes and barriers in Norwich. It also provided interactive opportunities to gather more views. NGECC will reflect the views and ideas shared through this workstream in its final

products.

- f) **Social Enterprises** – NGEC identified the advancement of the Social Enterprise sector as important for Norwich and commissioned Your Own Place to undertake research to better understand the challenges it faces and how to address them. This included a report [mapping social enterprise in Norwich](#). The research and report were used to form a successful [application](#) to Social Enterprise UK, giving Norwich the status of a Social Enterprise Place. To support this work and its overarching aim to “*to create the eco-system in Norwich for a better way of doing business that benefits all*”, an action plan will be taken forward by [FUSE](#), a Norwich Community Interest Company, focusing on the following aims that formed part of the application:
- a. Improve the branding and awareness of social enterprises across sectors and the community.
 - b. Improve the support (and access to support) available to social enterprises.
 - c. Improve the access to the right finance options for social enterprise.
 - d. Improve people's knowledge of social enterprise both as a career start-up option and skills development.
- g) **Research and Seminars** – This workstream is focused on raising awareness and introducing new ideas and concepts to conversations about the local economy. NGEC has awarded five grants of £3,000 each to community groups to research topics relevant to a good economy for Norwich:
- Women's key role in the Norwich economy – past experience and future possibilities.
 - Family carers and the caring economy.
 - Learning from the start-ups – This project is capturing information on the experience of small start-up businesses and the challenges faced by this important and innovative sector.
 - Helping SMEs understand their carbon footprint, accelerating a greener economy in Norwich.
 - Sustainable skills project – This project is identifying the types of disconnect that exist in skills support and the local jobs market. The research activities should provide insight into why some local vacancies are not being filled and the types of support needed to help people into these jobs.

All grant recipients are on track to provide final reports by end-March 2022, to be published on the NGEC website.

In addition, GEC has provided online seminars, including:

- [Green Jobs for Norwich](#) – a participatory event. The purpose of this event was to start a wider conversation about the development of green jobs in Norwich. It was arranged in partnership with the Norwich hub of Green New Deal UK, a campaigning organisation which has recently undertaken research on the potential of green jobs in the UK.

- Anchored in Norwich – the role of big organisations in a good city economy. The purpose of this event was to share how anchor institutions were being used to create social and economic value in localities such as Preston and Wigan, show what work was already being done in this area at Norwich City Council, and gauge interest in establishing or exploring an anchor institutions network across the city. It was arranged by the Norwich Good Economy Commission Norwich, with speakers from the Centre for Local Economic Strategy, Wigan Council and Norwich City Council.
- New opportunities in funding and finance - What is out there and how to get it. This seminar was presented by Graham Philip, Head of Funding at Norfolk County Council. Graham advised of trends he'd noticed in how grants and other funds were being awarded, what funders were looking for in applications and then opened it up to speak to the audience to suggest specific funding opportunities for their projects. Slides used in this presentation have not yet been received but will be published as soon as possible.
- The Circular Economy – Looking at how we can maximise value in the economy by maintaining, reusing, refurbishing and recycling.
- The Gendered Economy – Investigating the economic impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on women.
- What is Progress and how can we measure it? – Hosted by Centre for Thriving Places, focusing on measuring what is important to our economy so that we can strive to achieve the right things.

Next Steps:

10. The commission is now focussed on drawing together its learning in order to develop and publish final products by June 2022, at which point the commission ends.
11. Commissioners will attend a workshop in late March to receive updates from the workstreams and to contribute views on key recommendations and make commitments for the final NGEC report, including ideas for continuing momentum on inclusive economy work beyond the commission's lifetime.
12. In addition, the NGEC Chair, Catherine Waddams, will provide an update to the City Vision Partnership Board in late March, in order to gather additional input to inform the report.
13. The secretariat will draft the final NGEC report and associated communications plans for agreement by commissioners.
14. The final report will include findings from all workstreams and make recommendations for further action. The intention is that the recommendations include recognition of where action is already being taken and possibly new commitments from some NGEC partners. Any remaining research outputs, evidence and case studies that have not yet been published will be added to the NGEC website alongside the final report, to provide a library of useful resources open to all.
15. As noted in the Corporate Plan 2022-26, Norwich City Council will respond to the NGEC report by January 2023.

