

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

At 9.30 am on Thursday 2nd September, 2021 in the Lahnstein Room, Municipal Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering, NN15 7QX

Present:-

Members

Councillor Lloyd Bunday (Chair)
Councillor Jean Addison

Councillor Bert Jackson
Councillor Ian Jelley

Officers

Lisa Hyde – Director of Transformation
Janice Gotts – Executive Director of Finance
Adele Wylie – Director of Legal and Democratic
Geoff Kent – Assistant Director Customer Services
David Pope – Senior Committee Administrator
Fiona Hubbard – Senior Committee Administrator

20 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kirk Harrison and Cllr Richard Levell.

21 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

22 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 26th July 2021

RESOLVED that: The Service Delivery, Performance and Customers Executive Advisory Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26th July 2021 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

23 Notification of requests to address the meeting

None.

24 The Corporate Plan - Consultation on Service Delivery, Performance and Customers

Members received a report that presented for consideration relevant sections of the Council's draft Corporate Plan relating to Service Delivery, Performance and

Customers and were provided with the opportunity to comment and offer feedback to the Executive on the subject. The ultimate aim for this element of the Corporate Plan would be to provide efficient, effective and affordable services that would make a real difference to all local communities.

The panel was asked to consider what modern public services should look like. Members commented that services should be accessible to all members of the community with the option of face-to-face assistance available to those requiring it. It was noted that the ability to contact the Council without facing long waiting times was crucial, as was the setting of customer expectations at the initial point of contact.

It was noted that efficient digital service delivery would free up alternative methods of contact such as telephone and face-to-face appointments for those customers who required them. It was important that customers could have their queries resolved, or be signposted to the relevant organisation for resolution, at the initial contact.

Provide good quality and efficient services valued by our customers

Members were asked to consider draft ideas (set out below) that would evidence the Council's commitment to providing good quality and efficient services valued by customers:

1. Own responsibility for every contact received anywhere in the organisation and if we cannot help, connect you to other organisations that can
2. Work with our customers to develop quality services that are accessible to all and to make every contact count
3. Understand and care about your concerns; demonstrating through our actions that your issues matter to us
4. Be helpful, polite, friendly and treat you fairly and with respect
5. Be honest, only making promises we can deliver, and do what we say we will
6. Meet our customer service standards when we respond to you and regularly monitor and publish how well we are doing this
7. Provide clear and up to date information about our services
8. Explain our decisions and the reasons for them
9. If things go wrong, say sorry, do our best to put them right and learn from our mistakes
10. Enable customers to access more information and services online

Members provided comments as follows:

- Commitment 5 should be of increased importance
- The length of time for customers to establish initial telephone contact with a member of staff was vital, current timescales were too long
- Queries should be correctly dealt with at the initial contact

- The Council should understand that the costs of failure to provide exceptional service were not only financial but reputational
- Timescales for the resolution of customer queries had to be accurate
- Contact across the local authority needed to be joined up

Enhance the services provided at our community hubs

Members then considered how services provided at community hubs operated by the Council could be enhanced.

It was considered that community hubs should not offer a standard package or capacity of service, but rather relate directly to the needs and requirements of the community in which it was located and designed as a response to those needs. Additionally, facilities should allow communities to drive themselves by playing host to a variety of support groups and external community organisations. A mobile community hub could be beneficial to smaller or more isolated communities. Partnership working with other voluntary and public sector agencies at hubs would allow relevant queries to be handled correctly at the initial contact.

Members commented that community hubs should be able to assist in dealing with any query that would be answerable by customer services at one of the main office locations.

Value our staff and become an employer of choice

It was noted that in the post-COVID era employers including the Council had a duty to examine future working practices, with data analysis currently being undertaken in regard to equipment requirements, job types and workload for staff. It was of vital importance that service provision was not negatively impacted as a result of any changes made to working practices going forward.

Learning and development would play a key role in future working, and tools for line managers needed to be provided in order to effectively manage and support staff remotely. In addition, future accommodation requirements for the authority needed to be considered alongside flexible working arrangements.

It was noted that there were benefits and disadvantages to remote working, with positive environmental impacts from reduced journeys to work balanced against the reduced opportunity for information sharing and relationship and team building with colleagues.

Members noted that the Council should strive to become an employer of choice for the local community and further afield by offering stability and flexibility as well as the opportunity for career development and to learn new skills, including increased use of apprenticeships. Not only would such an offer assist in attracting an engaged and efficient workforce but could also offer external reputational benefits.

Use our assets, skills, knowledge and technology to make a real difference

The panel heard that making North Northamptonshire an attractive place for businesses to operate would assist in stimulating the local economy as well as furthering the growth and regeneration agenda. Promotion of assets such as local connectivity with larger urban centres, local attractions such as Wicksteed Park, listed architecture and national sporting facilities would be a positive way to promote the local area, not only to businesses but potential new residents.

It was noted that this aspect of the Corporate Plan would link in with the Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel.

It was requested that an additional bullet point be added to the draft document stating:

- Capture and use data to positively improve outcomes

It was further requested that reference to the “county” be removed from bullet point 3(iv).

Robust Finance and Performance Management

The panel stated that it was of paramount importance that services residents paid for offered exceptional value for money. Positive, proactive communication with residents was key to providing a greater understanding that the Council used available resources for the greater good of local communities.

There was a need for increased publicising of capital investments to evidence that the authority was using its finances to achieve the most positive outcomes possible. In addition, a much greater emphasis on local service procurement was required, with increased weighting of localism, added social value and environmental benefits to be given in the assessment of contracts to be awarded.

Ongoing financial monitoring by the Executive and Scrutiny Committees showed that the Council was committed to achieving positive financial performance.

Key Tasks

Key tasks required to achieve and deliver the Corporate Plan elements outlined above were provided to the panel alongside Key Measures of Success.

Members stated that a Customer Experience Strategy co-produced with customers was of paramount importance and requested that partner organisations also be involved in the process. Additionally, it was requested that the “People/Workforce Development Strategy” be expanded to include member development.

The panel requested that “good decision making” be removed from the Key Measure of Success as this was considered to be subjective. Members also requested that “low staff turnover” be removed as it was not considered that this was relevant.

The panel wished to understand how customer satisfaction levels would be benchmarked and noted that externally focussed measures of success such as a sense of local pride among staff and residents were of importance.

It was heard that the feedback as set out above would be collated and fed into the draft Corporate Plan, with an intention to bring the draft document back to a future meeting of the panel.

25 Executive Forward Plan and Panel Work Programme

Members received the Executive Forward Plan and the work programme for the panel and noted upcoming items for both.

It was requested that the Council's internal draft forward plan be circulated with the agenda pack for future meetings of the panel.

26 Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 11.35am.

Chair

Date