

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Active Communities

At 10.00 am on Friday 2nd February, 2024 in the Council Chamber, The Cube,
George St, Corby NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Helen Howell
Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Ken Harrington
Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor John McGhee
Councillor Russell Roberts
Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Officers

Kerry Purnell - Assistant Director, Housing and Communities
Shirley Plenderleith - Assistant Director, Public Health
Matthew Jenkins - Assistant Director, Commissioning and Performance
Evonne Coleman-Thomas - Assistant Director, Strategic Housing, Development and Property Services

53 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ken Harrington. It was noted that Cllr Paul Marks was acting as substitute for Cllr Harrington.

54 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gill Mercer declared an interest in Item 6 – Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector and would leave the meeting for the duration of the discussion on this item.

55 Minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2023

RESOLVED that:-

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

56 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

It was **AGREED** that this item be deferred to a future meeting date.

57 Service Presentation - Commissioning and Performances

The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance, Matthew Jenkins attended the meeting and provided a service presentation that initially gave the Panel an overview of the key service areas within Commissioning and Performance.

The meeting noted the approach taken to engage with social work teams in deciding desired outcomes alongside service users and the undertaking of assessments prior to the brokerage team engaging with contract providers regarding care referrals. It was heard that between £100m-£110m of payments were processed to independent care providers, with personal budget support services supporting service users to manage direct payments. Details were also provided regarding direct payments and financial assessments undertaken whereby service users contributed towards the cost of their care and support.

The meeting then received detailed of achievements made by the service during 2023 in key areas of work. It was heard that homecare procurements had completed in October 2023, with 114 Care Quality Commission registered providers. It was heard that this was a significant step forward for the council and reflected independent provider confidence in working with the Council as a care commissioner. The Council had invested heavily in the homecare market to ensure hourly pay rates enabled providers to recruit, train and retain staff and had increased the capacity within that sector of the care market and would significantly reduce the reliance on spot placements and offer more control over care quality.

Further achievements were detailed to the panel, including:

- Advocacy procurement completed with the contract awarded to Total Voice
- Learning Disability Partnership Board feedback completed and shared
- A new approach to brokering care and support had been adopted offering greater choice and control.
- Continued improvement in the quality of external market had been witnessed
- A Market Position Statement had been developed
- Co-production commenced for development of a Carers' Strategy
- Genie Connect pilot commenced

Cllr John McGhee noted the significant increase in the number of homecare providers and queried monitoring of services being provided. It was heard that regular reviews would be undertaken to ensure desired outcomes were being met, with contractors receiving an annual visit from the Quality Team as a minimum, more often should any concerns over quality of service arise.

Cllr Gill Mercer queried how often the number of providers would be reviewed as the markets moved and changed. In response, it was noted that framework agreements could be re-opened should the need arise across the five-year contract.

Cllr Russell Roberts referenced means testing before care and support was agreed, with the meeting noting that the Council could broker such services even for individuals who were over the threshold for paid care once a financial assessment had been undertaken. It was heard that up to six weeks of reablement was fully funded for

those leaving hospital and requiring care that allowed time for the financial assessment process to conclude.

Discussion was held regarding the cost of social care and the potential use of AI in future. It was heard that such technology was in its infancy, with reference made to the Genie Connect pilot which offered remote contact and reminders for care patients.

The meeting received details of recent changes to legislation and the impact on the Council's statutory duties, particularly with reference to the Health and Care Act 2022 that represented the most significant changes to Adult Social Care to be undertaken in more than a generation, with significant implications resulting for the Council.

- Integrated Care Systems had been placed on a statutory footing
- New duties for the Care Quality Commission to assure local authorities Adult Social Care functions and Integrated Care Systems
- Introduction of a care cap
- Activating section 18(3) of the Care Act requiring Local Authorities to commission self-funders social care support with a move towards paying a 'Fair Cost of Care

In regard to fair cost of care, the opportunity for internal service provision was raised, with the Assistant Director noting that where it was sensible to do so the Council could seek to provide care services itself, but not in instances where the care market could offer a higher quality or financially efficient service.

In regard to Integrated Care Systems, Cllr McGhee raised the issue of GP services and the issues faced by patients in trying to access these services. It was noted that the Integrated Care Board commissioners were responsible for commissioning services, with the Council able to influence that through its membership of the board. It was further noted that the Council, through offering a series of preventative health measures could assist in easing the burden on GP surgeries thereby increasing capacity.

Further details were provided to the meeting regarding the Fair Cost of Care, Care Market Sustainability and Care Cap, with the meeting noting that the Council had completed and published the work required to demonstrate how it would move towards paying a fair cost of care, with a focus on sustainable commissioned rates of pay.

The Panel received an overview of the new duties awarded to Care Quality Commission in assuring councils ASC functions and Integrated Care Systems with assessments set to commence in early 2024. Cllr McGhee received assurance in response to his question as to whether the Council would be conducting self-assessment prior to assessment by the CQC.

It was heard that five local authorities had been assessed to date, with indicative ratings provided. The CQC had developed a single assessment framework with quality statements aggregated to provide an overall rating. Details for preparatory work ahead of the assessment were provided with the meeting noting the development of a self-assessment tool that was extensive and robust, with a series of improvement projects identified for focus.

