

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Monday, 18 March 2024 at 5.00 pm.

PRESENT

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

L Darwin
L Dunn
V Jones
R Wearmouth

R Dodd
J Foster
G Sanderson

OFFICERS

J Cooper
I Hewitt
L Little

Strategic Programmes Manager
RAMP Programme Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer

Around 3 members of the press and public were present.

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bawn, Dickinson, Murphy, and Towns.

22 MINUTES

The minutes of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council held on Monday 12 February 2024, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been submitted in advance or were asked at the meeting.

24 PETITIONS

(a) Receive New Petitions – No petitions were received.

-

Ch.'s Initials.....

(b) Petitions Previously Received – None

(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered:

Island outside Blossom Park, Pegswood

In response to a request for an update from Councillor Towns, Members were advised that whilst there had been some delays to the works being undertaken due to inclement weather, the works had now been completed and the buildout removed with the necessary road marking and signage put in place.

25 RURAL BUSINESS FUNDING PROGRAMMES

I Hewitt, RAMP Programme Manager was in attendance to provide presentations on two new programmes to support businesses within rural areas. A copy of each of the presentations would be attached to the signed minutes of the meeting, uploaded to the Council's website and circulated to Members.

The Northumberland Small Business Service

The Programme which was available to small/micro businesses (those with 50 or less employees) had three clear objectives:

1. To increase business resilience and support rural businesses with growth potential and ambition to develop and implement business growth and resilience plans.
2. Develop a more diverse business base by creating new businesses and supporting rural businesses to grow, safeguarding and creating new employment opportunities, become more resilient and increasing productivity.
3. Stimulate investment in the growth of existing private sector rural businesses.

The four distinct strands of support available to individuals and small/ micro businesses across Northumberland were outlined and information provided on each as follows:

- Growth and Resilience Support – Businesses must have been trading for at least 12 months, be located within Northumberland, and operating within an eligible sector. They would have access to an evolving workshop programme and technical specialist support.
- Farming Advisory Service – This was being delivered on the Council's behalf by Northumberland National Park Authority and could support start up businesses and diversification but could not be used to purchase farm equipment. The support would be available to all farm enterprises that were located within rural Northumberland and were defined as a small or micro business and was within subsidy control thresholds.
- Enterprise and Start up Support – This would provide a dedicated service of tailored business support to help stimulate business growth and creation and would be focussed on providing individuals and businesses with the

Ch.'s Initials.....

skills and knowledge they required to set up, establish and run successful businesses. This support was available to all Northumberland residents aged 16+ at pre-start with a business idea and new businesses within 12 months of starting up and located within Northumberland.

- Grant Investment Fund – This was a £2m Capital Grant Fund to support small and micro businesses in the rural areas of Northumberland only with a clear growth plan to expand productive capacity or diversify into new markets or products. This could include capital investment in machinery, equipment, and business premises.

Information was provided on the eligibility for each strand of support and the grant application process. Details on how to register could be found at the following website: www.northumberlandsmbusiness.co.uk

In response to points raised by Members of the Committee, the following information was provided:

- Free advice was available to applicants and assistance could be provided to complete the application process.
- Work was being undertaken internally between departments to try to work to the same objective in relation to planning, climate change and business resilience. The team could also point businesses to other sources of funding.
- Whilst it was recognised that some businesses would not succeed, start up businesses needed the opportunity to get advice and support in order to have the best chance of success.
- Examples of where grants had made a difference were given as Marlish Waters where funding had assisted with the bottling and canning line, and also Silvermoor Farm haylage business which had developed a business supplying pet food from the farm which had expanded to an additional unit and now employed 16 people.
- The team could only help those businesses that they were aware of and tried to promote themselves through the website, talking to organisations and groups and therefore asked for the help of Members in promoting the service within their own areas.

Rural Asset Multiplier Pilot Programme (RAMP)

RAMP was £3.5m of investment part funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Fund, Rural England Prosperity Fund and North of Tyne Combined Authority and delivered by NCC in partnership with Northumberland National Park and Northumberland Coast AONB. The aim was to enhance the environment, grow the rural economy and improve services, opportunity and prosperity in rural communities by the provision of capital and revenue grants.

The different types of things which would be eligible for funding and those which could not be funded were outlined along with the process for applying and how applications were progressed. Information could be requested by emailing ruralassetmultiplierpilotprogramme@northumberland.gov.uk

Members were advised that the Rural Growth Team sat within the Economic Growth Team and it would be appreciated if Members could signpost people to the service.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Chair thanked the officer for the presentations which had been very informative.

26 **TRANSITION FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL LANDLINES**

J Cooper, Strategic Programmes Manager, was in attendance to provide information on the national initiative, led by the telecommunications industry, to transition from analogue to digital landlines. A copy of the presentation would be filed with the signed minutes and uploaded to the Council's website. The Committee were advised that the Council was not directly involved in this programme but had taken the decision to raise awareness with residents, businesses and community groups and signpost those with concerns to the relevant organisation for support. The Council did not have access to switchover plans and timescales for individual communications providers.

It was explained that the new digital phone lines would use broadband network for calls and would allow new features to be used. This would only impact residents who still had a landline and for the majority of users the switchover would be straightforward. Residents would be contacted by their own communication provider i.e. BT, Sky etc. However, there were approximately two million people across the UK who were more dependent on their landline and who may need additional support such as those living in an area with no mobile phone signal, vulnerable people with additional needs, users of healthcare alarms, elderly people and those who do not have a broadband service. Whilst those who were dependent on their landline should not be being switched at the current time, the Council had been made aware of numerous examples within Northumberland where this has happened. Residents who use their existing analogue lines for more than voice calls were also being encouraged to speak directly to their supplier.

Members were advised that whilst a corded analogue phone line would work in the event of a power cut that digital lines required additional equipment requiring a power supply to work and therefore would not be able to be used for any calls. Work was underway with the telecoms industry to try to mitigate the risks associated with this and some communication providers had committed to providing some equipment free of charge to certain more vulnerable or landline users, however there had been some examples within Northumberland of charges being incurred by residents in those specific categories.

Those who were identified for switchover would be notified at least 28 days before the switchover occurred and at any point during that period any concerns should be raised with the supplier. In some instances, a request could be made for the switchover to be delayed, however this could not be delayed beyond December 2025.

Concerns were expressed by Members regarding the vulnerability of broadband equipment being damaged and residents being left with no phone or broadband connections. In respect of residents who did not have broadband advice was provided that there were phones available which had a router in the phone itself and the residents would only need a new handset. However, it was stressed that

Ch.'s Initials.....

it was important for residents to raise any concerns with the supplier before being switched as once this had happened then it was not possible to switch back to the analogue service. It was highlighted that many people who had upgraded their service could have already been switched without realising.

Officers were thanked for their work and the efforts being made to raise awareness with residents.

27 LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

28 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was Monday 20 May 2024 at 6.00 pm and the venue was still to be confirmed.

29 URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....