

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 9 September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): J Wallace, R Beadle, D Bradford, D Duggan, P Foy, S Green, M Hall, J Kielty, R Mullen, B Oliphant and C Ord

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, L Caffrey, T Graham, N Weatherley and K Wood

CR9 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June be approved as a correct record.

CR10 REVIEW ON HELPING TO INCREASE SUPPORT/CAPACITY OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR: FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the final report of the Review on Helping to Increase Support/Capacity of the Voluntary Sector.

Following its meeting in October 2018, the Committee agreed the scope for a review to help develop the understanding of the type of support required by Gateshead's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), where it is needed most and why, and in the light of this, where the Council's role, support and resources may be best focussed to maximise impact. The aims of the review were agreed as:

- establish the extent and nature of the types of support the Council currently provides to the VCS across a spectrum of service areas
- how this activity is resourced and coordinated
- assess the effectiveness of this Council support in helping the VCS address the needs of Gateshead residents.

The review comprised of four evidence gathering sessions. Evidence was sought from internal council services, including Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering, Economic Development Service, Care Wellbeing and Learning Service, and externally funded partners, stakeholders and charitable trusts, Comfrey Project, Brighten Ryton Environmental Group, Dunston Family Church, Tyne and Wear Community Foundation, The Ballinger Trust and National Lottery Community Fund and Oasis Community Housing.

All of the sessions included presentations by each of the groups / organisations and

a question and answer session.

Findings, issues and challenges arising from the review

- The review reaffirmed the need for a vibrant community and voluntary sector in Gateshead that is supported and capable of meeting the challenges facing Gateshead's residents in the future.
- There is a need to ensure longer term support is available from the Council which cultivates relationships and reassures community and voluntary sector organisations that they can rely on the Council for advice and help.
- The community asset transfer programme has seen significant success in helping community organisations operate community facilities to deliver services for local residents.
- Need for dedicated points of contact within the Council – including key frontline services, particularly where the interface impacts directly on the Council and is a key purpose to the community organisation. This is required to ensure decisions can be made by the relevant service, relatively quickly – it also helps to build a positive working relationship.
- Where appropriate annual plans or agreements be put in place to be agreed and endorsed by the Council – including assigned responsible officers for specific activities, such as grounds maintenance as an example from the evidence gathering. This should help provide greater clarity on what the groups are doing, help inform the Council on decisions about deployment of resources and assist with timetabling key decisions/permissions – allowing the Group to have more accurate plans.
- Annual plan would facilitate greater synergy and timetabling of partnership approach – would maximize windows of opportunity for works to be undertaken (summer months, avoiding nesting season, etc)
- Always read the guidance thoroughly before applying – if in doubt get in touch.
- Ensure the organisation and the project are eligible.
- Have all information required ready at the time of submission.
- Ensure accounts/bank statements are timely and accurate and unrestricted reserves are beneath any eligibility threshold.
- Use data, local intelligence and consultation to demonstrate community needs (avoid duplication).
- Wherever possible try to get other funding to support your project.
- When Council and community efforts combine the synergy and impact can be fantastic (for example, coinciding cutting and strimming in cemetery)
- Speed/responsiveness of the Council – frustration with the time taken/delay in getting permissions/agreement to undertake works – sometimes legitimate due to legal process, sometimes multiple service involvement and sometimes staff sickness (as well as other things) – but could we be better?
- Perception of overbearing bureaucracy – particularly around Conservation and Licencing issues experienced – legalities, consultation periods, permissions, etc. Can this be mitigated with better information up front re realistic timescales (for both parties)?
- The Council's relationship/interface with (ethos towards) voluntary organisations needs to reflect a partnership arrangement (to maximize joint