The meeting noted two particular areas of focus within the Adult Social Care Strategy, Moving Forward with Place to manage demand and service user journeys and Moving

Forward with People where co-production would become the default method of working.

Cllr McGhee raised the issue of staff caseloads and noted that this was an area being closely monitored with a view to better managing caseloads and the influencing factors including reducing unnecessary contacts that added to the work of staff. Learning from complaints and seeking best practice from elsewhere was also vital to allow for continuous improvement.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for his attendance and presentation.

58 Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

(Prior to consideration of this item the co-Chair, Cllr Gill Mercer, left the meeting having declared an interest in this item)

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director for Communities and Leisure that introduced the Council's Communities Strategy and detailed the strategic investment made into the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE).

It was heard that the strategy before members had been coproduced with representatives from across the VCSE sector, with the report also setting out the proposed new VCSE strategic grants framework that covered a period of three-years from 1st April 2024 and replaced the previous strategic grant arrangements which the Council had inherited from the former sovereign councils.

Members also received details of the proposed new VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements that would be tendered and contracted for across a three year period from 1st September 2024.

It was reported that the operating landscape for the sector had altered dramatically across the preceding 18 month period, with the Executive approval to roll forward the inherited strategic grants to March 2024 providing the Council with sufficient time to engage and work collaboratively with the sector regarding its needs.

It was noted that although the strategic grant pot totalled £672,000, this was only an element of the funding committed by the Council to the voluntary sector, with the total investment being £1.8m for 2023/24.

It was heard that grant funding had been reviewed against the Council's strategic priorities alongside heavy engagement with the sector. An event held in September 2023 had seen representatives from the sector attend and have open conversations regarding key priorities for funding and infrastructure arrangements, the requirement for capacity building to support funding bids, and leadership development. It was noted that the Council did not currently operate a VCSE infrastructure contract and close engagement had been offered to assist the sector in being able to develop and become more sustainable thereby allowing organisation to carry out the work they were best at.

Details were provided to the meeting of the proposed new VCSE strategic grants framework for 2024-2027 with a focus on the following themes:

- Core cost support to the Community Centres which were supported by the former sovereign Councils;
- Financial Inclusion;
- Community Transport;
- Prevention of Social Isolation for Older People;
- Community Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Increasing resilience in the VCSE to provide support for vulnerable residents, as identified through the new Support North Northants (SNN) service;
- Promotion and Advocacy for Equalities

The Panel heard that the funding of community centres presented a challenge due to inconsistencies in legacy funding arrangements inherited. Discussions had been held with centres that received core funding support from the Council, with a view to developing sustainability and reducing reliance on this funding. It was noted that existing funding for community centres would remain the same for 2024/25 as in the current year but would be reviewed on an annual basis. It was heard that should communities wish to take on operation of community centres, conversation regarding support available could be brokered by the Council.

Details of the eight key themes of the strategy were introduced, six of which would form a significant part of the ask the Council would make of the future providers of the VCSE Infrastructure support contract, which would be tendered for delivery:

- Capacity Building and back-office support for the VCSE*;
- Funding Support for the VCSE*;
- Co-ordination of VCSE involvement and leadership for the Integrated Care System and the Place Programme*;
- Developing mutually beneficial relationships*;
- Co-ordination and promotion of best practice across the VCSE*;
- Volunteering support, promotion and best practice*;
- Supporting communities to take on assets and services where appropriate to do so;
- Delivery of the VCSE grants programme

Members noted the return on investment into the voluntary sector and welcomed the closer working between the Council and the sector.

Cllr John McGhee noted that the strategy lacked mention of Family Hubs and sought an update in this regard. Cllr McGhee also referenced community centres with regard to future funding and the need to make lesser centres more successful as well as a lack of detail within the strategy regarding support for left behind areas.

In response it was noted that a piece of work as required to review to delivery of community centres with a view towards harmonisation. It was heard that a report would be tabled at Executive the following week providing an update in regard to Levelling-Up progress within left behind areas as this formed a separate strand outside this strategy before the Panel. With regard to Family Hubs it was heard that this strategic change had seen voluntary sector involvement and reference would be made within the strategy to this.

Cllr McGhee raised the issue of community assets and the complexity of the processes involved in communities and organisations taking these on and the need for support to help navigate this area.

Cllr Geoff Shacklock noted that the rural community was heavily reliant on Volunteer Action, a community transport scheme and sought assurances that funding would not be removed or reduced for this service. In response it was heard that community transport was a key priority with existing funding allocations set to continue to March 2024, with future allocations under discussion and organisations able to bid for funding.

Debate concluded with reference to the Community Wellbeing Forums and multi-organisational partnerships that considered community priorities and engagement. Discussion regarding funding opportunities for Local Area Partnerships was also referenced.

59 Executive Forward Plan

The Executive Forward Plan for February to May 2024 was noted.

60 Forward List of Items for the EAP

The forward list of items for the EAP was considered including the following:

- Family Hubs
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- In-house Service Provision
- North Northamptonshire Council All Age Carers Strategy
- Implementation of the draft Health & Wellbeing Strategy

61 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 11.58 am