

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, 26 June 2017

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, J Wallace, D Bradford, L Caffrey,
T Graham, J Green, S Green, M Hall, M Henry, B Oliphant,
M Ord, N Weatherley and J Kielty

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): P Foy and M Charlton

CR1 CONSTITUTION

RESOLVED - Committee agreed the constitution of the Committee and the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chairs (as approved by the Council) for the current municipal year.

CR2 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2017 be approved as a correct record.

CR3 ROLE AND REMIT

A report was received outlining the remit and terms of reference of the Committee.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That reference to Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council be removed from the Terms of Reference of the Committee.
 - (ii) That the remit and terms of reference be noted.

CR4 THE IMPACT OF THE GATESHEAD FUND 2016-17: A CASE STUDY

The Committee received a report and presentation on the impact of the Gateshead Fund during 2016/17.

The Gateshead Fund was agreed by Cabinet in 2011 and was created to fund the voluntary and community sector to build capacity within communities. The key components of the Gateshead Fund comprises of the Local Community Fund (LCF) and the Gateshead Capacity Building Fund (CBF). The criteria for 2016/17 remained

the same as previous years, however additional objectives were included which were; developing and mobilising volunteers, supporting building relationships with communities and supporting residents to build their communities and improve what is already there. The overall fund budget for 2016/17 was £490,267.

The Community Foundation for Tyne and Wear and Northumberland is working to develop the CBF on behalf of the Council and Nils Stronach, Senior Programme Advisor for Community Foundation, gave a presentation on the work of the Foundation during 2016/17. It was noted that the partnership between the council and the Foundation was established in August 2016 and undertakes research into developing the Fund and also undertakes the administration of the CBF.

The CBF provides grants up to £10,000 to voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations to build capacity and strengthen local communities. The Individual Sporting Grants can provide up to £400, in addition the Talented Athlete Scheme can grant up to £1,000 to reward and recognise sporting talent of Gateshead residents. The Gateshead Volunteers' Month can provide grants of up to £300 to support volunteering development during the month of June.

It was reported that in 2016/17 there were 61 awards, with fund distribution of £180,938 benefiting all wards in Gateshead. This equates to approximately £1.77 per capita per ward.

A number of case studies were shared with Committee of organisations which received Capacity Building funding in 2016/17. Victims First Northumbria is an independent victim referral service which was awarded £10,000 to support women in Gateshead who have been victims of rape, sexual assaults and other sex offences. Felling Male Voice Choir was awarded £4,500 to support a programme of visits which will be used to generate interest in joining the choir, it was noted the progress has been steady but work is ongoing to look at different ways of delivery. Ryton Triathlon Club was awarded £8,000 to support the creation and delivery of a new Junior Club to facilitate the transition from the children's section to the adult section. The Young Women's Outreach Project was awarded £4,786 to engage two workers who will run a weekly session for the LGBT Plus Group, it was noted that this work was previously delivered through the Sexual Health Team before funding was cut, it has been used to reduce stigma and so far there has been high engagement.

In terms of plans for 2017-2018 there has been a number of changes to how the Gateshead Fund will be delivered. A new assessment and reporting framework will be established to help rate the impacts of the grant. There will be increased leverage for additional funding and impact reports to donors which will provide a general overview of the area. For 2017/18 there will be three rounds, the first of which opened on 5 June and will close on 30 June.

A presentation was also given on the Local Community Fund (LCF) which is another component of the Gateshead Fund. The LCF has a budget allocation of £66,000, which equals £3,000 per ward. The LCF is used to help Councillors to support local issues and promote community engagement, development and cohesion. The LCF can support a wide variety of local priorities, groups and organisations, it can help the delivery of Vision 2030 and the Council Plan and also can lever in external

opportunities.

In 2016/17 £55,500 of the allocated budget was spent, this was spent on 88 projects in Gateshead. The key characteristics of how the LCF was used were; health and wellbeing, community facilities and activities, environmental improvements and arts, heritage and culture. A number of case studies were provided; Blaydon District Scouts received £750 (£250 from each of the wards of Chopwell and Rowlands Gill, Blaydon and Winlaton and High Spen), this allowed Cub Scouts from across the west of Gateshead to attend the Blaydon District's 'Cubs 100'. This was an event to celebrate 100 years of Cub Scouts and was an all night birthday party held at the Winlaton Centre. The LCF contribution acted as a subsidy for the event costs and enabled cubs to attend for a very small price. In the Felling ward Friends of Felling Park and Town Centre received £200 to cover the cost of litter pickers, bags and gloves. The group has since recruited more volunteers and has made a vast improvement to the park. The LCF grant also inspired the group to do more work and apply for further funding. £760 of LCF enabled Birtley Community Partnership to deliver an arts project, supported with match funding from the Arts Council, which allowed Birtley Villas residents to meet weekly and record their personal memories through visual art. The project allowed residents to socialise with their neighbours while learning something new and also enhanced their wellbeing. LCF also provided £760 to support 'Lighting up Whickham' group, this was used to prepare the site and supply and maintain for one year the lighting of the Christmas tree at Church Green. It was reported that Bensham and Saltwell Alive was awarded £1950 from the LCF, this was used to support asylum seekers with various household goods, the fund is also open to other members of the community who need extra support due to unforeseen circumstances. Ryton Cricket Club received £500 towards Ryton Fair Day, this allowed the community to generate excellent income from the fair day which was distributed to local organisations.

