

## Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Prosperous Communities

At 10.00 am on Wednesday 8th May, 2024 in the Council Chamber, The Cube,  
George Street, Corby NN17 1QG

### Present:-

#### Members

Councillor Matt Binley  
Councillor Lyn Buckingham

Councillor Andy Mercer  
Councillor Steven North

#### Officers

Graeme Kane - Assistant Director for Highways, Waste and Growth  
Evonne Coleman Thomas - Assistant Director for Strategic Housing, Development  
and Property Services  
Philip Beeston – Head of Highways  
Ged Faulkner - Assistant Head of Highways  
Garon Cornell - Interim Housing Allocations Team Leader  
David Pope – Senior Committee Administrator

### 42 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the co-Chair, Cllr Mark Rowley and Cllr Malcolm Ward. Apologies were also received from David Watts, Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing.

### 43 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

### 44 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March 2024

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 45 Highways Asset Management Policy

The meeting received a presentation in regard to the Highways Asset Management Policy, with supplementary information provided by Graeme Kane, Assistant Director for Highways, Waste and Growth, Philip Beecroft, Head of Highways and Jed Faulkner, Assistant Head of Highways.

It was noted that there were a number of policies governing the Highways section, a number of which had been inherited from the former county council upon unitarisation.

It was heard that it was now considered a good time to review these policies and adopt a North Northamptonshire Council-specific Highways Asset Management Policy (HAMP) and a workplan was in place for this to be undertaken. The meeting heard that a number of member engagement sessions and town and parish council engagements would take place with details provided regarding highway maintenance and work undertaken alongside the Council's contractor to repair highway defects.

The panel received details of the details of highway assets, noting that the Council was responsible for over 1800km of roads, nearly 2000km of footways, over 1100km of public rights of way and 888 highways structures such as bridges.

It was reported that the current HAMP had transferred from the former county council and would be reviewed based on the Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice. The revised document would ensure the Council:

- Understood the assets it was responsible for,
- Could measure and monitor how they perform, and
- Could determine the funding required to manage and maintain assets to ensure safety, serviceability and sustainability

Cllr Andy Mercer noted that there was currently insufficient funding available to meet the highways aspirations of the Council and community and queried whether alternative funding sources had been explored with reference to local businesses potentially investing in the area's highway network to make their business more efficient. Cllr Mercer also made reference to recent advances in technology regarding self-repairing roads and the need to balance the costs with the number of repairs undertaken.

Cllr Steven North queried how accurate the data provided by the former county council was in terms of land ownership and referred to the existing highways inspection regime and whether there were any opportunities for increased inspections in light of the recent receipt of additional government funding for highways.

It was heard that the Council had an accurate mapping system with details of all adopted highways and public right of ways in the Council area. In terms of inspections, it was noted that a series of surveys were undertaken each year, informing where surface repair works would be required. In addition, scanner surveys and condition surveys were undertaken outside of routine inspections, with HEAT evaluations of differing potential remedial treatments on different roads undertaken.

The co-Chair, Cllr Matt Binley noted that although the Council knew which highways it had responsibility for, there remained challenges with certain assets and the ownership of those assets, with reference made to boundary queries for maintenance.

Cllr Lyn Buckingham queried whether the Council worked with internal and external departments and partner organisations in regard to repairs to bridges and culverts whilst taking into account nature recovery and biodiversity. It was heard that such partnership working did take place, and the Council would continue to liaise with landowners if they were identified as needing to undertake works for which they had responsibility.

## 46 Keyways & Housing Allocations

The panel received a presentation from Evonne Coleman-Thomas, Assistant Director for Strategic Housing, Development and Property Services in regard to the Council's Keyways Housing Allocations Scheme.

It was reported that procedural processes involved in the allocation and transfer of Council properties were of great importance, alongside an understanding of the types of housing available within the Council's stock and the background criteria and circumstances of its tenants. It was heard that a number of legacy Housing policies had already been amalgamated since unitarisation with the Keyways scheme now in a position to be reviewed.

The meeting noted that demand for social housing continued to outstrip the available supply. The Council offered a single access point to good quality, affordable housing with an aim to make the application process as simple as possible. Vacant properties were advertised online through the Keyways website with prospective and existing tenants able to bid on the properties that were then allocated in accordance with the Council's existing policies and procedures. The Council also had a Housing Options service that worked to prevent homelessness and could also provide tenants with advice regarding mutual exchange of properties and the private rental sector.

The meeting noted that the aims and objective of the Keyways service were:

- To provide clear and transparent information to people who need to find a home about the social housing that is available so that they can make realistic, informed and affordable housing choices
- To support all Keyways landlords in making the best use of their housing stock in North Northamptonshire, ensuring that larger homes, specialist housing, and homes adapted for disabilities, are made available to those who need them most
- To support Keyways landlords in managing their homes effectively, by ensuring properties can be let quickly and that tenants are given the best chances of maintaining their tenancies in the long term

The panel noted that in terms of housing the Council operated within a tight legal framework, with details of Primary Legislation (Part 6 of the Housing Act as amended) highlighted and details of the eligibility and qualification criteria for Keyways applicants provided to the meeting.

Statistics were provided detailing the level of demand for social housing via the Keyways scheme, with 6395 active applications on the system as at 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 and an increase in applications of 21.7% noted for the financial year 2023 to 2024. Further details of significant correspondence levels with applicants were provided to the meeting.

The following elements of forthcoming planned changes to the housing allocations service plan were detailed

- Service restructure to meet the needs of a unitary authority

- Review of Keyways scheme informed by analysis of application and lettings data
- Implement standard nominations agreement (SLA) and review existing Local Letting Plans (LLPs)
- Commence annual review of active Keyways applications

Cllr Lyn Buckingham spoke to note the difficulties for Council staff given the demands on the service and the level of expectation among applicants. Cllr Buckingham raised the issue of auto bidding and the need for local support networks for tenants who may not be offered accommodation in their local area. In addition, the need to meet medical needs within the Council's housing stock was raised.

It was heard that whilst the Keyways policy required review, government funding levels and housing affordability would be a large factor to consider as part of the review. There remained a need to manage expectations for those applicants with lower levels of housing need, with support offered to allow entry to the private rental sector whilst ensuring safe, affordable accommodation that might meet applicant needs but not necessarily their wants. The Council continued to work closely with registered partners to provide more properties of varying sizes across the Council area and encouraged developers to provide more affordable accommodation as part of their developments.

It was heard that a registered partners forum would take place in July to consider how best to deliver housing across the Council area, with a need to work with Local Area Partnerships, healthcare services and the private sector to provide the right level of support for those in social housing.

Cllr Andy Mercer raised concerns that the homelessness duty would increase the workload on an already stretched service as a result of rising population levels.

Members considered that Keyways applicants with Band D and E eligibility would realistically face little chance of being allocated a property and should therefore be supported to secure alternative housing provision thereby reducing the pressure on the services.

The panel thanked officers for their dedication to supporting Keyways applicants and tenants in the Council's housing stock.

#### **47 Executive Forward Plan**

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

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

The forward list of items for the EAP was considered.

#### **49 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