

Agenda item: OC 107/21

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To review the completed safeguarding audit requested by this committee, due to awareness of an increase in safeguarding concerns and the question of increased demand on officer time. And, to propose a working model is developed in response to its findings for the agreement of Full Council to implement into WCC practice.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the committee notes this report.**
- 2. That the committee reflects on and contributes to the actions suggested in the audit.**
- 3. That the committee recommends the actions from this audit form the basis of a working model to be developed by the DSL/ CP lead, Clerk and senior management team.**
- 4. That the committee recommends that the said model (to be implemented into WCC wide operations) be submitted for agreement by Full Council, for the purpose of strengthening WCC safeguarding procedures.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Over the past few months, the level of safeguarding concerns and the time spent on this has increased significantly. This is felt to be linked to the current pandemic, the closure of some services or restricted access to other elements (e.g. schools closed / no social worker home visits).

Increasingly, issues are coming from other officers, councillors or members of the public and being managed by the Safeguarding Lead. It has been agreed that this is the correct way to manage safeguarding and should continue, but there may be a need for additional resources, either in the short term or over a longer period, to ensure that we work to best practice and that other aspects of the organisation are not neglected.

In response to the audit, reflection on the demands of safeguarding highlighted within the organisation alongside the actions recommended (initial action plan) should form the basis of a working model to be developed and presented to Full Council for agreement to implementation into council wide practice.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Potential costs are likely to implement a secure database, record, store and measure digital platform. However, this is likely to be integrated into the database system already being explored for the Advice & Wellbeing and Youth services. In addition,

dependent on council and SLT recommendation, the DSL/CP Lead may need to offset some youth work duties to youth support workers, in order to manage the proposed model of practice.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

- Officer time to undertake the development of the working model, updating processes and implementation of the model into council practice.
- Further demands on all officer's time for training.
- A demand on support staff to take on delegated task in order to release the Youth Manager/ DSL to effectively manage and sustain the agreed model of practice.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Safeguarding is an essential part of our organisation, especially due to the scope and nature of the services that we provide. It is essential that this sits at the heart of induction, ongoing training will be necessary. Appropriate consideration and importance be attributed and suitable and relevant resources are allocated to this area.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Audit February 2021.
- The Safeguarding Policy is available for review at <https://www.woughtoncommunitycouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Safeguarding-and-Child-Protection-Policy.pdf>

AUTHOR

Tash Darling – Youth Manager, DSL & Child Protection lead.

Safeguarding Audit February 2021

Author: Tash Darling (Youth Manager, DSL & Child Protection Lead)

Completing a Safeguarding audit has proven a complex and difficult task. The reason for this is that firstly, safeguarding is so inherently part of the youth work culture, that it is difficult to be clear on where youth work ends and safeguarding begins in many cases. It makes recording outcomes tricky. Secondly, Safeguarding in our setting does not naturally lend itself to a quantitative measure, rather a qualitative overview. With this in mind this report will aim to provide a clear overview of the types of cases we have, how we manage them, what kinds of outcomes we are working towards and those gained. Alongside how and where we typically escalate cases to and will try to provide some indication of the time spent by our officers on Safeguarding.

In addition, this report will offer recommendations to act as the basis of an action plan to ensure we have robust safeguarding and Child protection protocols & practice in place.

AT A GLANCE: I encourage reading of the audit in its entirety, however, to offer and bulleted summary for succinct reflection, please see below:

- WCC has outstanding safeguarding and Child Protection practices in place that are working well.
- There are areas for improvement. These are within our capabilities to improve and no area for improvement suggested any direct level of risk for our officers, residents, or councillors.
- It has been illustrated that safeguarding is deeply imbedded into the culture of our service delivery, especially the Youth team (which is good practice) However, as such we do not have accurate numerical measures of cases. This can be improved but may not be necessary.
- Safeguarding should and does pose a demand on officers' time, most notably the Youth Manager/DSL's.
- The greatest categories of need/risk in our parish are what appear to be neglect and domestic violence. *it is important to note that neglect is often (not always) seen as a result of the complexities that accompany poverty, rather than a carers lack of regard for the child/ young person.
- There has been an increase in safeguarding cases during the lockdowns. It is expected there may be a residual effect as we emerge but with schools and social services returning, it is expected the numbers may return to previous levels.
- The pathways we have in place for escalation are well known by specific staff and work well. These could be better disseminated.
- There is no denying that the early intervention style of support we offer in the community (Youth & Community teams) is hugely impacting our residents in a positive way and reducing the need for escalation or increased severity in the cases we see.

- Identified areas of need have been incorporated into a first draft action plan, suggested herein. On reflection by the committee, these should be taken forward to develop a working model to be implemented into WCC infrastructure.
- The DSL has responsibility across the areas of Child Protection, Safeguarding Staff and Service users, Policy and protocol development & implementation, Safe recruitment and risk assessments. It has proven impossible to report how much officer time these elements take. For the most these are periodic reviews and not ongoing. A safeguarding or child protection case can span many weeks, even months. In acute situations can be consuming of all officer time for 2-3 days and more generally each case may take 1-2 hours to investigate and refer on. Safeguarding & Child Protection always take priority over other tasks and as such some work is delegated to youth staff, so their time is also impacted indirectly.
- WCC has been party to two serious case reviews in the last year, in both cases our practice was found to be excellent and beyond reproach.
- NOTE- WCC is not typical of Parish councils or community organisations and we do offer an 'above & beyond' service. Council may choose to consider if we offer more than we should. We know we offer more than is 'required' of us. The recommendation of the Youth Manager & DSL is that we should continue to strive for excellence. It is our level of service which sets us apart and best serves our residents. Furthermore, holding to account statutory services for their shortcomings through the correct channels whilst supporting our residents in the interim is what improves the living experience for Woughton residents and undeniably reduced the escalation to higher levels of risk and harm.

In trying to provide a numerical overview, it can be reported that in an average month WCC as a whole:

- Almost all the cases the wellbeing and advice team become aware of are potential safeguarding cases. All are explored, evaluated and actioned at source by those officers. Up to 40% will be escalated to IAPT, an existing Social Worker, GPs, and adult services directly. The majority require early intervention support so they can go on to access help for their more complex needs. Any that on investigation are categorised as 'at risk' are flagged to the DSL, on average 2-5 per month. These are each reviewed in full by the DSL and advice given to officers to action or escalate as advised. It has been necessary for the DSL to become directly involved with the client and case on just 6 occasions in the last year.
- For the youth team the tables below will illustrate the frequency, severity, and pathways of our cases.

Provided here is a summarised overview of a typical week from pre-lockdown and a summarised overview of this current week to provide some context.