It was queried whether wards can carry forward any underspend to the following year. It was acknowledged that traditionally wards do carry forward any underspend at the end of the year although they are encouraged to spend it. However if Councillors are aware of bigger projects discussions can be held around use of the wider Gateshead Fund.

Concerns were raised that some organisations had faced problems in receiving grants in time for volunteers month due to administration delays by the Community Foundation. It was acknowledged that there had been issues in terms of notification of the final round of grants, with four organisations being affected by not having enough time to deliver events. Committee was reassured that the Community Foundation had learnt from this and plans are in place to run the application process earlier next year.

It was questioned whether there are any mechanisms to inform the public of successful outcomes which have been as a result of the Gateshead Fund. It was confirmed that previously this was done through an Annual Summary and newsletters, however due to reduced capacity within the team this no longer happens. It was agreed that this would be discussed further with the Council's communications team to look at the possibility of including positive case studies on line. It was also suggested that this could be promoted through a rolling blog for all

organisations to see, which would show the support Gateshead is giving. It was agreed that officers would look into this possibility and in the meantime feedback summaries would be provided to all wards.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the comments and suggestions of the Committee be noted.
 - (ii) That the Committee was satisfied with the overall impact of the Gateshead Fund.

CR5 REVIEW OF ABSENCE IN THE COUNCIL - MONITORING REPORT

Committee received an update report on progress following its review of absence in the Council. The report covers the period 1 June 2016 until 31 May 2017.

During the period stress, depression and mental health was the biggest cause of sickness absence, at 24% for the whole Council. Post-op recovery was second highest at 18% and also musculo skeletal was at 12%.

The total days lost has reduced to 43672, with the average sickness per FTE due to stress at 2.53 days, which has reduced since the same period last year. Sickness absence due to stress, depression and mental ill health was broken down into service groups, the biggest of which was Care Wellbeing and Learning. Although this has reduced across the Council sickness absence in this group has increased. Data was provided in relation to the numbers of employees on short term and long term sick, it was noted that the vast majority of were long term sickness.

It was reported that management training has been rolled out, which is one of five mandatory modules to enable managers to deal with workforce issues more effectively. A stress course has also been piloted in partnership with Talking Therapies for people suffering from work related stress. A full review of the course will take place after the pilot. In addition, eight workplace contacts have been recruited who can provide support and guidance to employees experiencing issues with mental health.

It was noted that two Workforce Development Advisers from the Council attended Connect 5 training, which was based on a cognitive behavioural therapy approach to enable them to work with adults to help improve their mental wellbeing.

The Health and Safety E-learning portal is continuing to be monitored, with 200 employees completing modules on stress management.

Committee was advised that sickness absence management training will continue to be rolled out for all managers, which is expected to take six months to complete. A review of the Council's health surveillance programme will be undertaken and employees will continue to be trained in mental health first aid.

It was queried whether there was a comparison of the council's sickness absence to the national picture. It was acknowledged that this has previously been looked at but

that not all sickness recording is like for like. It was suggested that this could be looked at in terms of a regional aspect in the future.

It was questioned whether HR support is still in place to help those managers dealing with more complex cases. It was confirmed that HR support is not being withdrawn, however capacity within that service has reduced by 50%. Therefore managers are being given the tools to manage sickness absence but HR will still be available.

It was questioned as to how short term sickness absence is being dealt with. It was noted that this is covered in Council procedure, for example return to work interviews and any relevant action thereafter.

Committee queried what level of absence was related to performance management. It was confirmed that this level of detail was not readily available, although it was noted that one of the modules in training is around capability.

