

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 3 December 2018**

**PRESENT:** Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): W Dick, J Wallace, D Bradford, L Caffrey,  
M Charlton, D Duggan, T Graham, J Green, S Green,  
M Hall, M Henry, B Oliphant and N Weatherley

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): P Foy and K Wood

**CR8 MINUTES**

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.

**CR9 REVIEW ON HELPING TO INCREASE SUPPORT/CAPACITY OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR: EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

This was the first evidence gathering session on the review on Helping to Increase Support/Capacity of the Voluntary Sector, the scope of the review is to develop an understanding of

- The type of support required by Gateshead's Voluntary and Community Sector ~(VCS)
- Where support is needed the most and why
- Where the Council's role, support and resources may best be focussed to maximise impact

The evidence gathering will look to:

- Establish the extent and nature of support the Council currently provides to the VCS
- How this activity is resources and coordinated
- Assess the effectiveness of this support in helping the VCS address the needs of Gateshead residents

The Committee were advised that currently there are 876 registered charities based in Gateshead or name Gateshead within their charitable objects. There are 750-1000 smaller groups (eg knit and natter, toddlers etc), many of which are un-constituted. The Council provides support to the VCS in a number of ways, by commissioning frameworks, awarding contracts, grants relief and buildings. The Council also offer information, guidance and networking and brokering relationships mentoring and showcasing.

In 2017/18 the Gateshead Thrive Fund awarded £321,696 to 39 organisations supporting Gateshead residents. There is also £3000 per ward Local Community Fund, the Volunteers Month Grant of up to £500 and a £10,000 fund for Tenants and Residents' Associations.

Some of the commissioned services for Supported Living for Adults include, advocacy, carers, non-statutory floating support, mental health day provision and older people day provision. 35 voluntary and community sector organisations are involved in delivery of services with current contract values of £3.01m.

In terms of supported living for adults with learning disabilities there is a framework of 27 providers, 9 of whom are voluntary and community sector. There are 36 VCS organisations delivery a range of services for Children and Young People under 18, with a value of £805,000.

Public Health funded 12 VCS Organisations to deliver services relating to drug and alcohol, obesity and mental health to a value of £144,800. The Make Every Contact Count (MECC) programme supported 19 VCS Organisations to a value of £235,251.

Go Gateshead supports around 100 voluntary sports clubs to build clubs' capacity and sustainability. The Culture and Events team support around 50 cultural organisations within Gateshead and during 2018 has provided event advice to around 100 organisations delivering public events, from community festivals to fun runs. Economic Development and Housing Growth provide support to Gateshead-based social enterprises, which includes Community Interest Companies, setting up, business planning, sources of finance and finding business accommodation.

The Environment, Housing and Planning Team provide advice and guidance to Gateshead residents and volunteers helping to look after Gateshead's ecology, countryside and open spaces. The Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering team are the Council's principal development support and capacity building function to community organisations from setting up to project support and identifying funding opportunities. They have also supported the Community Asset Transfer process for community centres, libraries and bowling greens and manage the council contract with the Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service. The Team also co-ordinates volunteering in Gateshead.

The Committee heard from Dr Joanna Price, Chair of Trustees, The Comfrey Project. The Charity supports primarily asylum seekers and refugees in particular in relation to their mental health, their wellbeing and to increase their community participation. The project specialises in therapeutic horticulture with some other additional activities and services and places are offered following a referral. All participants are volunteers at the Project.

The project initially had 3 allotment sites which weren't working out, the project moved to Windmill Hills in 2015 and currently have 100 active participants with 28 different ethnicities. Gateshead Council offered support in a number of ways to help facilitate the move to Windmill Hills, including financial, expertise and connectivity.

In 2017, the project hit a bit of a crisis and the Neighbourhood Management and

Volunteering Team offered support, the project also received report from the Thrive Fund which helped alongside other support kept the project from closing.

It is hoped that for the future the centre will become a Community Hub, will lead to participant integration and will offer meaningful recreational activity and skills development for the local community.

The Committee were advised of one particular asylum seeker who has still not had a decision on his status having been in the UK for 17 years ago having fled from Iran as he converted to Christianity. He was looking for a project which allowed him to work outdoors with the land. As an asylum seeker he is not allowed to work or study. This particular participant would like to become a plumber or a gardener.

The project is grateful for the support, knowledge and assistance with funding applications it has received from the Council. It has mainly received advice from the Council It has found this more useful as the Neighbourhood Management team has knowledge of the area and know what is needed in the area. It also received some advice from the NCVS.

The Project now has a 3-year strategic plan and are currently looking at a lottery fund application. As they have this opportunity the aim is to become more embedded into the community.

The Committee noted that there were pleased to hear about the idea of guerrilla gardening to improve the local neighbourhood verges and waste land.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the presentation and the Committee's comments be noted.

