

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Service Delivery, Performance and Customers

At 9.30 am on Monday 28th June, 2021

Held as a virtual meeting

Present:-

Members

Councillor Lloyd Bunday (Chair)

Councillor Jean Addison

Councillor Annabel de Capell Brooke

Councillor Kirk Harrison

Councillor Bert Jackson

Councillor Ian Jelley

Councillor Richard Levell

Officers

Lisa Hyde – Director of Transformation

Kerry Purnell – Assistant Director Housing and Communities

Geoff Kent – Assistant Director Customer Services

David Pope – Senior Committee Administrator

Fiona Hubbard - Senior Committee Administrator

1 Apologies for absence

None

2 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

3 Notification of requests to address the meeting

None

4 Terms of Reference

The meeting received the draft Terms of Reference for the panel.

A query was raised regarding the Leader of the Council having the option to add, amend or delete Executive Advisory Panels. It was noted that this position offered flexibility should Executive portfolio coverage alter in future and was outlined in the Council's constitution.

It was

AGREED that the Terms of Reference for the Executive Advisory Panel - Service Delivery, Performance and Customers be approved.

5 Restoration of Customer Services Post-Covid

Members received a report that sought to outline options for the restoration of face-to-face customer services across North Northamptonshire.

The report set out short-term proposals for the re-opening of Customer Services sites as well as longer-term aspirations that would allow the council to deliver an efficient, high quality service to its residents.

Members heard that despite minimal face-to-face contact from residents since March 2020 because of Covid-19 restrictions, the volume of telephone contacts from residents had not shown a marked increase.

It was therefore proposed that Customer Services would re-open while continuing to utilise the service model offered during the last year. Aside from offering customers the opportunity to find information online, there was an aim to continue resolving queries during initial telephone contacts thereby reducing the reliance on face-to-face visits by customers.

It was considered that continuation of an appointment-based, face-to-face service would allow for a higher level of service to be offered, with resources targeted to assisting customers with complex needs.

The meeting noted that this service model would develop to include access points, for instance at local libraries, and would reduce the need for customers to travel to a specific municipal building. This would also benefit the Council in reducing its carbon footprint.

In response to a member query, it was heard that telephone contacts had increased significantly since 1st April, however this had been driven largely by the resumption of Council Tax recovery action and was consistent with pre Covid annual call volumes.

Further questions were asked in relation to the following aspects of service provision:

- Reopening of cash offices (Corby Only)
- Communication with the public regarding re-opening of facilities
- Staff welfare
- Prioritisation of customer queries for face-to-face appointments
- Establishment of local service delivery points
- The first point of contact providing a positive customer experience
- Ensuring services remained accessible for the elderly and vulnerable

The meeting noted the Key Performance Indicators and customer feedback would be made available to members to enable evaluation of the service.

6 Leisure Services - Covid Impact

A presentation was provided to the panel regarding work that was being undertaken to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic across the Council's leisure service provision.

It was noted that the Executive would be asked to consider a report that outlined the medium-term impact on leisure services, as well as giving thought to the level of ongoing financial support that would be required for the sector. It was anticipated that this report could be taken to the meeting of Executive on 5th August, although the potential lifting of national Covid restrictions (currently set for 19th July) would affect the projected financial impact.

Questions were asked regarding a playing pitch strategy and the new leisure contract procurement for the Kettering area. It was noted that the health and wellbeing of communities were a priority coming out of the Covid period and availability of leisure facilities would aid recovery.

7 Discretionary Voluntary Sector Grants Policy

Members received an early draft of the Community Funding Policy that set out the principles and criteria governing how the Council would award small grants of up to £25,000, both revenue and capital, to support community activities.

The meeting heard that although the current arrangements for grant provision to the voluntary sector had been extended, it was important to have a policy in place that would provide reassurance to the sector and its members. As such, consultation was underway with Northants Community Foundation and the Voluntary Sector Assembly to seek their views.

The policy sought to establish a Community Funding Strategic Oversight Board to review grant decisions, particularly those over £2500, ensuring member endorsement and representing the four former sovereign areas.

Eligibility and grant criteria were laid out in the policy ensuring that any funding awarded supported volunteering and community activities, particularly in relation to young people, homelessness and tackling inequality. The policy would be reviewed once the Corporate Plan had been written to align it to key strategic objectives.

There remained policy details to be finalised, including the number of applications that could be made per organisation during a financial year and whether to have specific application windows for the capital grant scheme.

Members asked questions in relation to

- The maximum funding pot available
- Likely launch date for the policy
- Accessibility and timescales involved in applications
- Feedback to members regarding grant applications and awards
- Councillor empowerment funds

It was noted that the scheme would launch as soon as it had been approved by Executive, with a current timeframe of September appearing most likely. A figure for the total grant budget would be obtained and circulated, with a paragraph clarifying application timescales inserted into the policy.

The meeting heard that ward members would receive regular updates on grant applications and awards.

8 Identified Areas of Interest

Members considered and recommended topics that they wished to add to the work plan for future meetings of the panel.

It was considered that it would be beneficial for the panel to receive a formal process flow which indicated the panel's place in the policy and decision-making process of the Council. Monitoring of subjects recommended to the Executive for inclusion in policy would allow the panel to monitor the effectiveness of its work.

Areas recommended for future consideration were:

- Opening Hours for Recycling Centres
- Levelling-up of brown recycling bin collections across North Northamptonshire
- Maintenance and Recovery of the Highway Network
- Parking enforcement/parking strategy
- Playing pitch strategy
- Dumped vehicle strategy
- Forward Plan for Executive

9 Urgent Items

None

10 Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 10:47am.

Chair

Date