Internal officer referral	External referral	DSL investigation	Other WCC officers involved	Escalated and to where	Outcome

Youth	Q	✓		MASH	CSC assessment. Police prosecution
Advice		✓	✓	MASH	CFP assessment/ involvement
	CAN	✓		School/ MASH	Court order
	Councillor	✓	✓	School/ MKC Housing	Taken on by school DSL
Youth		✓	✓	GP/ CFP	Support plan activated
	Family centre	✓		CFP	

As previously mentioned, so much of what is done can be seen a purely within the culture of practice for the youth team and indeed, the community team, so in order to provide a more accurate reflection of need, we could add to this summary that in the same week: Youth staff noticed & recorded:

- 5 out of 8 young people attending the Netherfield Youth club specifically reported they were hungry/ hadn't had dinner (they are with us 5-7pm)
- 1 Tinkers Bridge young person spoke of family fallouts at home and angry parents
- 4 Young parents & 1 Beanhill family required baby basic referrals (Tash)
- 2 young parents & Netherfield family required foodbank referrals (Tash)
- 2 young parents required 1 to 1 consultation in regard debt and mental health issues, respectively. (Tash)
- 2 young people at youth groups were noted to be unclean, suspecting one having headlice and with unlaundered clothing (one household)
- 4 under 12's were noted to leave youth clubs without adult supervision (after 7pm in the dark)

Each of these incidences could be indicators of safeguarding issues. Every one was noticed through vigilant but standard practice, recorded and either followed up with targeted conversation and to ascertain context and evaluate a need for additional support. All were reviewed by the youth manager/ DSL. In each of these cases the initial intervention was sufficient or further monitoring within the setting was planned.

NB: these would not currently be recorded as safeguarding cases on our session evaluation sheets. One of these cases went on to require a MASH referral to CFP support This would be recorded under our current recording system. The reality is that potential for safeguarding concerns are not equal to proven safeguarding issues and often in our practice, the early intervention, signposting and ongoing support prevents the need to escalate cases. Although this is the majority, it requires, knowledge, training and consistent good practice. This is time consuming and a large part of what the youth team do as a matter of course. It is impossible to genuinely gauge the time spent by officers on these elements.

Summary of week commencing 22nd February 2021, during Lockdown.

Internal officer referral	External referral	DSL investigation	Other WCC officers involved	Escalated and to where	Outcome
Youth		✓		MASH	CSC family assessment & mother no longer staying out at night
Advice		✓	✓	Legal advice & CSC	Positive development but not yet complete
	MKC Social Worker	✓		From MASH/ CSC as part of serious case review, WCC youth team to maintain support to prevent further harm	DSL supporting the monitoring process as youth service only service 'At Risk' YP is engaging with
Advice	Healthwatch MK	✓	✓	From Healthwatch MK to Youth team	Supporting the children in a single parent family to access support as mother suffering with mental health issues.
	MKC Social worker	✓		From CSC to WCC Youth Team for support	DSL supporting young person and Providing 'Escape the Trap' programme over coming weeks. To prevent further abuse and the removal of the unborn child into care.
	School & CFP worker	✓	✓	School requesting WCC Youth support	Special needs parent has accepted debt support and is coming round to

					the idea of accepting CFP input to prevent CSC assessment
Youth	Q	✓		School/ parent	YP has a clearer understanding of their rights. The school & parents are better informed and the YP as a result is no longer at risk of injury or harm.
Youth	Family centre	✓		CFP	Family agreed to self-refer and now accessing support

These cases are current so not necessarily at their final outcome. On the whole, cases are being raised at a later stage and are more serious. We suspect this is due to and evidenced by the lesser amount of early intervention work happening, due to the team not seeing open access children & youth as we usually would. It is also notable that the WCC youth team are being sought out to support MKC Children’s Social Care dept, School DSL’s and MKC CFP workers, as we are able to offer youth work practices, they either cannot in lockdown or that the individuals will not engage with their offer but will with us. This was a fairly typical week for the DSL and additional time was spent on a serious case review learning event and completing this audit. But also relatively quiet week for lockdown in that the youth team/ DSL alongside the above only processed 1 Foodbank and 3 Baby basic referrals and begun work with

- 1 young person to learn skills to combat neglect, to ensure retains care of their 1 yr old son.
- 1 young pregnant girl at risk of domestic abuse.

In order to ascertain whether our safeguarding systems are adequate, The DSL/ CP Officer has implemented a Safeguarding tool, checklist based on the NSPCC Safeguarding standards <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1079/safeguarding-standards-and-guidance.pdf> Working methodically through each of the 6 elements: Grading them as an **Identified** need where we need to implement. **Satisfactory** where we have good practice in place. And **Developing** where some improvements could improve our practice. NB: The need to develop a better training model and resources has recently been identified and having now been created has been transitioned to a satisfactory level, noting training is to be completed by all in the coming weeks.

Safeguarding Element	Specific Safeguarding Practice	Evaluation	Notes
Safer Recruitment	Safer recruitment policy statement	Satisfactory	
	Safer recruitment process	Satisfactory	Role appropriate variance
	Barring / DBS checks	Satisfactory	
	Induction & Training process	Developing	No new starters to trial
	Ongoing supervisions (1 to 1s, appraisals & external support)	Satisfactory	? are all staff aware external professional supervision is available
Protecting Children, Young People & Vulnerable adults	Safeguarding & Child protection policy	Satisfactory	
	Lead responsibility for safeguarding	Satisfactory	
	Safeguarding/ CP training for staff and volunteers	Satisfactory	
	Behaviour Code	Satisfactory	
	Promoting safeguarding to all	Developing	
	Raising concerns	Developing	All officers with responsibility are well versed. Not necessary for all but will address in training for all
	Child protection referrals	Satisfactory	
	Allegations against adults	Satisfactory	
	Allegations against child or young person	Satisfactory	
	Whistleblowing procedure	Satisfactory	
	Auditing safeguarding arrangements	Developing	This is our first
Safer Activities	Risk Assessments	Satisfactory	It is impossible to enforce for open access projects but every effort is made
	Parental consent	Satisfactory	
	Registration forms	Satisfactory	
& Working conditions	Emergency information	Satisfactory	
	First Aid	Satisfactory	
	Reporting accidents	Satisfactory	
	Complying with regulations	Satisfactory	
	Adult to Child ratios	Satisfactory	
	Children & young people are adequately supervised	Satisfactory	
	Equal Opportunities policy & procedures	Satisfactory	
	Protection and promotion of diversity & difference	Satisfactory	
	Policy & procedure awareness for staff & volunteers	Developing	

	Anti-bullying policies & procedures	Developing	? covered by Equal Op's
	Employee handbook	Satisfactory	
	Codes of behaviour	Satisfactory	
	Whistleblowing procedure	Satisfactory	
Recording information	Policy & Procedures for Child Protection records	Identified	? covered by GDPR policy
	GDPR policy	Satisfactory	
	Storage and Access to records- Who/ How	Identified	
	Service user's access to records	Developing	
	Service user's aware of why/ how we keep records	Developing	
	Staff & Volunteers trained in record keeping	Developing	

Safeguarding Tool Checklist Continued:

Sharing information	Guidelines on sharing information	Identified	
	Consent for sharing information	Developing	
	Early help records	Identified	
	Measuring impact of early help	Identified	

Based on this audit, we can reflect that we have some outstanding Safeguarding practices in place and that the areas highlighted for development do not raise any concerns in terms of risk to service user or officer's rights and safety. Rather they relate most specifically to how we record, measure and share information.

