



East of England All Party Parliamentary Group

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The East of England's Potential Response to 'The Great Recovery'

Non-Verbatim Minutes of Zoom Webinar, Thursday 7TH May, 14:00 to 15:00

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Peter Aldous MP introduced the first 'virtual' meeting of the East of England APPG, welcoming all attendees, including MPs and sponsors of the APPG, and thanking panellists from the FSB, CBI and EELGA for joining the meeting to provide their updates. He reminded attendees that May 7th was the date the current lockdown period ends however social distancing will clearly continue in some form for some time. Notwithstanding this, it is timely to start discussing '*the great recovery*' and in particular the East of England's potential contribution.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PANELLISTS

Seena Shah - Chair of East of England FSB, began by stating that this crisis has highlighted the amount of uncertainty that businesses have endured over the past couple of years; with Brexit not providing much clarity for its impact on small businesses, they have now been forced to adapt to the current environment. Business leaders are under extreme amounts of pressure, there is a lot of anxiety around finance security and the impact on their workforce, all of which highlights the huge mental impact this crisis is having. On the road to recovery for many small businesses there is a great deal of stress and fear when they think about the future because they don't know what is going to happen with the pandemic, what new work guidelines will be or what challenges lie ahead of them.

Seena said that having clarity and information as early on as possible is going to be really important to allow business leaders to look at the possibilities that are available to them and make the right decisions. She stated that it needs to be accepted that many of small businesses operate in very unique ways and there have been anomalies during this crisis - such as suppliers to the hospitality industry - that mean they don't fall in a specific category that's helps them gets bundles of support, despite being heavily impacted. Seena concluded by saying that a more flexible approach to giving support to different sectors of business will be needed; and this approach that should be reflected in the job retention scheme.

Jane Galvin - former East of England CBI Chair and Head of UK Corporate Banking for HSBC explained that HSBC is adapting to support customers, and especially businesses, through the crisis and they plan to continue that support in the recovery period. HSBC have lent over a billion pounds in CBILS loans and although things moved somewhat slowly in the beginning, their online portal has had a quarter of a million visits. HSBC are now picking up calls within 15 seconds on average and processing applications far more quickly as systems have become more robust.



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Jane gave the example of East of England business Arena Group, an international events company headquartered in Cambridgeshire, who secured a £4¾ million loan to provide colleagues and customers stability and support in the coming months. The business needed to prepare for the cancellation and postponement of major sporting events and raised an additional £9½million in shareholder funds to help a 'business as usual' approach as much as possible. HSBC has had to transform and speedily adjustment in a space of weeks to help companies such as Arena Group through the crisis; so far it has risen to the challenge.

Jane commented that she was pleased by the excellent collaboration so far between Government and the Finance Service Sector, who are working together to support businesses. She stated that companies are seeking clarity on how long the restrictions of COVID-19 will last and details regarding support available such as furlough schemes. Jane shared the figure that 75% of HSBC customers unsurprisingly say their cash has been impacted by covid-19 and recommended that pressure should not be put on businesses to repay loans early as it could damage and discourage investment and growth. She finished on the point that we have to encourage businesses to invest beyond the recovery into long-term growth, particularly in the East of England.

Cllr Linda Haysey - Chair-elect of the East of England LGA, praised the work that local authorities had achieved so far during this crisis such as distributing food parcels, keeping up the delivery of PPE where it is available and most importantly keeping up local government services such as refuse collection that residents pay Council Tax for and expect to see. Councils have helped businesses to keep going as far as possible and are now looking at how they can help businesses change their skill base. She stated that the LGA have found a number of SMEs are incredibly entrepreneurial but may not have the depth of resilience to get through something like this and will therefore need help to develop a new skill set.

Cllr Haysey said this period has been a learning curve on how Councils connect and communicate with people, and it has highlighted how important digital infrastructure is. She stated that in the East of England the digital infrastructure needs to be a basic utility and one that needs significant improvement. She concluded by summing up some key issues local authorities face including: the mental wellbeing of the workforce; how people will travel into work after this crisis – questioning whether people going to be commuting to the same extent or not, especially into London; and how we continue the benefits of cleaner air and quieter environment. She stated that working from home suits some people for some jobs, but not everybody, and that we need policies of flexibility to help people do their job in the best way they can.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND DEBATE

Daniel Zeichner MP, co-chair of the APPG, agreed with the panellists that further clarity is needed and that is something the MPs can feedback to Parliament. However, he raised the point that in his current experience it's proving very difficult to have the normal kind of conversations he would usually have both with colleagues and directly with government in the new virtual Parliament. He asked two questions to the panellists – firstly, if they agree with him that many parts of the workforce do not feel confident about returning to work and therefore what kind of measures, they think would give people that confidence to go back into the work place? Secondly, regarding commuters within the region, especially those who go into London, what can Parliamentarians do to help and support the region to start this transformation in transport?

