

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Connected Communities

At 10.00 am on Friday 20th October, 2023 in the Council Chamber, The Cube, George Street, Corby NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Lloyd Bunday (Chair)
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Bert Jackson

Councillor Ian Jelley
Councillor Elliot Prentice

Also in attendance – Councillor Lyn Buckingham

19 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Valerie Anslow and Richard Levell. Apologies were also received from Adele Wylie and Janice Gotts.

20 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations received.

21 Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2023

RESOLVED that:-

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22 Developing the Council's Approach to Communication

The Council's Assistant Chief Executive, Guy Holloway attended the meeting and provided a presentation with regard to the development of the Council's approach to communication.

The meeting heard that the Council was reviewing its approach to communications with an aim of developing a new Communications Strategy. It was noted that while there were positive aspects to the current approach, there remained areas for improvement.

The panel was provided with details of factors that guided the Council's approach to communication, noting that communication activity should mirror and enforce the Council's Corporate Plan. The values of the Council were highlighted, with the meeting noting that methods of communication should demonstrate these values.

The following aims were set out as being targets for achievement in terms of communications

- Informing residents, customers and other stakeholders of relevant information
- Explaining how to access services and detailing what was available
- Engagement with stakeholders in policy development and decision-making
- Provision of timely, relevant and accurate information
- Helping customers to help themselves
- Attracting the right attention to the area

The panel noted a number of constraints to achieving the targets set out above, including time and information overload, the digital divide, cultural and language barriers, misinformation and misunderstanding. Limited resources and the complexities of communication were also factors facing the Council.

The meeting was provided with details of the Council's customers and key stakeholders, who covered a wide range of individuals, organisations and sectors. It was noted that there was a need to engage with all of these stakeholders when developing policy and making decisions, while being mindful of the need to target stakeholder groups through a variety of communication mediums to allow for better coverage.

The panel heard that there was a vision to allow customers to access services 24/7 rather than just by visiting the Council offices in person or making contact by telephone. Early interventions and access to relevant advice first time could assist in stemming issues further down the line, with examples provided including debt advice and housing issues.

It was considered that members had a very important role in the Council's communication approach, not only with their constituents, but also in developing the Council's communication strategy.

The meeting heard that following unitarisation a corporate identity had to be formulated, with details of the brand guidelines detailed to the meeting that would allow all communications to be issued in a standard, cohesive manner. It was also noted that there was a variety of content issued by the Council in the form of press releases. In addition, there was a significant number of high-level conversations undertaken with local media services that was a positive route of circulating the Council's messages.

Reference was made to the Council's website, the panel noting that customers could undertake a wide range of business at a time that suited them, although it was heard that use of the website could also present challenges in access and navigation. The meeting heard that individuals could sign up for updates on specific areas of interest and there was a desire to develop that approach going forward.

Statistics were provided for the number of hits on the Council's website as well as engagement with the Council's social media accounts and reference was made to the Leader's updates. The panel also received details of the Council's newly installed soft phone system and the roll-out of this system across the Council.

Details were provided of current communication campaigns; Hi Street, aiming to boost and detail the local business offer available in the High Streets of local towns, the Council's Christmas campaign and the Big50 North Northamptonshire Vision. Details of positive feedback associated with each of these campaigns was presented to the panel.

Further details were provided of a revamp of the Your Voice Matters website that sought to push and increase engagement across a range of consultation processes, although consideration needed to be given as to how the message regarding these consultations could be more widely disseminated.

The panel heard that the following areas formed the future focus for the Council's communication:

- More planned activity adopting a more pro-active approach
- Targeted, prioritised approach
- Key campaigns with an annual programme
- Additional focus on: Demand management, prevention and early intervention, efficiency, economy & effectiveness
- Clear strategy and supporting policies and procedures
- Standardised and simplified approach
- Centralised capacity but with service champions
- Make efficient and effective use of traditional methods
- Make the most of digital channels and technology

Concluding the presentation, reference was made to the potential future use of Artificial Intelligence.

Councillors asked questions in relation to:

- Communicating and improving understanding of the responsibilities held by the unitary and town and parish councils
- How to utilise AI for the Council's benefit
- Digital literacy
- Accessing specific departments rapidly
- Accessibility of the Council website requiring improvement
- Elements of the telephony system requiring implementation
- Keeping the public updated on housing repairs and maintenance
- Management and access to the Council's CRM system
- The Council's intranet function

The Chair thanked the Assistant Chief Executive for his presentation.

23 Executive Forward Plan

The Executive Forward Plan for 1st October 2023 to 31st January 2024 was noted.

24 Forward List of Items for the EAP

The forward list of items for the EAP was considered.

25 Close of Meeting

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

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 10.54 am