

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

Briefing Note for Overview and Co-ordinating Scrutiny Committee

Newcastle-under-Lyme Co-operative Strategy 2013-2015: Update

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BACKGROUND

Members will recall that the above Strategy was agreed at Cabinet in February 2013.

The Strategy provides the framework for the Borough Council to develop, in conjunction with others, a Co-operative Council in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The development of a co-operative council is one of the key priorities as set out in the current Council Plan.

This note updates Members on developments since then and also sets out a series of proposals for further work around the concept.

The national development of a co-operative approach to local government has been set in train due to the various issues currently faced by the public sector including reducing resources and rising expectations from service users and citizens generally.

The co-operative approach argues that traditional approaches to governance and service delivery are no longer fit for purpose and argue instead that new models of co-production need to be explored which mean a different role both for organisations and for people.

The Strategy sought to develop these ideas and translate them into a set of core concepts for Newcastle-under-Lyme. These concepts emphasise the desire of the Borough Council to use its role as a leading body within the community to ensure that citizens, partners and staff work together to improve the borough.

These concepts are listed as the 'five Es' in the Strategy: -

- **Encouraging collaborative working** – developing partnership working further and deeper, making it a critical part of how the Council operates;
- **Enhancing citizen/customer experiences** – co-operating with citizens/customers by making their experiences in doing business with the Council as simple and straightforward as possible;
- **Engagement with others** – developing consultation and communication further to ensure that as many people as possible know what we are doing and why;
- **Establishing change** – to be clear about what change we want and why and how we will deliver it – ensuring that any change is fair; and
- **Empowering stakeholders** - people taking charge of their own lives and being part of decisions about their own area

In addition to developing the Strategy, the values of the Council have also been amended to reflect the co-operative council approach. The Council's values are now:

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- We will put residents at the centre of everything we do
- We will work co-operatively with our partners and communities
- We will be open and transparent in all our decision making
- We will be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things

Since the Strategy was agreed, a number of changes, proposals and projects have been brought forward to begin to bring these co-operative concepts and values to life for the Council. These include the following: -

- Building on changes to our partnership working by developing new links with areas such as health and using co-location to further partnership work in key areas such as anti-social behaviour
- Further developing LAPs and working with town/parish councils with a view to encouraging devolution where possible
- Enhancing consultation work where possible and where relevant
- Setting up a partner workshop on investigating the impact of welfare reform
- Developing the concept of the 'customer journey' – analysing where people do business with the council with a view to ensuring that the process is as simple and straightforward as possible
- Inclusion of the new values in the Council Plan for 2013-2016
- Developing an Employer Supported Volunteering scheme for the Council's staff to volunteer locally
- Work with staff, including a conference on the issue in May 2013

Underpinning these areas of work is the implementation of a new performance management framework, which emphasises the delivery of improvements against outcomes not outputs and recognises the need for the Council to work with others to achieve improvements in key outcome areas.

Finally, in terms of developments since the Strategy was produced, the Council has become part of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network. The Network is made up of councils who subscribe to the principles of co-operative working and delivery, namely: -

- Working with local people to create solutions
- Using concepts like collective action and co-operation as the foundation for developing solutions
- Re-balancing power between public services and citizens to deliver better outcomes and manage demand on public services

The Network formally launches at the LGA Conference on 3rd July 2013.

ISSUES

Despite the areas already covered and the development in a number of areas, a number of other actions need to be considered by the Council.

These actions have come from a number of sources, but mostly from the LGA Peer Challenge process in October 2012 and also discussions at the Overview and

Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee in March 2013, when the Co-operative Strategy was discussed.

These actions include the following: -

- Engaging with other stakeholders on what being a co-operative council means – this process has begun in part in terms of discussions with partners, elected Members and LAPs, but more may need to be done?
- Developing a charter, including minimum standards for the co-operative council – it is suggested that the ‘five Es’ could form the basis for this?
- Enhancement of the customer experience/journey – work has already begun on this via an EMT sponsored programme board, but should it be done in a different way?
- Embedding the co-operative council concept into consultation and decision-making, including setting out the behaviours and attitudes expected of all stakeholders (including the use of a code of conduct) – this may include staff training and also opening up the decision making process currently in place for the Council (including the Constitution)?
- Further development of support for Members, staff and communities – this is an area of work which has started in some areas, but may need a more co-ordinated strategic approach in key areas?
- LAPs to be a champion of the co-operative approach – the approach has been started with LAP Chairs, but may need a more intensive session around key concepts such as commissioning and devolution, for example?
- Development of a model of co-production – in other words, asking citizens to do something in terms of delivering a service – giving something back. This can be done in any number of ways, but the Third Sector Commissioning Framework could be used to achieve it, for example
- Relating the co-operative council concept to the performance management framework – how does it improve things and how can this improvement be measured?

It is therefore suggested that elected Members form a view on these issues and the next steps in terms of developing them under the co-operative council heading.

PROPOSALS

It is proposed that Cabinet consider this note and take into account the work done around developing a co-operative council and the work which needs to be done.

It is therefore proposed that Members review the work already done and examines the developing areas of work.

As said, the last report on the co-operative council concept went to the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee in March 2013. It may be that the Co-ordinating Committee consider this note at their meeting on 24th June 2013, prior to Cabinet on 17th July 2013.

Any discussion, therefore, could be focused on the above issues and where work could be done next.