The point was made that there are more inherently pressured jobs within Care Wellbeing and Learning which is reflected in the sickness levels. It was acknowledged that HR advises on frameworks in place to support staff to intervene and due to the group going through significant change this has had a detrimental impact on staff. Concerns were raised that more proactive work needs to be undertaken with staff from this service. It was agreed that these concerns would be looked at further. It was also acknowledged that a recent survey was carried out which identified issues around job roles which are being addressed through action plans. However, improvement figures were not known at present but could be looked at for future reports.

A request was made for a breakdown of age groups in relation to sickness for stress and depression. It was agreed that this could be looked at and also in relation to whether the stress is work related.

It was requested that the Council's procedure for dealing with sickness absence and managers guidance be brought to Committee when the next update report is presented.

It was suggested that more weight should be placed on sickness absence in terms of the redundancy policy, however Committee was advised that this has to be balanced with a number of other factors. The point was made that since the redundancy criteria has evolved staff are coming into work who should be absent, which can make the situation worse.

Committee was advised that a Senior Occupational Health Adviser is now in post who is looking into responses to work related stress. It was noted that a risk assessment toolkit is now available on the intranet and managers are being encouraged to make occupational health referrals earlier. The toolkit is aimed at individuals, in particular the risks of certain jobs and mitigating stress.

It was questioned how outside factors that impact on work are taken into account. It was acknowledged that the occupational health team is clear on staff taking

personal responsibility, for example physio exercises, to show measured improvements. Reports of progress are communicated with managers to deal with should improvements not be made.

The point was made that the national picture shows that one in three people have mental health issues, therefore this is reflective of the picture within the Council. It was also recognised that it is hard to pick out what situations are work related. Committee was satisfied with the introduction of stress risk assessments and early intervention work being implemented.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That Committee was satisfied that the actions are in place to reduce sickness absence levels of employees.
 - (ii) That the comments of the Committee, in terms of the scope of the data that is included in the reporting of sickness absence management, be noted.

CR6 THE COUNCIL PLAN - YEAR END ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY 2016/2017

Committee received a presentation on year end performance for 2016/17 and an update on the performance and delivery of the Council Plan 2015-2020.

Over the last year work has been ongoing to deliver the Workforce Plan, this includes implementation of the new HR and Payroll system; iTrent. Over 100 officers have been trained on the system which provides direct access to sickness management data for managers. In the future the system will also include Appraisal and Developments.

In terms of employee engagement there was approximately 2,000 responses to the Employee Survey, however this is only 40% of the workforce. From the responses positive messages were received including; 88% felt that their managers were approachable, 80% understood the need for change. Internal communications still remained an issue and as a result a Council-wide Employee Forum has been set up, chaired by Roy Sheehan.

The Appraisal and Development (A&D) framework has further been developed based on employee feedback. 45% of staff were not receiving A&D's and therefore the process has been simplified to make it more flexible. The new system will now rate performance.

Committee previously agreed to support young people leaving care to access Council apprenticeships. There has been one so far and work is ongoing to ensure care leavers are apprenticeship ready, a working group has been set up with Council officers and staff from Connexions.

Council Tax collection has improved to 95.8%, however this remains below the target of 96.6%. Business Rates collection has fractionally decreased from last year to 97.3%, however this remains above the target of 97%.

In terms of benefit claims there continues to be steady progress, with a fall in the number of days taken to process new claims to 7.75 days. It was acknowledged that the roll out of Universal Credit has changed caseload and will likely impact on performance in the future. The rate of undisputed invoices paid on time fell from 87.16% last year to 71.44% in 2016/17. This could have a financial impact on the Council therefore work is ongoing to improve the rate.

It was reported that the new Council intranet was launched on 26 April 2017. This was developed following the views of staff being sought through surveys, workshops, forums and testing. Effectiveness is currently being measured and improvements will continue to be made as the system is live. A one system for all has been introduced for fly-tipping, forms can be completed online which is the same form that customer services would complete when a resident telephones to report fly-tipping. Feedback is provided to the complainant at all stages of the process and it is reported when the issue has been completed. This provides a fully rounded digital process. Performance dashboards help inform how services can be delivered in the future.

It was questioned whether the system has the capability for residents to send photos of fly-tipping through the system. It was confirmed that there is this facility and GPS detects the location. It is hoped that this can be used for other issues such as pot holes in the future. It was acknowledged that the key is this is a transparent process and residents feel more informed. It was also noted that there is still options for customers to report through customer services if they do not have digital access so no resident will be excluded.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That Committee was satisfied with the activities undertaken to achieve the desired outcomes in the Council Plan 2015-2020.
 - (ii) That the report be referred to Cabinet on 18 July 2017 and the views of the Committee be used to inform the Council's approach.

Chair.....