The already identified and actioned need to better train officers & volunteers alongside the areas of improvement are reflective of the organisations desire to adapt and strive for excellence in a changing landscape of service delivery. All are within our capabilities to improve.

Furthermore, the audit and this report has, perhaps, highlighted a greater need to acknowledge the essential part Safeguarding & Child Protection plays within our organisation, the additional demand our good practice places on officers and to ensure we are not lax in perpetuating a robust culture of Safeguarding at WCC.

Recommended Actions/ First draft action plan

Which can be developed by the DSL, Clerk and senior management team into a working model (to be implemented into practice) at the request of the Operations committee.

- Ensure Safeguarding & Child Protection policy is maintained: updated as minor local changes occur, committee informed and is reviewed in full in accordance with Operations Manager's direction.
- Ensure related policies are maintained and reviewed in accordance with Operations Manager's direction.
- Develop a one-page document of what is expected for officers from recruitment, through induction and during employment in relation to Safeguarding, that can be implemented organisation wide.

- Create a crib sheet for easy case assessment, management and escalation, available to all officers.
- Ensure annual external training is carried out for DSL and deputy.
- Increase one deputy to two: currently Gemma Simmons, to include Sue Varley.
- DSL to create and deliver, setting specific, safeguarding and Child Protection training on induction for all employees.
- DSL to create and deliver, setting specific, safeguarding and Child Protection refresher training to officers annually.
- Enable the DSL time and support within their role to manage Safeguarding & Child Protection effectively.
- Implement a robust, secure process and digital space for recording, monitoring, and accessing records. Create a policy if necessary.
- Develop an agreed framework of what is to be recorded and implement into policy & procedures.
- Provide clear lines of supervision for all those managing Safeguarding cases and offer external professional supervision to DSL periodically and those for whom it is deemed necessary.

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To amend the current disciplinary procedure in the staff handbook and the disciplinary policy.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Committee notes the report.
2. That the Committee agrees to the amendments and to adopt the new procedure.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Our current disciplinary procedure is one that has been inherited from our previous HR provider. The current procedure is as follows:

- 1) Disciplinary action taken against you will be based on the following procedure:

OFFENCE	1st OCCASION	2nd OCCASION	3rd OCCASION	4th OCCASION
UNSATISFACTORY CONDUCT	Formal verbal warning	Written warning	Final written warning	Dismissal
MISCONDUCT	Written warning	Final written warning	Dismissal	
SERIOUS MISCONDUCT	Final written warning	Dismissal		
GROSS MISCONDUCT	Dismissal			

I am suggesting the following amendment. ACAS policies suggest that once a warning is written even if this is informal becomes a **formal** warning. Whilst informal mediation, conversation and target setting is always beneficial in early stages of any concern this is something that can be advised in staff one to ones and appraisals. However, the disciplinary process is used for disciplining an act which is not in-line with WCC policy and procedure. Therefore I am suggesting that Unsatisfactory conduct adopts the widely used 'three step' process, first, final and then dismissal – the same as that for misconduct. All other stages remain the same.

1) Disciplinary action taken against you will be based on the following procedure:

OFFENCE	1st OCCASION	2nd OCCASION	3rd OCCASION
UNSATISFACTORY CONDUCT	First Warning (written)	Final warning (written)	Dismissal
MISCONDUCT	First Warning (written)	Final warning (written)	Dismissal
SERIOUS MISCONDUCT	Final warning (written)	Dismissal	
GROSS MISCONDUCT	Dismissal		

The inclusion of first informal warning has therefore been removed from clause three.

3) If a disciplinary penalty is imposed it will be in line with the procedure outlined above, which may encompass a written warning, final written warning, or dismissal, and full details will be given to you.

G) Disciplinary Authority – the structure has therefore changed for ‘other employees’ the original states below:

	PERSON AUTHORISED TO TAKE DISCIPLINARY ACTION IN THE CASE OF:	
	MANAGEMENT/SENIOR OFFICERS	OTHER EMPLOYEES
Formal verbal warning	Line Manager	Line Manager
Written warning	Line Manager	Operations Manager
Final written warning	Line Manager	Council Manager
Dismissal	Policy and Resources Committee	Operations Manager/Council Manager

This new structure allows for consistency and also a fresh independent set of eyes at each stage which allows for ‘fair’ treatment. I have also amended dismissal for Senior managers to sit at the Operations Committee this seems more fitting for issues such as HR, and employee dismissal as the previously quoted Policy and Resources committee now sits as Finance and Resources.

The operation of the disciplinary procedure contained in the previous section, is based on the following authority for the various levels of disciplinary action. However, the list does not prevent a higher level of seniority progressing any action at whatever stage of the disciplinary process.



	PERSON AUTHORISED TO TAKE DISCIPLINARY ACTION IN THE CASE OF:	
	MANAGEMENT/SENIOR OFFICERS	OTHER EMPLOYEES
Written warning	Line Manager	Line Manager
Final written warning	Line Manager	Operations Manager
Dismissal	Operations Committee	Council Manager



H) Period of warnings

The highlighted clause has been removed from handbook.

H) PERIOD OF WARNINGS

1) Formal verbal warning

A formal verbal warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a three month period.

2) Written warning

A written warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a six month period.

3) Final written warning

A final written warning will normally be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after a twelve month period.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Staff will be advised of amendment once ratified and asked to read and acknowledge change to procedure.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

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Woughton Community Council

Disciplinary Procedure

These procedures are provided for information only and do not form part of your contract of employment, although these procedures may be referred to in your Contract of Employment (or Terms and Conditions).

Disciplinary procedure

The primary aim of this procedure is to provide a framework within which managers can work with employees to maintain satisfactory performance standards and to ensure improvement where necessary.

It is our policy to ensure that concerns over performance and/or conduct are dealt with fairly and that steps are taken to establish the facts and to give employees the opportunity to respond at a hearing before any formal action is taken.

The rules set standards of performance and behaviour whilst the procedures are designed to help promote fairness and order in the treatment of individuals. It is our aim that the rules and procedures should emphasise and encourage improvement in the conduct of individuals, where they are failing to meet the required standards, and not be seen merely as a means of punishment. We reserve the right to amend these rules and procedures where appropriate.