- efficiency/shared resources and available skills, knowledge and capacity).
- Volunteers should be seen more as partners not as contractors or a threat to employment.
- Is there need to train/brief Council staff (particularly those in key interface positions) about how a better more productive relationship can be achieved?
- Remove any stigma, perceptions of job insecurity, etc) as above
- Review how the Council's Insurance arrangements work for/with volunteer activities – could this become more inclusive/less risk averse – redesigned to accommodate such work not respond to request for the work (turn it around completely).
- Organisation/rigour of the Group and its monitoring of activity was praised (and may be exclusive to Brighten Ryton currently) – whilst not necessarily required to the level of Brighten Ryton it is food for thought for other community organisations to become more organised and planned in approach
- Recruiting and retaining volunteers was still an issue for a number of community groups across Gateshead, especially where specific skills are required.
- Securing funding is becoming an increasing challenge for many community groups and charities across Gateshead.
- Specialist advice is required for a number of groups across the borough, in particular governance, legal advice, business and financial planning, health and safety to name some areas.
- Co-ordination between NCVS and Gateshead Council needs to continue to be managed to ensure the skills and expertise of the team compliments the work of the Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering Team and other support services
- This service hub approach is a central part of our future sustainability plans for Basis@Gateshead – and we also see this model as being potentially replicable across the NE: we are committed to it.
- This Basis model is helping us build the evidence base needed to show external partners that delivering out of Basis@Gateshead is a more successful and cost effective way of reaching those facing housing crisis either at their crisis point, or in many cases before things get too bad.
- Basis is a great example of how the VCS can collaborate and integrate with public services to reach the most vulnerable in our communities in a more efficient and effective way.
- As staff from partners will be based at Basis@Gateshead we anticipate they will save costs of being based in their own premises, and less money and time will be wasted signposting vulnerable people to different services, locations and experts.

The following recommendations have been produced as a result of the evidence gathering sessions and feedback from the Committee over the course of the review.

Recommendation 1 – Commit to provide clear single points of contacts to community organisations, and explore providing the autonomy to provide advice, support and definitive decisions as required.

Recommendation 2 – Encourage community organisations that the Council is

supporting to provide an annual plan, particularly relevant with Friends of or environmental groups.

Recommendation 3 – Be clear and more transparent regarding Council fees and charges, so community organisations understand the costs and the reasons why the fees exist.

Recommendation 4 – Improve the relationships that exist between the Council and the community and voluntary sector to encourage greater collaboration / joint working, addressing common challenges faced by residents, avoid duplication or competition and enable the Council to consider where best to invest its community development and financial resources.

Recommendation 5 – Seek ways to encourage community groups to work together, support each other and share resources and ideas.

Recommendation 6 – Develop further the Council's Volunteers Plan – Helping Out - to ensure there is clarity about the roles of volunteers, the relationships with volunteers and paid employees.

Recommendation 7 – Assess the support required by volunteers to enable them to help out effectively, safely and with the knowledge, training, advice and relevant permissions – primarily aimed at volunteers that directly support activities delivered with the Council and on Council property.

Recommendation 8 – Review the Council's insurance arrangements to ensure volunteer groups are adequately covered for the activities they are participating in and the system to obtaining cover is as efficient as possible.

Recommendation 9 – Focus the work of the Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering team increase capacity across the community and voluntary sector to enable the securing funds from a range of sources rather than be dependent on the various forms of Council funding.

Recommendation 10 – Ensure the Council's resources to support Gateshead's communities are targeted in a way that ensures the activity delivered as a result of the funding will support Thrive.

Recommendation 11 – The Council will work proactively with external funding partners, to secure investment and maximise opportunities to invest in Gateshead.

Recommendation 12 – Monitor the delivery of the contract to support the Community and Voluntary Sector (currently held by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service) to ensure it delivers the advice, support and networking required by the sector in partnership with the Council

Recommendation 13 – Within the current contract to support the Community and Voluntary Sector, continue to support the development of OurGateshead to ensure it provides the service required by Gateshead residents and the community organisations represented on the website.