Jane Galvin said the two questions were interlinked; we need to know what are the guidelines, so employees have comfort to go back into work? HSBC are considering having no more than 10% of staff in one building at any one-time, social distancing screens for walkways and opening up office space more. Additionally, they have sent a survey to colleagues about how they feel about working from home and what they want returning to work to look like. Jane said it would be helpful to map out the key parameters, such as social distancing in the workplace, to help businesses and staff can gain a level of comfort.



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Seena Shah raised the impact social distancing guidelines would have on businesses in small premises and how they would be allowed to operate. She concluded that advice and clear guidelines for those businesses in particular would be helpful.

Cllr Linda Haysey said that many local authorities are working with taskforces to help businesses understand how they can open up again, and that a lot of that will be by using common sense and abiding by the current rules – similarly with the transport issue.

Julie Marson MP said as a relatively new MP she's been amazed by how the local businesses, banks, local authorities, community groups and more have responded to this unprecedented crisis and how important it is to acknowledge their contribution. She also stated that LEP's will have a key role to play in how the region will recover, and she was interested to hear Mark Bretton's view.

Mark Bretton, Chair of Hertfordshire LEP and the National LEP Network, said on a national perspective the LEP network have approached their response in a number of phases: firstly, by helping businesses survive today; and secondly, by making sure the voice of business - working closely with the FSB, CBI and Chambers of Commerce – is heard by central government. He stated there's more for LEPs to do in helping local government with the massive task of paying out grants. He stated that every LEP produced a local industrial strategy and did a thorough economic analysis that underpinned each of those strategies. These are now being updated so they are recovery strategies.

Mark stated that it must not be forgotten that although it's very easy for some to work from home, that option is not available to people who have to work at a shop, in a factory, delivering things to your front door or a train driver. LEPs are also engaged in helping review some practical workplace procedures - for example what happens if somebody has an accident at work? How do you give somebody CPR in a very different scenario from what has been used to? How does one give somebody confidence to help a colleague? He stated that over the coming weeks, LEPs will collaborate with Metro Mayors and the LGA to discuss some of those real practicalities for businesses.

Mike Sargeant, Deputy Leader of Cambridge City Council, raised the issue of universities which won't come back in the Autumn in the same way as previously. Moreover, less people may want to study altogether. He pointed out that 15-20% of Cambridge students won't come back at all as they are from other countries and we must look at this particular issue very carefully.

Cllr Javeria Hussain, Vice Chair and Director of London Luton Airport, asked the panellists for their view on the ONS stats published which show the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the BAME communities and raised the point that a specific government strategy may be needed to tackle and address the social and economic inequality in places like Luton and Peterborough. She noted that BAME communities make up large proportions of the local workforce as key workers in low income jobs.

Cllr Linda Haysey said it's something the local authorities are aware of, and they need to ensure as far as possible that the wealth that is created is distributed across all groups.

Seena Shah made the point that it's important to look after all members of our society and ensure there are ways all can work together across the community to make sure promises are delivered.

Jane Galvin agreed with the points made and added that we should look at all different employee groups in terms of how different levels of support can be provided based on the facts available at the moment.

CONCLUSIONS, NEXT STEPS AND CLOSE OF MEETING

Cllr Linda Haysey, in her final statement, said “we will get through this, though things will be different we will all work together; collaboration and mutual respect are key to recovery.”

Seena Shah reminded us that small businesses in this country employ 60% of our private sector workforce and are incredibly important to our economy. She said SMEs want to keep their employees employed and any support and flexibility that Parliamentarians can offer is really important. Seena ended by stating the impact on mental health cannot be forgotten when moving forward.

Jane Galvin said that HSBC are working hard to get as much money out the door to and the support from Parliamentarians she would ask for is twofold: consideration given to extending the furlough scheme; and helping provide support for the private equity investors. Then together we can move forward.

Peter Aldous MP confirmed that a letter to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Steve Barclay MP and Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for BEIS will be drafted to highlight and advance the issues raised during the session.