Every effort will be made to ensure that any action taken under this procedure is fair, with you being given the opportunity to state your case and appeal against any decision that you consider to be unjust.

Disciplinary Rules

It is not practicable to specify all disciplinary rules or offences that may result in disciplinary action, as they may vary depending on the nature of the work. In addition to the specific examples of unsatisfactory conduct, misconduct and gross misconduct shown in this handbook, a breach of other specific conditions, procedures, rules etc. that are contained within this handbook or that have otherwise been made known to you, will also result in this procedure being used to deal with such matters.

Rules covering unsatisfactory conduct and misconduct.

(these are examples only and not an exhaustive list)

1) You will be liable to disciplinary action if you are found to have acted in any of the following ways:

- a) failure to abide by the general health and safety rules and procedures;
- b) smoking in designated non smoking areas;
- c) persistent absenteeism and/or lateness;
- d) unsatisfactory standards or output of work;
- e) rudeness towards residents, members of the public or other employees, objectionable or insulting behaviour, harassment, bullying or bad language;

- f) failure to devote the whole of your time, attention and abilities to our organisation and its affairs during your normal working hours;
- g) failure to carry out all reasonable instructions or follow our rules and procedures;
- h) unauthorised use or negligent damage or loss of our property;
- i) unauthorised use of e-mail and internet;
- j) failure to report immediately any damage to property or premises caused by you;
- k) use of our vehicles without approval or the private use of our commercial vehicles without authorisation;
- l) failure to report any incident whilst driving our vehicles, whether or not personal injury or vehicle damage occurs;
- m) if your work involves driving, failure to report immediately any type of driving conviction, or any summons which may lead to your conviction;
- n) carrying unauthorised passengers in our vehicles or the use of our vehicles for personal gain;
- o) loss of driving licence where driving on public roads forms an essential part of the duties of the post; and
- p) failure to abide by the rules and regulations issued by the Community Council.

Gross Misconduct

- 1) Where one of the unsatisfactory conduct or misconduct rules has been broken and if, upon investigation, it is shown to be due to your extreme carelessness or has a serious or substantial effect upon our operation or reputation, you may be issued with a final written warning in the first instance.
- 2) You may receive a final written warning as the first course of action, if, in an alleged gross misconduct disciplinary matter, upon investigation, there is shown to be some level of mitigation resulting in it being treated as an offence just short of dismissal.

Rules covering Gross misconduct.

Occurrences of gross misconduct are very rare because the penalty is dismissal without notice and without any previous warning being issued. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of examples of gross misconduct.

However, any behaviour or negligence resulting in a fundamental breach of contractual terms that irrevocably destroys the trust and confidence necessary to continue the employment relationship will constitute gross misconduct. Examples of offences that will normally be deemed as gross misconduct include serious instances of:

- a) theft or fraud;

- b) physical violence or bullying;
- c) deliberate damage to property;
- d) deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination or harassment;
- e) possession, or being under the influence, of drugs* at work;

*For this purpose, the term 'drugs' is used to describe **both** illegal drugs and other psychoactive (mind-altering) substances which may or may not be illegal.

- f) breach of health and safety rules that endangers the lives of, or may cause serious injury to, employees or any other person;
- g) maltreatment of residents; by neglect, omission and/or commission;
- h) failure to report an incident of abuse, or suspected abuse of a resident;
- i) abandoning duty without notification or sleeping on duty or Community Council/residents premises;
- j) acceptance of gifts & hospitality in contravention of the Bribery Act 2010;
- k) failure to give notice of any pecuniary interest of which you are aware, in a contract which has been, or is proposed to be, entered into by the organisation;
- l) wilful misrepresentation at the time of appointment including:
 - 1. Previous positions held
 - 2. Qualifications held
 - 3. Falsification of date of birth
 - 4. Declaration of health
 - 5. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction/caution within the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act;
- m) wilful misrepresentation at any time during employment in connection with qualifications held;
- n) deliberate disclosure of privileged confidential information to unauthorised people;
- o) negligent or deliberate failure to comply with the requirements of the organisation's policy & procedure concerning medicines;
- p) working whilst contravening an enactment, or breach of rules laid down by statutory bodies;

- q) any act or omission constituting serious or gross negligence/or dereliction of duty;
- r) consumption of alcohol on a residents or Community Council premises prior to and/or during hours of duty;
- s) failure to attend or gain access to visits and not reporting to Manager/ on call; and
- t) conviction for a criminal offence which clearly indicates unsuitability for the role employed to undertake.

(The above examples are illustrative and do not form an exhaustive list.)

Disabilities

Consideration will be given to whether poor performance or cause for concern may be related to a disability and, if so, whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to your working arrangements, including changing your duties or providing additional equipment or training. We may also consider making adjustments to this procedure in appropriate cases.

If you wish to discuss this or inform us of any medical condition you consider relevant, you should contact your line manager or the Head of Business Support.

Confidentiality

Our aim is to deal with performance matters sensitively and with due respect for the privacy of any individuals involved. All employees must treat as confidential any information communicated to them in connection with a matter which is subject to this disciplinary procedure.

You, and anyone accompanying you (including witnesses), must not make electronic recordings of any meetings or hearings conducted under this procedure. You will normally be told the names of any witnesses whose evidence is relevant to your capability hearing, unless we believe that a witness's identity should remain confidential.

Notification of a Disciplinary hearing

If we consider that there are grounds for taking formal action over alleged disciplinary issue, you may be required to attend a disciplinary hearing.

An impartial investigator will be allocated to the case, and you will be asked to attend an investigation interview, this is merely an evidence gathering exercise. It is an opportunity for you to answer and respond to the allegation(s) in your own words. This meeting will be formally minuted, upon conclusion of the investigative interview the investigator must review all evidence submitted to the case alongside your responses and reasons. The investigator should submit a conclusion report of their findings to the individual who will carry out the disciplinary hearing. The investigator may conclude **no further action needs to be taken** or they may recommend that the disciplinary procedure should be continued (and they must provide ample reason for this.)

The investigative interview is used as on an evidence based and factual basis, opinions or assumptions are **not permitted** to be included in the report or used as any reasoning towards their recommendation.

We will notify you in writing of our concerns, the reasons for those concerns, and the likely outcome if we decide after the hearing that your performance has been unsatisfactory. We will also include the following where appropriate:

- A summary of relevant information gathered as part of any investigation;
- A copy of any relevant documents which will be used at the disciplinary hearing;
- A copy of any relevant witness statements, except where a witness's identity is to be kept confidential, in which case we will give you as much information as possible while maintaining confidentiality.

We will give you written notice of the date, time and place of the disciplinary hearing. The hearing will be held as soon as reasonably practicable, but you will be given a reasonable amount of time, usually 2 to 5 working days, to prepare your case based on the information we have given you.