Cost of living crisis and Council Tax Reduction Scheme:

Background:

16. As set out in the [medium term financial strategy corporate overview](#), pressures around joblessness and reduced incomes in Norwich are compounded by the rise in cost of living. Inflation, largely driven by energy bills and food prices, jumped from 2% to 3.2% between July and August 2021. This came at the same time Government announced it would cut the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit introduced at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.
17. The cumulative effect of benefit cuts and cost of living rises over the winter and into the spring means single out-of-work adults are set to be worse off by around £24 a week by April 2022, a significant fall of around 14 per cent to an already low income ([Resolution Foundation](#)).

Social inclusion and equality:

18. As set out in the [recent paper for scrutiny committee on social inclusion](#), Norwich City Council is committed to reducing inequality in all its aspects, including financial inequality. We recognise that financial inequality in Norwich is being exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis (see appendixes for links to external sources giving a sense of likely impacts on Norwich residents).
19. Officers are working to join up activity across the council on equality, to achieve more for Norwich residents. This includes recognising that equality goes far wider than the protected characteristics listed in equality legislation and that our work on reducing inequality (including financial inequality) is working towards the same aim. Initial scoping meetings took place in February and we are planning a workshop to agree the ambitions of the equalities work and initial areas of focus in April. The work of the group will be reflected in the council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and refreshed Reducing Inequality Action Plan, which will be published in September.

Council tax reduction scheme:

20. Since 1 April 2013, the council has operated a council tax reduction scheme (CTRS), which replaced council tax benefit. The CTRS helps people on low incomes and/or certain welfare benefits to pay their council tax bill. This provides support to those under the greatest financial pressure. Pensioners are protected by the government so any changes to CTRS only impacts working age claimants.
21. Having made various changes since 2013, the Council maintains the principle of a full support (100% discount) scheme. After discussions with the cross-party member working group, it was recommended that the council retains a 100% support scheme for the 2022/23 year which was approved at budget council on 22/2/22. [Cabinet report – 09.02.22](#)

Implications

Financial and Resources

There are no proposals in this report that would affect the council's finances or use of resources, as it is an update report for discussion rather than a proposal for decision.

Statutory Considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	Creating a fairer and more inclusive economy.
Health, Social and Economic Impact	Creating a fairer and more inclusive economy.
Crime and Disorder	N/A
Children and Adults Safeguarding	N/A
Environmental Impact	NGEC's work has included two seminars on environmental themes: green jobs; and the circular economy. These will be reflected in the commission's final products.

Risk Management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
Work on an inclusive economy reduces significantly when NGEC comes to an end in June.	NGEC impact is limited.	Materials will be available on the NGEC website, supported by communications to encourage their use. Discussions with the City Vision Partnership and NGEC commissioners in late March to explore support for ideas to keep the legacy going. Norwich City Council has already committed to respond to the NGEC report by January 2023.

Appendices:

None.

Areas for potential further research and reading

[Resolution Foundation](#)

[Bundle: Cost of living crisis – LGIU](#)

[Cost of living crisis: four in ten Britons expect their finances to get worse in next 12 months | YouGov](#)

['Rising cost of living in the UK'](#)

[Norfolk - Deprivation - District | Norwich | InstantAtlas Reports](#)

[\(norfolkinsight.org.uk\)](#)

[How the City Council is Supporting Residents through uncertain times](#)

[\(norwich.gov.uk\)](#)

[CLES What is an Anchor Institution?](#)

[Mapping social enterprise in Norwich](#)

[Social Enterprise Place application](#)

[The medium term financial strategy corporate overview](#)

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