The Secretariat announced plans for the next APPG meeting, in June or July, on health innovation and improvement, which will also allow the APPG to reflect more fully on the Covid19 crisis and how the East of England has fared. Additionally, the Secretariat gave an update about the Reception which is still scheduled for Tuesday 15th September in the Terrace Pavilion, although this have to be deferred to later in the year or even next year depending on social distancing rules.

ATTENDEES

First Name	*Role	*Organisation
Daniel Zeichner	EofE APPG Chair	Cambridge
Peter Aldous	EofE APPG Chair	Waveney
Seena Shah	Chair	FSB
Linda Haysey	Council Leader	East Herts Council
Jayne Galvin	Head of UK Corporate Banking	HSBC
Steve Barwick	Director	DevoConnect
Office of Priti Patel	MP	Witham
Julie Marson	MP	Hertford and Stortford
Ben Everitt	Milton Keynes North	Milton Keynes North
Paul Bristow	MP	Peterborough
Duncan Baker	North Norfolk	North Norfolk
Paul Wood	Head of Economic Development & Regeneration	East Suffolk Council
Richard Wenham	Leader	Central Bedfordshire Council
Cllr Alan	Leader	Norwich City Council
Peter Taylor	Mayor	Watford City Council
Dawn Redpath	Director for Economic Development and Prosperity	Surrey County Council
Brian Keane	CEO	Harlow Council
Cllr Jamie Jamieson	Chairman	Local Government Association
Antoinette Jackson	Chief Executive	Cambridge City Council
Rob Gledhill	Leader	Thurrock Council
David Ellesmere	Leader	Ipswich Borough Council
Richard Carr	Chief Executive	Central Bedfordshire County
Gillian Beasley	Chief Executive	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils
Andy Williams	VP MedImmune	Astrazeneca
Olivia Tyrrell	Political Researcher	DevoConnect
Adam Thorp	Policy and Programme Manager	East of England LGA
Emma Green	Public Affairs Manager	British Sugar
Roy Elmer	Senior Manager	East of England LGA
James Wood	Account Director	Built Environment Communications Group (BECG)
Mike Sargeant	Deputy Leader	Cambridge City Council
Andy Walker	Head of Policy and Research	Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Richard Tunnicliffe	Regional Director	CBI
Alan Todd	East of England Regional Policy Lead	Federation of Small Businesses
David Thomas	Group Public Affairs, Group Corporate Affairs	Lloyds Banking Group
Jane Thomas	East of England Regions	BT
James Stevens	Director for Cities	Home Builders Federation
Rebecca Stephens	City Manager	City Fibre

Hannah Staunton	Head of External Affairs	East West Rail
Dave Shaw	PA to Dave Shaw, Managing Director	Norwich Regeneration Limited.
Greg Sage	Communications Director	Greene King
David Russell-Graham	Consultant	DRG Consultancy
Jane Paterson-Todd	Chief Executive	Cambridge Ahead
Michelle Parrott	Facilities Office Manager	HaskoningDHV UK Ltd.
Robert Parker	CEO	Beechwood Homes
Simon Papworth		
Matthew Norton	Head of Public Affairs	University of Cambridge
James Moon	Area Manager for London and South East	Careers and Enterprise Company
John McGill	Director	London Stansted Cambridge Consortium
Cllr John Lodge	Leader	Uttlesford District Council
Jemma Little	Innovation and Funding Manager	Haven Gateway
Ann Limb	Chair	The UK Innovation Corridor
Graham Lambert	Managing Director	Vinci
Javeria Hussain	Vice Chair and Director	Luton Airport
Faye Holland	Founder and Director	Cofinitive
Stuart Hallett	Area Development Manager, South East	FSB
Emma Green	Public Affairs Manager	British Sugar
Fiona Graham	Director of External Affairs and Policy	Institute for Family Business (UK)
Harriet Fear	Chair	Cambridge Ahead
Richard DeNetto	Assistant Regional Director	Confederation of British Industry
Simon Darby	Head of East of England	PLMR
Arnie Craven	External Affairs Manager	Cadent Gas
Linn Clabburn	Programme Director	Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor
Karen Chapman	Growth Programme Partnership Manager	Suffolk Growth Programme Board
Alessandra Caggiano	Head of Strategic Partnerships	This Land
Mark Bretton	Chair	Hertfordshire and National LEP Network
Matt Brennan	Senior Public Affairs Manager	Network Rail
Jordi Beascoechea	Engagement Manager	East West Rail
Christine Abraham	Chief Executive	Community Action Suffolk
Richard Bayley	CEO	NEGC