Right to be accompanied at hearings

You may bring a companion to any disciplinary hearing or appeal hearing under this procedure. The companion may be a work colleague or trade union representative. You must tell the manager conducting the hearing who your chosen companion is, in good time before the hearing. Your companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up your case, but will not be allowed to answer questions on your behalf. You may confer privately with your companion at any time during the hearing.

A companion is allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay but no-one is obliged to act as a companion if they do not wish to do so.

If your choice of companion is unreasonable, we may require you to choose someone else, for example:

- If in our opinion your companion may have a conflict of interest or may prejudice the hearing; or
- If your companion works at another site and someone reasonably suitable is available at the site at which you work; or
- If your companion is unavailable at the time a hearing is scheduled and will not be available for more than 5 working days.

Procedure at disciplinary hearings

If you or your companion cannot attend the hearing you should inform us immediately and we will usually arrange an alternative time. You must make every effort to attend the hearing, and failure to attend without good reason may be treated as misconduct in itself. If you fail to attend without good reason, or are persistently unable to do so (for example, for health reasons), we may have to take a decision based on the available evidence.

The hearing will normally be held by your line manager or a more senior manager and may be attended by the Council Manager or a member of the Councillor Group (usually Chair of Operations, Chair of Council or Council Leader) if available.

You may ask relevant witnesses to appear at the hearing, provided you give us sufficient advance notice to arrange their attendance. You will be given the opportunity to respond to any information given by a witness. However, you will not normally be permitted to cross-examine witnesses unless, in exceptional circumstances, we decide that a fair hearing could

not be held otherwise. The aims of a disciplinary hearing will usually include:

- Setting out the required standards that we believe you may have failed to meet, and going through any relevant evidence that we have gathered;
- Allowing you to ask questions, present evidence, call witnesses, respond to evidence and make representations;
- establishing the likely causes of concern including any reasons why any measures taken so far have not led to the required improvement;
- Identifying whether there are further measures, such as additional training or supervision, which may improve performance;
- Where appropriate, discussing targets for improvement and a time-scale for review.

If dismissal is a possibility, establishing whether there is any likelihood of a significant improvement being made within a reasonable time and whether there is any practical alternative to dismissal, such as redeployment.

A hearing may be adjourned if we need to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at the hearing. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the hearing is reconvened. We will inform you in writing of our decision and our reasons for it, usually within 5 working days of the capability hearing. Where possible we will also explain this information to you in person.

Stage 1 hearing: first written warning

Following a Stage 1 disciplinary hearing, if we decide that there has been evidence of unsatisfactory or misconduct, we will give you a first written warning, setting out:

- The areas in which you have not met the required performance standards;
- Targets for improvement;
- Any measures, such as additional training or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
- A period for review;
- The consequences of failing to improve within the review period, or of further unsatisfactory performance.

A first written warning may be authorised by a manager.

The warning will normally remain active for 12 months from the end of the review period, after which time it will be disregarded as active, but will be kept on file for reference.

Stage 2 hearing: final written warning

If further instances of unsatisfactory conduct, misconduct or gross misconduct occur, or the issue from the first stage does not improve within the review period set out in a first written warning, while your first written warning is still active, we may decide to hold a Stage 2 disciplinary hearing. We will send you written notification as set out above.

Following a Stage 2 disciplinary hearing, if we decide that there is evidence for further action as outlined in the rules above, we will give you a final written warning, setting out:

- The areas in which you have not met the required performance and/or conduct

standards;

- Targets for improvement;
- Any measures, such as additional training or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
- A period for review; and
- The consequences of failing to improve within the review period, or of further unsatisfactory performance.

A final written warning may be authorised by a senior manager.

A final written warning will normally remain active for 12 months from the end of the review period. After the active period, the warning will remain permanently on your personnel file but will be disregarded in deciding the outcome of future disciplinary proceedings.

Your performance will be monitored during the review period and we will write to inform you of the outcome:

- If your line manager is satisfied with your performance, no further action will be taken;
- If your line manager is not satisfied, the matter may be progressed to a Stage 3 disciplinary hearing; or
- If the manager feels that there has been a substantial but insufficient improvement, the review period may be extended.

Stage 3 hearing: dismissal or redeployment

We may decide to hold a Stage 3 disciplinary hearing if we have reason to believe:

- Your performance has not improved sufficiently within the review period set out in a final written warning;
- Your performance is unsatisfactory while a final written warning is still active; or
- If there are further instances of unsatisfactory conduct, misconduct or gross misconduct – this does not have to be relating to the previous disciplinary issue, any instance of non-compliance will result in next stage disciplinary
- Your performance has been grossly negligent (gross misconduct) such as to warrant dismissal without the need for a final written warning.

We will send you written notification of the hearing as set out above.

Following the hearing, if we find that your performance is unsatisfactory, we may consider a range of options including:

- Dismissing you;
- Redeploying you into another suitable job at the same or (if your contract permits) a lower grade;
- Extending an active final written warning and setting a further review period (in exceptional cases where we believe a substantial improvement is likely within the review

- period);
- Giving a final written warning (where no final written warning is currently active).

The decision may be authorised by the Operations Manager, Council Manager or, in exceptional circumstances, a member of the Council.

Dismissal will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice, unless your performance has been so negligent as to amount to gross misconduct, in which case we may dismiss you without notice or any pay in lieu.

Appeals against disciplinary action

If you feel that a decision made in your disciplinary hearing under this procedure is wrong or unjust you should appeal in writing, stating your full grounds of appeal, to the Operations Manager or Council Manager within 5 working days of the date on which you were informed in writing of the decision.

If you are appealing against dismissal, the date on which dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of the appeal. However, if your appeal is successful you will be reinstated with no loss of continuity or pay.

If you raise any new matters in your appeal, we may need to carry out further investigation. If any new information comes to light we will provide you with a summary including, where appropriate, copies of additional relevant documents and witness statements. You will have a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the hearing.

We will give you written notice of the date, time and place of the appeal hearing. This will normally be 2 to 5 working days after you receive the written notice.

The appeal hearing may be a complete re-hearing of the matter or it may be a review of the fairness of the original decision in the light of the procedure that was followed and any new information that may have come to light. This will be at our discretion depending on the circumstances of your case. In any event the appeal will be dealt with as impartially as possible.

Where possible, the appeal hearing will be conducted by a more senior manager who has not been previously involved in the case. The Council Manager, Operations Manager or another Service Manager, where available, and/or the manager who conducted the

disciplinary hearing will also usually be present. You may bring a companion with you to the appeal hearing (see above).

A hearing may be adjourned if we need to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at the hearing. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the hearing is reconvened. Following the appeal hearing we may:

- Confirm the original decision;
- Revoke the original decision; or
- Substitute a different penalty.