Recommendation 14 – Review the Gateshead Offer – which provides guidance on where to seek support for community and voluntary organisations in Gateshead and define its commitment to find the most effective way to define its relationship and support to the sector to deliver Thrive.

Recommendation 15 – Increase publicity and communications through all means possible to raise awareness, share and celebrate the fantastic range of activities that take place across Gateshead.

Recommendation 16 – In line with the Council's Public Service Reform work, implement further place based / community hub opportunities for collaborative work between the Council, its partners and the community and voluntary sector.

Recommendation 17 – Retain the current capacity building resource, as outlined in evidence gathering session 1, within the Council to ensure the community and voluntary sector is adequately supported to meet the demands of Gateshead’s communities in the future.

Recommendation 18 – Continue to maintain and utilise the Community Asset Transfer policy to encourage communities to help retain community assets and ensure the Cabinet Portfolio holder for Communities and Volunteers has the role and remit for this area.

RESOLVED - That the final report be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

CR11 THE IMPACT OF THE GATESHEAD THRIVE FUND 2018-19: A CASE STUDY

RESOLVED - That this item be deferred to a future meeting.

CR12 REVISED STRATEGIC RESILIENCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Committee received a report which provided an overview of the revised Strategic Resilience Management Framework.

The purpose of the revised framework is to outline the focus for Gateshead Council to continue to work in collaboration with our partners and communities over the next two years for emergency planning, resilience, response and recovery. This will ensure that the council continues to comply with statutory legislation and has the necessary capacity and capability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergency or major incident situations and use the learning to inform contingency planning.

The emphasis of this framework is to support the sustained development of a network of competent officers who are able to respond to emergencies and carry on embedding resilience into all aspects of service delivery.

The revised framework includes the following revisions:

- Updated national context and Local Resilience Forum arrangements
- Alignment to the Council’s Thrive Agenda
- Revision of the Local Governance Arrangements
- Proposal for a future Local Government Association Peer Review
- Updated service key objectives and priorities for 2019-2021

The Service Key Objectives have been developed to ensure there is compliance with the Civic Contingencies Act (2004) and help achieve the strategic vision with continuous review that will align to the Council’s Service Business Planning Process and individual Appraisal and Development Sessions.

The revised framework will contribute to achieving three of the five pledges of the Council’s Thrive agenda:

- Put people and families and the heart of everything we do
- Support our communities to support themselves and each other

- Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead Council

Since the year-end Assessment of Performance and Delivery Report was presented to Committee members in June, additional highlights include:

- The Council’s Resilience and Emergency Planning Team has developed a Community Emergency Guidance document which aims to:
 - Provide emergency contact details for a range of situations and the type of assistance that can be provided
 - Enable residents and business proprietors to be better prepared to protect themselves and their properties
 - Provide opportunities to volunteer as Community Resilience Warden
 - The document has been added to the Council website.
- A recruitment campaign is underway for additional staff volunteers to join the council’s emergency response team which will ensure continued resilience and maintaining of capacity and capability
- The Council has implemented a new on-line digital logging system for use during incidents and emergency situations. Training and awareness sessions are currently ongoing for members of the emergency response team.

- RESOLVED - (i) that the comments of the Committee be noted
 (ii) that it be noted that the Committee is satisfied with progress achieved
 (iii) That the Committee agreed to receiving a progress report in April 2020

CR13 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the work programme report. It was noted that the item on The Gateshead Thrive Fund had been moved to the October meeting. It was also noted that Brexit is still an issue to slot in. The Committee were advised that a members seminar has been arranged for 8 October, it may be that something needs to be brought to Committee at a future meeting.

It was suggested that the Committee may wish to visit some of the organisations who have been supported by Thrive Fund and organisations who are working in Gateshead.

- RESOLVED - (i) That the provisional programme be noted.
 (ii) That further reports on the work programme may be brought to the Committee to identify any issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.
 (iii) That officers look at the programme to include visits to voluntary organisations working within Gateshead.

Chair.....