## **CR10 STRATEGIC RESILIENCE AND EMERGENCY PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

The Committee were provided with a report to update in relation to the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework.

The Emergency Response Team has been involved in responding to a number of incidents over the last eight months, including a couple of particular incidents in Gateshead - Regent Court Fire and Oak Square Fire – a members seminar is being arranged for 7 January 2019 to brief members on the learning from these two issues.

The team has also been part of several exercises both internally and working with partners. Whilst there have been several table top exercises, in April May and July 2018 there was also a simulated fire-fighting exercise which took place in Crowhall Towers. This was led by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service in conjunction with The Gateshead Housing Company. It involved the testing of a new firefighting procedure on high rise buildings. This was successful and will be rolled out to operational teams across the region. This highlights the excellent partnership working with TWFRS in the management of fire and tenant safety.

All operations, exercises and incidents follow a debrief process. This allows the Council to identify areas of good practice and enables us to learn from issues.

Updates from the themes within the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework in the last six months include:

**Building Resilient and Stronger Communities** – working with businesses, the voluntary sector, partner agencies, communities and individuals to ensure they are better prepared for and able to recover from emergencies.

- The resilience team has recruited two new Community Resilience Volunteer Wardens in different areas of Gateshead which takes the total to ten across the borough.

Future priorities include:

- Further development of our arrangements for sharing and mapping information about vulnerable people, the use of the Cabinet Office Resilience Direct system, the prioritisation of assistance and identification of support that needs to be provided during and after an incident.
- Developing an approach to explore and utilise spontaneous volunteering in an emergency or incident situation – regionally principles have been developed but this needs to be translated and implemented to a Gateshead approach.

**Assessing Risk** – identifying hazards and threats that may affect Gateshead implementing measures that may prevent an emergency or incident occurring.

- Closer working arrangements are now in place and work is developing through the Risk and Resilience Group with the Corporate Audit and Risk Team to strengthen the approach to internal business continuity and critical services risks to the Council.
- The Council is part of a Northumbria Local Resilience Forum Risk Working Group that is in the process of reviewing the methodology and regional risk assessments in line with national approaches.

Future priorities include:

- Reviewing and adapting the criteria used to assess critical services within internal business continuity planning when there is an emergency or major incident in conjunction with the Audit and Risk Team in Corporate Resources
- Reviewing the Council's approach in relation to the revised CONTEST guidance (June 2018) and continue to assess risk of terrorism occurring.

**Enhancing our partnership arrangements to respond and recover** – the effective response and co-ordination of arrangements in the event of an emergency or incident occurring and achieving a rapid return to normality.

- A number of the Council's senior officers have recently completed the Multi-Agency Gold Incident Commander training with the College of Policing which

had developed knowledge and skills of being able to have clear understanding and awareness of the strategic element of the response to an incident or emergency.

Future priorities include:

- Review our humanitarian assistance arrangements and continue to develop relationships with voluntary organisations and community facilities, utilising the Government's Aspects Guidance
- Development of a further Strategic Emergency Response Table Top Exercise for Chief Executives.

RESOLVED - (i) that it be noted that the Committee are satisfied with the progress made within the last eight months.  
(ii) that the Committee agreed to receive a further update report in April 2019.

## **CR11 CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT - ANNUAL DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received a report to provide an update on the progress made against the Council's Corporate Asset Strategy and Management Plan and the year on year performance of the property portfolio.

Following a review of how the Council manages its property portfolio in 2009, it was recognised that councillor engagement was essential in both the monitoring and scrutiny of the way in which the Council uses its property portfolio to deliver its services and priorities.

It was agreed that reporting would be in respect of two specific elements:

- Approval of a Corporate Asset Strategy and Management Plan (CASMP); and
- Monitoring and Performance of the property portfolio

The CASMP sets the strategic direction for the use of the Council's land and buildings in support of its policy priorities. It provides the focus for the efficient use of property assets to support service delivery and the strategic management of, and investment in, the Council's property portfolio.

The performance of the assets is assessed against the provisions of the Council Plan, the CASMP and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Some of the following works were highlighted as part of the ongoing work:

The major works to the Civic Centre as part of the Workspace Strategy in 2015/16, attention is now focussed on the remaining areas on the ground floor and the public spaces and reception areas. The work in the Registrars area and facilities available for wedding ceremonies has recently been upgraded. Cemeteries and Crematories,

IT Business Support and Occupational Health and Health and Safety will be the next phase to be upgraded.

The ongoing review has highlighted the opportunity for the Council to develop the Civic Centre as a public sector hub whereby vacant office accommodation can be offered to other public sector/partner organisations. This will enable the Council to secure an income, reduce its running costs for the building and provide the opportunity for enhanced service delivery through partnership/cross-organisation working.