We will inform you in writing of our final decision as soon as possible, usually within 5 working days of the appeal hearing. Where possible we will also explain this to you in person. There will be no further right of appeal.

Last review date:	February 2021
Next review date:	February 2022
Lead:	Operations Manager
Overseeing Committee:	Operations
Approved:	
Review cycle:	Annually and/or as per legislation

Agenda item: OC 109/21

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To formalise a standalone policy that outlines our disciplinary procedure.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Committee notes the report.**
- 2. That the Committee approves publication to all staff and the upload of this procedure onto Brightpay.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Our Disciplinary procedure currently does not sit in a standalone policy therefore can only be found in our employee handbook. To improve transparency and to make all reasonable efforts to ensure our policies and procedures are **easily** accessible to staff I am recommending that you approve the attached policy as our 'Disciplinary procedure' to be circulated to all staff and published on Brightpay for access.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Disciplinary Procedure (policy).

AUTHOR:

Samone Winsborough
RFO

Agenda item: OC 110/21

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the committee on proposed training for councillors and consideration of other sessions / subjects.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the committee notes the report and proposed / booked training.**
- 2. That the committee supports the sending of regular training updates from B&MKALC.**
- 3. That the committee considers any further training that may be required or beneficial for councillors.**
- 4. That the Committee and Member Support Officer, in conjunction with the Council Manager and Chair of Operations, develops an annual training plan for 2021/2022.**
- 5. That the Committee and Member Support Officer, in conjunction with the Council Manager and Chair of Operations, develops a rolling training programme covering the council term.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Training has been significantly impacted by the recent restrictions and many sessions that were planned for the past year have not taken place. Whilst there have been some options for 'online' sessions, these have been limited and not necessarily focused on the specific needs of WCC.

There are some training sessions booked and in place:

- Mental Health First Aid – to take place over two x two-hour sessions on 11th and 25th March. Spaces are still available for people who may not have booked already.
- Safeguarding training for councillors – to take place during April.

There are also a range of courses that are provided by Bucks and MK ALC which all councillors can access if suitable, with the costs associated covered by WCC. These courses include a basic 'induction' for councillors (covering the main issues associated with local councils), to quite specific courses around allotments and church yards (NOT suitable for WCC). A full list is available on the BMKALC website (<https://bucksalc.gov.uk/trainingandevents/>) and updates are sent via the Council Manager to all councillors regularly.

Is this something that this committee would like to continue? Should the Council Manager continue to send round training and development opportunities, or would the committee prefer everything to come via this committee?

Additional training can be booked and prepared for the coming council year and this paper aims to consider the essential elements that are needed. Some of these are suggested within the Terms of

Reference for committees (e.g. Planning training for members of PLaD), with other ideas having been previously discussed but nothing concrete agreed.

It is recommended that the following sessions be investigated, booked and provided during the 2021/22 council year:

- Planning Training (for PLaD members initially, with any additional space opened to others)
- Finance Training (for Resources and Finance members initially, with any additional space opened to others). This is a session that BMKALC provide and, dependent on numbers, we may be able to 'buy in' an in house session for WCC and invited other MK Councils.

These sessions are needed to enable compliance with the ToR for those committees. There are also caveats within other committee ToR's, but they do not specify any designated training, simply undertake training that relates to the 'functions and duties' of the committee. It may be that this committee considers additional sessions should be included.

Additional sessions that have been previously highlighted as useful for all councillors have included:

- Communication Skills - everything from use of social media to holding difficult conversations.
- Equality and Diversity – this is an area which WCC should promote and holding regular sessions around this topic would show the importance and help develop confidence and capability in this area.
- Chairing Skills – essential for those that Chair committees or the council and therefore useful for all councillors to undertake, promoting a wider pool of councillors able to take on this essential role.
- Data protection and GDPR
- First Aid, Food Hygiene, Mental Health First Aid.
- Community Engagement and Support

It would also be sensible to consider which sessions, if any, should be considered an annual / two yearly / council term level of provision (i.e. everyone does a refresher every 1 / 2 / 4 years) – it is recommended that this should include:

- Council 'Away Day' (annually)
- Safeguarding (two yearly)
- Data Protection / GDPR (two yearly)
- First Aid (every three years is recommended)

- Mental Health First Aid (one session each council term)
- Planning training (one session each council term)
- Finance Training (one session each council term)

There are likely to be other issues that would benefit from some training and suggestions are welcomed from both this committee and other councillors for inclusion in annual and council term training programmes. Suggestions are to be submitted to the Committees and Members Support Officer by 15th April 2021, for consideration and inclusion in proposal training programmes which will return to this committee for agreement. These programmes will include space for 'ad hoc' or developing priorities and will be further supported by enabling access to external events, activities, conferences and forums, where these are allowed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The training budget was reduced for 2021/22 when the situation with income was unclear – this formed part of the savings that were necessary at the time to bring in a balanced budget. It may be that this committee would like to propose an increase in the budget, given the more favourable financial situation of the council now. This would need be agreed at the Resources and Finance committee.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Some of these sessions will be provided 'in house', using the expertise of officers. Other sessions will be bought in from external providers. There will be a demand on staff time to enable this programme to be delivered, whether this is simply for the administration side, the online management or creating and delivering a session. It is manageable within existing resources.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: OC 111/21

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the committee on the website.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the committee notes this report and updates to the website.
2. That committee members assess the current website and consider any further changes that they would like to see.
3. That the changes are implemented and the new content / site design commences on May 6th 2021.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:



Welcome

TO WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Woughton Community Council is the council closest to the residents in the parish of Woughton. The Community Council is here to support residents by representing their views on issues affecting them. We provide a range of services, including environmental and landscaping, advice and support, youth and community and also manage four community centres.

On our website you will find information about Woughton Community Council's services, as well as news about upcoming events and projects.



CONTACT US TODAY
01908 395681
 reception@woughtoncommunitycouncil.gov.uk



[YOU CAN FIND OUR ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT HERE](#)

Welcome
 TO WUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Woughton Community Council is the council closest to the residents in the parish of Woughton. The Community Council is here to support residents by representing their views on issues affecting them. We provide environmental and community facilities. On our website you will find information about Woughton Community Council's services, as well as news about upcoming events and projects.

There has been significant work undertaken on the website in preparation for a 'relaunch' once all is in place. This has included some changes to the font and layout of the site (top pic is the new site), changes to the menus (removing some of the elements that were outdated, such as the 'Welcome Letter') and adding things that have been missing (such as a dedicated 'Finance' page, ensuring compliance with legislation).

There have also been updates to the 'Hire a Hall' page, creating more visual and engaging content:



Hire a Hall

Woughton Community Council manages the **Netherfield** Meeting Place on Farmborough, **Coffee Hall** Meeting Place on Garraways, **Eaglestone Centre** on Harrier Court and the **Tinkers Bridge** Meeting Place on Marshworth. These can be hired for family parties, community meetings and general activities.

