

## Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Connected Communities

At 2.00 pm on Wednesday 28th February, 2024 in the Council Chamber, The Cube, George Street, Corby NN17 1QG

### Present:-

#### Members

Councillor Lloyd Bunday (Chair)  
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury

Councillor Bert Jackson  
Councillor John McGhee

### 26 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Elliott Prentice, Cllr Richard Levell, Cllr Ian Jelley and Cllr Valerie Anslow. It was noted that Cllr John McGhee was acting as substitute for Cllr Anslow.

### 27 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

### 28 Minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 2023

#### **RESOLVED** that:-

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 29 Update to North Northamptonshire Council Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

Members received a report that sought feedback on a proposed revision of the North Northamptonshire Council Unacceptable Behaviour Policy ahead of its presentation to Executive.

It was heard that the existing policy had been drafted by Future Northants for implementation on vesting day, and was designed to support North Northamptonshire Council officers, members and customers during interactions. It was considered that an appropriate point had been reached for a review of the policy as the Council approached its third anniversary, in light of a broader understanding of the way the new authority operated and how customers accessed its services.

It was reported that a significant amount of time had been spent working with officers, services areas, Health & Wellbeing leads and Unions to ensure a broad range of input in updating the policy with a view to receiving approval to adopt it at the March meeting of the Executive.

It was considered that the existing policy did not go far enough in assessing the needs of individual customers, with work undertaken to better describe actions and engagements the Council could undertake when in contact with customers displaying behaviour deemed unacceptable. The revised policy offered a more consistent approach to support staff and was viewed alongside the internal staff alert register that captured risks arising from reported incidents of unacceptable customer behaviour.

Cllr John McGhee questioned the definition of persistent behaviour as well as who would determine the applicable penalties in cases identified. It was noted that this was outlined in the latter stages of the policy document with service leads and Assistant Directors being responsible for determining applicable penalties for unacceptable behaviour.

Cllr McGhee noted that persistent behaviour in seeking redress often stemmed from frustration with service received. This was noted, and the meeting heard that there would be no blanket approach to customer interactions. Contacts would be reviewed and there would not be implementation of indefinite removal of service for anyone showing unacceptable behaviour. It was further noted that only when contact became unreasonable, forceful or excessive or customers refused to accept decisions when due process had been followed would sanctions be imposed.

Cllr Bert Jackson queried training for staff regarding confrontational approaches from customers, with the meeting noting that conflict and resilience training was undertaken in Customer Services, with de-escalation a primary focus.

Cllr McGhee questioned whether there was a code of conduct for staff and who customers could appeal to if they were sanctioned for unacceptable behaviour. It was heard that appropriate procedures were in place for staff behaviour, managed by Human Resources but that the policy did not currently contain an appeals mechanism although this could be added to the document ahead of approval by Executive.

Members accepted the policy as a well-written document designed to address the very small number of instances of recordable unacceptable customer behaviour. It was heard that, once approved, training sessions for staff would be undertaken with the establishment of a centralised audit point for issuing and reviewing of any sanctions applied.

### **30 North Northamptonshire Council Complaints Remedy Policy**

Members received a report that sought comments and feedback in relation to the North Northamptonshire Council Complaints Remedy Policy, which was designed to support services in assessing complaints at stage one, stage two and Ombudsman scale points.

The meeting heard that North Northamptonshire Council Complaints Handling Policy confirmed that complainants had statutory rights when raising a dispute around loss of service or maladministration. It was therefore considered prudent to adopt a Complaints Remedy Policy that would enable services to make more consistent decisions informed by Ombudsman guidance as to how best to address injustice arising from maladministration or loss of service arising from fault of the Council.

It was noted that the Panel's feedback would be factored into the final report presented to the March meeting of Executive for approval, prior to the policy being used to support services responding to such complaints by offering informed decision making and supporting best practice in line with Ombudsman guidance.

It was reported that under the current published complaints policy, a Stage One complaint would be reviewed by a service lead, service manager or Head of Service within 20-days. It was heard that this timescale would be altered to a statutory 10-days in line with case management responses. A Stage Two complaint, where a complainant is unhappy with the response provided at Stage One would be allocated to a different manager a level up from the original reviewer and would remain at 20-days for review. Complainants then had the option to escalate a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman once the Council's complaints procedure had been exhausted.

The Panel was advised that in circumstances where financial remedy was the correct course of action, this would be taken against benchmarking of the Ombudsman guidance at the earliest opportunity rather than elongating the complaint process. It was noted that having a policy in place could see the use of financial remedies decreasing as complaints were handled in a more timely and consistent manner.

Cllr John McGhee queried examples of improvements made to Council operations arising from complaints. It was suggested that unless an honest appraisal of failings was made then service improvements could not be undertaken.

It was heard that the policy before members was of critical importance in tracking service improvements being made by the Council, particularly the use of a case management system that would assist in putting emphasis on service areas to show where improvements were being made. The remedy policy would help the tracking of complaints and their ownership. Once approved, tool kits, guidance and templates would be provided to assist services with informed decision making.

It was noted that the Ombudsman had a statutory requirement for complaints to be properly logged throughout the process, inputting these via the case management system would result in better visibility and ensure learning was captured concisely resulting in work with services areas around commitments as part of an ongoing learning plan. It was further noted that Internal Audit were planning two audits to work on the case management system, to ensure the Council was doing what it should.

Members welcomed a well-drafted, easy to follow policy that accorded with the Council's Corporate Plan that had taken into account good practice at other local authorities during its preparation.

### **31 Executive Forward Plan**

The Executive Forward Plan for 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024 was noted.

### **32 Forward List of Items for the EAP**

The forward list of items for the EAP was considered.

**33 Close of Meeting**

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

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Chair

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Date

The meeting closed at 2.48 pm