The Council has been supported with the Civic Centre project through the One Public Estate which has provided revenue funding to enable the Council to secure additional resources to bring pace to the project.

The Council has been pro-active in its approach to working with local communities and associations supporting the idea of community asset transfer. To date 22 former community centres have been transferred to Charitable Incorporated Organisations or Sports Clubs with The Winlaton Centre and Emma Memorial Hall being completed in 2017/18. There is now only one community centre remaining to be transferred (Barley Mow) and discussions are progressing with the community group, this will be reported in next year's performance report.

The Council is committed to making continuing improvements in a reduction in its energy usage. There have been continuing improvements, however, there has been an increase in gas usage, it is thought that this is a result of the beast from the east. In terms of water consumption it is thought that the increase of 8.72% is due to the council changing suppliers of water and it is anticipated that there will be a reduction by the time next years figures are produced.

The Council's aim to reduce carbon emissions by 35% by 2016. As at March 2017 that target has been achieved, the total actual and weather corrected carbon emissions for property and street lighting have decreased by a further 8% and now stand at 44% since 2007. This is due in part to the completion of the 5 year programme to retrofit all street lighting with efficient lanterns (either LED or high efficiency dimmable lanterns). The expansion of the Gateshead Energy Company private wire network to the Civic Centre and the two depots at Shearlegs Road and Park Road has further reduced carbon emissions.

Following a strategic review of the Council's non-operational portfolio, a suite of local property performance indicators has been agreed. The highlight for performance in 2017/18 is:

- Nett income from the TNRP was £2,300,552. A total of 26 new lettings, 15 lease renewals and 12 rent reviews were completed over the year.

During the course of 2017/18 discussions continued with the Public Sector Plc (PSP), following the establishment of a Limited Liability Partnership between the Council and PSP: 'PSP Gateshead LLP'. The Partnership and Operational Boards have been established and are meeting on a regular basis to identify projects that can be taken forward by the Partnership.

The Council continues to strive to secure the disposal of surplus assets as quickly and efficiently as possible, as this helps to avoid vandalism or antisocial behaviour associated with vacant property, both of which can pose a risk and cause problems for local residents. It also reduces the holding costs and the amount of maintenance required to the property portfolio.

As at March 2018 there were 5 properties, (Gateshead Old Town Hall, former Hookergate School, The Courtyard, Low Fell (Former WING building) former Wrekenton multi-purpose building and former Dunston Hill School, valued at £3,580,000 on the Council's surplus property register.

It was queried what the current position was with the potential sale of the central nursery site. It was noted that planning permission was granted last week and officers are currently looking at options around tenure and the delivery route, whether it be joint venture, or the Council through the trading company. It is anticipated that proposals will be brought to Cabinet over the next 2 or 3 months.

It was queried whether the services occupying the Civic were paying rent. It was confirmed that occupiers of the Civic Centre pay rent and contributions towards heating and maintenance. It was also noted that we have a number of police officers working in children and families, adult social care and trading standards. They don't pay rent but it is enhancing the services offered.

It was queried whether the carbon emissions figures took into account the reduction in the number of buildings. It was noted that there is an element of less buildings in the portfolio than 10 years ago, however, the larger buildings remain, however, the street lighting can account for a 60% drop in electricity usage, it was noted that the baseline hasn't been adjusted.

The position with Barley Mow Community Centre was queried. It was noted that this had been completed in the 2018/19 year and would be reported in the next annual report.

It was queried what percentage of staff work from home. It was noted that there is a relatively small number of employees who work from home on a regular basis. There are some services who have employees working from home on permanent basis. It was noted that there will be more of a push to include this in the workforce strategy.

It was queried what the position was with the Old Town Hall and buildings on Swinburne Street, given several voluntary organisations have been given notice but currently are still paying rent and maintenance is not being undertaken. It was also queried whether alternative accommodation has been identified. It was noted that officers are working with all of the organisations affected and some have already relocated. It was also noted officers will look to get an update on the plans and timeframe from the organisation involved.

RESOLVED - (i) That the progress achieved over the period against the Corporate Asset Strategy and Management plan be noted.

(ii) That the comments of the Committee in relation to the Plan be noted.

**CR12 MAKING GATESHEAD A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE THRIVES - SIX MONTH ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY - 2018/2019**

The Committee were provided with an update on the six-month assessment of performance and delivery for the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 in relation to the Council's Thrive agenda.

The Council's new strategic approach Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives, was approved by Cabinet in March 2018 to ensure the Council continues to get the best outcomes for local people and remains a viable and sustainable organisation into the future. As part of the Council's performance management framework, five year targets were replaced with a single 2020 target with strategic indicators identified as either target or tracker indicators. These targets were approved by Cabinet on 12 July 2016.