All meeting places can be booked on any day of the week **except for public and bank holidays**. Our costs are:

- For commercial/statutory agencies or anyone residing outside of Woughton: **£20 per hour**
- For voluntary organisations, charities or Woughton residents: **£15 per hour** – all local residents must produce a proof of address when confirming the booking.
- Meeting rooms at **Eaglestone Centre** can be booked for £10 per hour.

Prices valid from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019
£100 DEPOSIT REQUIRED FOR ALL BOOKINGS – THIS IS REFUNDABLE

Please contact us on **01908 395681** if you wish to book one of these facilities or use the booking request form below (please note that completing this form does not guarantee a booking, but submits the request to our bookings team, who will confirm if available).

BOOKING REQUEST FORM

Start Date*

End Date*

Block bookings will only be taken for 3 months at a time.

Registered Charity No (if applicable)

Hire a Hall

PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO COVID-19, CURRENT MAXIMUM CAPACITY IS 30 PEOPLE OTHER THAN TINKERS BRIDGE MEETING PLACE WHICH HAS A MAXIMUM CAPACITY OF 20 PEOPLE. WE WILL UPDATE AS WE KNOW MORE.

Woughton Community Council manages four community venues across the parish. These can be hired for family parties, community meetings and general activities. For more details about any of the centres, please click the pictures below.



Tinker's Bridge Meeting Place



Netherfield Meeting Place



Eaglestone Activity Centre



Coffee Hall Meeting Place

It should be noted that this is a hotchpotch of sites – the content is on the old platform and will change to the new fonts and styling – the top picture is the new site, with the bottom picture being the new content.

Councillor pages have been updated, where possible, to include councillor biographies, links to Declarations of Interest and similar. These will be further updated with better photos when the new site is finished.

The homepage has also been changed to include a 'latest' section – this highlights the latest news stories and includes a live 'feed' from Facebook.

Latest

COMMUNITY COUNCIL NEWS

FESTIVAL 2019 – FOUR BRIDGES 2

Following the success of our inaugural event in 2018, we are in the early stages of planning our 2019 event. It will be taking place at Two Halls Park on Coffee Hall and the date to save in your diary is Saturday 13th July between 12 – 4pm. We ...

[Continue reading](#)

RECYCLING BAGS BACK IN STOCK

We have a supply of the new clear recycling bags back in stock at the Council Offices in Coffee Hall. If you live in Woughton and need an extra roll, pop in and grab them.

[Continue reading](#)

Facebook Posts



Woughton Community Council
4 hours ago

A very Happy Birthday to our Chair, Cllr Sue Smith, from all of us at Woughton Community Council.

[View on Facebook](#) · [Share](#)



Woughton Community Council
6 hours ago

It is with the deepest sadness that we have to announce the death of Cllr Tina El-Shabrawy. Cllr El-Shabrawy, Tina, was a respected, valued and popular member of the Woughton family. She worked tirelessly for the Residents of Beanhill (her ward) she will be sorely missed by those residents and many of us across the parish.

[See via later Bub](#)

Part of the update with regard to the website is around content – a website is only as fresh as the content that it includes. This means that provision of news stories, events and similar, alongside regular updates on the services we provide, will be essential. As you can see from the above, news stories are shared very irregularly on the site, with Facebook the ‘default’ – we need to be better.

The current site has significant content on that needs to be migrated to the new site – this is a relatively simple, but extremely time-consuming process (which is one reason it remains a work in progress). However, more importantly, being clear that this is the approach that this committee feels is appropriate is equally important – are there things missing that should be on the website? The committee has been discussing a ‘new’ site for some time – what is wanted on the ‘new’ site? Or is that covered in the changes discussed/

The site, as it stands, is legally compliant and meets the transparency standards expected. It includes the necessary information for a Quality Council submission and is relatively easy to monitor and maintain.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The website is extremely cheap, costing around £60 a month. This amount is reflected in the amount of work that WCC officers take on in adjusting and maintaining the site, as opposed to paying someone else to do it. There is no additional cost with these changes.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

There remains a significant amount of work needed to migrate the old content onto the new site, removing anything that is no longer needed. Whilst this has been happening on a piecemeal basis as time has allowed, this needs to be completed.

In addition, officers and councillors should understand that the website can be better used, with the right oversight and content. It is noteworthy that there are a number of councillors who do not have bio on the website, as it is noteworthy that many of the services pages are limited at best.

There is no one officer who is responsible for the website. This is also something that could and should be addressed, with that officer being given resource and control to manage and maintain this fully. There may be a training implication here and potentially a change to a job description.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

The Council Manager recommends that any feedback on the site is provided by the end of March, to enable sufficient time for any final adjustments prior to the new site taking over from the start of the new Council Year, on May 6th. This means all councillor bios should be provided to Brian Barton, any suggestions for further inclusions to Steve McNay.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations Committee

Monday 8th March 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the committee on the re-opening of the Hub and delivery of services within the 'roadmap' suggested by government.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the committee notes the report.
2. That the Council Manager, Operations Manager and Health and Safety Manager, in conjunction with Service Manager, continue to monitor the situation and adjust the plan (if necessary), reporting back to this committee / Full Council where appropriate.
3. That the committee agrees to the proposals discussed below, namely:
 - a. That the Hub remains closed until at least 17th May (Step 3) *
 - b. That the Hub opens on reduced hours for a period of 6 (six) weeks after re-opening, to assess benefit, visitor numbers and impact. *
 - c. That the Operations Manager creates and manages a roster to ensure suitable levels of officer cover for both Hub opening and phone coverage.
4. That service provision continues and develops in line with the elements noted below, namely:
 - a. Play Rangers programme for Easter holidays publicised and delivered, starting on 30th March. *
 - b. 12th April* – Community Centres are re-opened for groups that can meet the relevant standards and safety measures. This will include limited use for Youth Clubs. Volunteers will restart within the community fridge.
 - c. 17th May* – outdoor events, such as pop-up cafes, etc. restart and a programme of events for the remainder of 2021 to be developed and shared.
 - d. 17th May* - The Hub reopens between 10am – 3pm on Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri, with consideration of both a 'late night' and weekend opening (this can be discussed and will need to be agreed in advance with suitable staffing in place).
5. That a full review of all aspects takes place at the end of June 2021 and further plans return to this committee.
6. That the committee considers the long term staffing and delivery implications stemming from the past year and, at a future meeting, consider flexible working arrangements, working from home, remote and/or hybrid meetings and similar.

