

RURAL & FARMING EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 19 JUNE 2025 - 2.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor T Taylor (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs D Laws and Councillor A Woollard

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Clark and Councillor M Humphrey

GUESTS: Natalie and Louise from Organity.

Officers in attendance: Anna Goodall (Assistant Director), Simon Jackson (Economic Growth Manager) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

RF18/23 **APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF RURAL AND FARMING EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/26**

It was proposed by Councillor Foice-Beard, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and resolved that Councillor Taylor be elected Chairman of the Rural and Farming Executive Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2025/26.

RF19/23 **APPOINT A DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE RURAL AND FARMING EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/26**

It was proposed by Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and resolved that Councillor Mrs French be elected Vice-Chairman of the Rural and Farming Executive Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2025/26.

RF20/23 **PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 7 October 2024 were confirmed and signed.

RF21/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Taylor and Councillor Foice-Beard both declared they were members of the Pro Farmers United.

RF22/23 **UPDATE TO MEMBERS ON MOTIONS TO COUNCIL IN RESPECT OF RURAL AND FARMING MATTERS**

Councillor Taylor updated the committee on the religious slaughter motion taken to the last Council meeting and stated there has been a conversation with Defra which has led to the conclusion that there will be no label changes made on food products for the foreseeable future.

RF23/23 **REPRESENTATIVES FROM ORGANITY AND THE BOWLER HAT FARMER**

Louise and Natalie From Organity gave a presentation on feeding the community first.

Apologies were given from the Bowler Hat Farmer

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Taylor stated that if community halls are happy to house this idea, he feels this could work in the Cambridgeshire area.
- Councillor Mrs French stated that in the presentation it was mentioned that no salary has been taken so far and asked how this project was funded? Natalie responded there is a small percentage that is added to the cost to cover the outgoings and to replenish stock, plus there is a delivery fee to cover the driver's expenses.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that there are local food banks and additional units supplying surplus food from supermarkets, which is free, and when there are people who are economically stretched, their options are limited and as much as they would like to eat healthy these will be the options that they will take and not through choice in some cases. Natalie responded that they get to know their community very well and have set up on their website a donation page which people can pay from £1 to however much they want to pay, but this is not compulsory, and that money is sitting there waiting for one of the community members to say they have fallen on hard times and cannot afford to feed their family, then Organity will put a box together to support them. She continued that, Organity also ensure if there is any leftover food that it gets distributed to members of the community who cannot afford to buy organic fresh produce. Councillor Mrs Laws pointed out that there were quite a few farm shops in the Fenland area plus farms where the public can 'pick your own' which at the end of the season can be free or given at a lower cost.
- Councillor Mrs Laws asked how many deliveries Organity were planning on making if they can make this work in Cambridgeshire and what are their thoughts around the environment and fuel cost? Natalie answered that currently Organity are doing two run cycles a week.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that if Organity are going to make it viable in the Fenland area, cost will need to come into it and GDPR as many people do not like to admit hardship which is where the food banks and the surplus banks come in. Natalie responded that herself and Louise know their community well, nobody would be treated differently, and they would give customers a chance to talk to them if they need extra help.
- Councillor Taylor stated that Organity are not setting up as a food bank they are setting up to assist the local farmer to sell their produce straight to the public instead of through the supermarkets. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she was being mindful of how this would work in this area alongside all the other things that are on offer already.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked if Organity have experienced any challenges so far and if so, how have they adapted to those challenges? Natalie answered one big challenge was the fact that Organity had outgrown the garage space they had started in so a new premises had to be found that would be good enough for what the business needed. She stated that the farm in which the business was moved to was the perfect fit and over time the farmer has seen the benefits of what Organity offer and now wants to be more involved with the process.
- Councillor Foice-Beard stated that in the presentation it was mentioned about online orders, in Fenland there can be a lot of digital exclusion and asked, is online the only way people can order and see the produces from Organity and are you planning on catering for the residents that are not online? Natalie stated that members of the public can phone orders through or send emails and there will be maps on the website where the public can click on to view what products are available.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked if the system Organity run is easy for farmers to access? Natalie stated that it is an easy service to use and once contact is made, Organity visit the farms and get to know the farmers and their produce. Councillor Taylor added that he knew many farmers that are using the system and are happy with the simplicity of the system in place.
- Councillor Mrs Laws asked how the staffing was going to be managed if the business grows, will they be paying staff or will it be volunteer run? Louise answered at this present time it is volunteer run.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked about the hub idea mentioned in the presentation Natalie

confirmed that they would work out of one central hub in Cambridgeshire using the local farmers within the area.

- Councillor Woollard stated that he fully admired the community aspect of the project set up and would always support anything that supports the farming community but expressed the view that once Organity starts expanding into other areas, financial planning and a good business plan to back up the community spirit is going to be crucial to make it a viable project, because of the remote and different areas the company wishes to expand into. Natalie responded that Stuart in the team is the financial partner who has retired from his business role and supports in that area.

Members noted the information provided

RF24/23 FENLAND AGRI-FOOD BUSINESS SECTOR DATA UPDATE

Simon Jackson gave the committee an update on the Agri-Food Business Sector data.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Foice-Beard asked within the report is there any focus on the how? She referred to the mention of training etc, but asked how will this be delivered and by when? Simon Jackson responded that there is a little bit of the how in the report, but the assumption is that Argi know who to go to, to make the how happen through the CPCA with a working document.
- Councillor Mrs Laws asked who the others were involved with this project outside of what was reported in the presentation? Simon Jackson replied, the Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce won a big contract 18 months ago working with skills and skills development, Agri also liaise with the colleges to consistently talk about areas of improvement especially around the subject of AI. Councillor Mrs Laws asked if there is a possibility the agricultural colleges could expand, and the students receive bursaries encouraging that this be investigated. Councillor Mrs Laws asked if a consultant had been involved to validate 60% of what is known already, and will this be presented to the others and the CPCA? Simon Jackson confirmed there is some validation on the information already known and this will all be in the report that will be distributed to the committee. He added that the report does include looking at areas in Italy, Holland and Chile to help the Agri technology in this area.
- Councillor Mrs French asked when the report will be available? Simon Jackson confirmed it will be available from Monday to view.

Members noted the information provided

RF25/23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS INCLUDING FUTURE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AGENDA ITEMS

Councillor Taylor asked the committee to let local farmers know that this committee exists for them.

Councillor Mrs Laws suggested this committee creates some information to give to the IDB members through the chairmen of each board to get the message out about the Rural & Farming committee and what it hopes to achieve.