The six-month assessment of performance for 2018-19 focuses on the achievements and actions undertaken during the period 1 April 2018 – 30 September 2018. Areas for future improvement are also identified.

Some of the key achievements over the six month period were highlighted:

- Financial Management is on track
  - Council Tax and NNDR collections are a little bit down on last year but officers are confident that the target will be met.
  - There have been improvements in the time taken to process Housing Benefit Claims with the average time to process being 9 days.
- Staff Sickness
  - Staff sickness has been reduced to 5.93 days per FTE
- Employee Engagement
  - A recent employee survey where of 39% of employees responded, 73% of those agreed that the Council is a good place to work.
  - A corporate action plan is currently being developed.

The Committee were informed of the results of the residents survey "You and Your Local Area Survey 2018". The survey was undertaken between June and August 2018, the survey was completed by 910 Viewpoint Online members and 1137 members of the public.

- 64% of respondents were satisfied with their local area as place to live. This is a decrease in satisfaction level in 2016 which was 75%
- 91% of respondents felt that people in their local area usually got on well together
- 28% of respondents said they regularly volunteer (at least once a month), 27% of respondents said they volunteered less often and 45% said they never volunteered
- 13% of respondents said they have heard of the Council's Thrive agenda,

- however, 88% indicated they were supportive of the 5 pledges
- 41% of respondents state that their personal financial circumstances are either only just coping or really struggling. This is particularly an issue for those of working age, with fewer (30%) of those aged 65+ experiencing difficulties
  - 42% of respondents are satisfied with the way the Council runs thing, which is 9% lower than in 2016. However, this reduction in satisfaction has not resulted in a corresponding increase in dissatisfaction. 29% of respondents are dissatisfied (up1% from 2016) and a further 29% are neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - 39% of respondents are confident that the Council will provide the best possible services it can within its available budget. A further 27% neither agree or disagree.
  - The main area of importance was Clean-streets, Parks, Crime, Schools and Anti-social Behaviour. Potholes also came out strongly and was consistent across the Borough.

RESOLVED - That the report be referred to Cabinet on 22 January 2019 as part of the composite report relating to the Council's overall performance.

## **CR13 REVIEW OF ABSENCE IN THE COUNCIL OSC - MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee were provided with an update on actions taken since the last monitoring report which was considered by Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

The Committee were advised that the focus of this report was on managing sickness which is due to stress.

The average sickness day per FTE for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 was 12.75. When monitoring absence it is preferable to compare the same reference periods, eg April to March each year, however, as an interim update, the average sickness days per FTE for the period 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018 has been calculated at 11.82.

The Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team take sickness absence very seriously and in September 2018 considered a report which focussed on how sickness is managed with a 'deep-dive' into the actions within Care, Wellbeing and Learning (CWL) Group. The CMT discussion provides the focus of this report and is detailed below.

- HR Service will continue to make sure that the Council's frameworks for managing sickness are reviewed regularly. The policy is currently under review and will be discussed with Trade Union Partners.
- The roll-out of mandatory sickness absence training also continues.
- The HR service also provides comprehensive sickness data to management teams to enable effective and timely case management.
- Corporate Management Team focussed on Care Wellbeing and Learning as

sickness across the group is high with some teams running at more than 30 days per FTE.

- A review of the management of sickness absence was initiated across the CWL group. This review included consideration of how individual managers are being held to account for the management within their own teams.
- The Strategic Director of CWL informed all CWL employees of her concerns regarding absence levels and that addressing this issue was a priority for the Group Management Team.
- CWL piloted the introduction of an additional “informal” stage in the sickness management procedure. This related to short-term absence trigger points which is where an employee has had three or more separate periods of sickness over the preceding 12 months.
- There was a mixed reaction from the workforce to this initiative, with concerns about the impact on otherwise good attendees who may have had two unavoidable absences, possibly related to a serious illness.

HR Advice will continue to provide dashboards and more detailed data to services and provide advice and support in order that managers can take appropriate action.

The review of the Council’s Sickness Policy and Procedure will be progressed with suggestions for improvements being discussed with Trade Union partners.

As part of the North East Better Health at Work Award the task and finish groups established will continue to develop and take forward wellbeing initiatives around the priority areas as identified by employees.

Strategic Directors and Service Directors will continue to monitor and address absence.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee agreed to receive a report on an annual basis with the 6-monthly review to be included in the six-monthly assessment of Assessment and Performance and Delivery.
  - (ii) That members of the Committee will forward suggestions for improvement to the HR Service Director on the Council’s Sickness Absence Policy.
  - (iii) That the 6-month review report be noted.

## **CR14 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a report detailing the work programme for the municipal year 2018/19.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the report be noted.

**Chair.....**