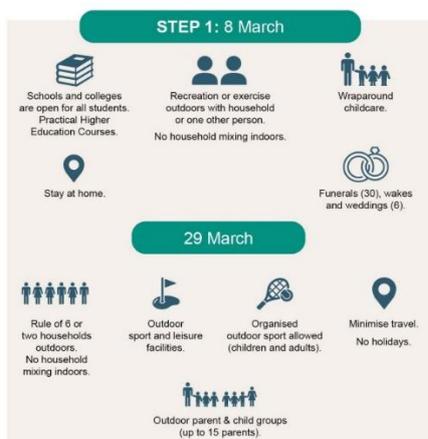
It should be noted that these dates are based upon the various steps within the 'roadmap' being met – anything marked with an * is subject to change.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The Hub has been closed since 17th March 2020. Since July, there has been access to essential elements via the Community Fridge which has remained open since then for a minimum of 8 hours per week. In addition, significant levels of service have been delivered online, through alternative

methods or with limited numbers. Phone coverage has been possible using the integrated phone system and the additional benefits of both MS Teams and Zoom technology have proved invaluable. The council officers and councillors have worked hard throughout, responding to needs and the changeable level of restrictions, often responding to these changes within 24 hours.

Following recent reductions in infection rates, the start of the vaccination programme and reducing pressures on the National Health Service, the government has now published a 'Roadmap' that defines and details the proposed relaxation of restrictions over the next few months. There is a full document that can be seen as an 'additional paper', but the main points are that there are four steps, with five-week gaps in between (4 weeks to see the impact and a further week to enable notice to be given for changes), starting on March 8th with the return to schools for all children. Later this month, there are some further adjustments, principally some outdoor sports restarting and the possibility to meet others outdoors (see below) – this enables a Play Ranger provision to be offered over the Easter break.



The next major change is at Step 2, which is planned for 12th April (but may be pushed back). This includes a return to outdoor catering (possibility for the pop-up cafes to restart, but not recommended at this point), all retail and 'personal care' (hairdressers, nail bars, etc.) services to re-open and libraries and community centres to open to some groups. This is the time where WCC will start to be able to move towards re-opening and is the point where it is recommended that the office is opened again for limited periods and limited numbers.

There are other restrictions lifted at this point too – see below.



No earlier than 17th May is Step 3. This allows up to 30 people to meet outdoors (this is where it is recommended that we restart the cafes) and for up to six people / two households to meet indoors. This is the point when it is recommended that we look at a more complete re-opening, with the option of face-to-face appointments for the advice service becoming more regular, some wellbeing activities and 1:1 sessions taking place and visitors to the Hub to book community venues, collect dog bags, meet with officers / councillors and similar able to happen on a day-to-day basis. There are some additional safety measures needed (see later), but manageable and relatively easy to implement.

Some further restrictions also lifted – see below.



The final step that has been proposed, Step 4, will take place five weeks later (assuming all is well) and therefore no earlier than 21st June. At this point, assuming all other aspects have met the agreed standards (see 'The Four Tests' below), then restrictions will be lifted for almost everything, whilst safety measures, including some level of 'covid compliance' will remain in place – this might include the continuation of face coverings, one-way systems, limited numbers, safe distancing, etc. This has not yet been confirmed but will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. Full details are below.

STEP 4

At least five weeks after Step 3, no earlier than 21 June.
By Step 4, the Government hopes to be able to introduce the following
(subject to review):



No legal limits on social contact.



Nightclubs.



Larger events.



No legal limit on all life events.

All of these stages, bar Step 1, are provisional at this time and based upon assessment of the situation as each step is reached. The government has suggested that there are four tests that need to be passed prior to moving onto the next stage – this is the reason for the five-week gap between steps, to allow 4 weeks to assess the impact and a further week to inform the public. There are also ‘safe behaviours’ that we are being encouraged to follow. The four tests and safe behaviours are:

The Four Tests

Test 1



The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.

Test 2



Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.

Test 3



Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

Test 4



Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

Safe Behaviours



Wash hands frequently, for at least 20 seconds.



Wear a face covering in enclosed environments.



Maintain space with anyone outside your household or bubble.



Meet with others outdoors where possible.



Minimise the number of different people you meet and the duration of meetings, if possible.



Let fresh air in.



Download the NHS Test & Trace app.



Get a test immediately if you have any symptoms.



Self isolate if you have symptoms, have tested positive, or had contact with someone with COVID-19.

These will be key to timescales being met.

For Woughton, the following recommendations are suggested for suitable times and delivery of services and events:

- 8th March – work starts on preparing the offices / Hub / Community Centres for re-opening. Play Rangers programme for Easter holidays publicised and delivered, starting on 30th March.
- 12th April* – Community Centres are re-opened for groups that can meet the relevant standards and safety measures. This will include limited use for Youth Clubs, with booking in advance and buildings only used if no alternative options available – outdoor sessions will run where possible. An assessment will be made regarding ending the furloughing of caretaking

- staff at this point.
- Volunteers will restart within the community fridge and, where weather allows and based upon risk management, outdoor pop-up café (in preparation for café proper to start later in the year) *could* restart (in line with 'outdoor hospitality' rules), but it is recommended that this is postponed until May (in part to do with weather and in part to provide greater surety regarding safety). Advertising and engagement start on next stage(s)
- 17th May* – outdoor events, such as pop-up cafes, etc. can restart and a programme of events for the remainder of 2021 to be developed and shared.
- 17th May* - The Hub reopens between 10am – 3pm on Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri, with consideration of both a 'late night' and weekend opening (this can be discussed and will need to be agreed in advance with suitable staffing in place). This will include the provision of a 'wrap around' Perspex screen for the reception desk and limiting numbers in reception.
- That at the end of June, a further review takes place, and any changes are implemented after returning to this committee.

Additional Learning / Considerations

The past year has shown the flexibility within the council to enable both officers and councillors to work and engage from a variety of venues. Remote working has brought some challenges but has also provided space away from the distractions of the office that has meant that outstanding actions have been completed. It is felt that a continuation of a more flexible approach would bring continuing benefits. Given this, the following suggestions are made for further discussion and deliberation in coming months:

- That for some officers, some 'work from home' time is useful, and a flexible working approach is embraced by the council.
- That enabling officers to work from home will reduce the amount of people within the Hub, reducing risks in the future from either any continuation of or occurrence of future virus and infection.
- That enabling remote access to council meetings has ensured higher attendance and streaming of meetings has built far greater engagement with residents than 'in person' only meetings. It is recommended that meetings are streamed, whether in person, online or hybrid and we continue to encourage a law change to enable remote meetings to happen in future.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are some implications in terms of the community centres, with the longer the delay in re-opening, the larger the impact on income levels.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Having been significantly impacted over the past year, officers are eager to 'get back to it' – finding the balance between supporting this and ensuring safety is key. Vaccinations will help, especially for those that are most vulnerable, but equally the safety measures that have been in place will need to remain.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager