

## **GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 31 January 2022**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, D Burnett,  
H Weatherley, H Kelly, Reay, R Waugh and Anderson

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): A Wheeler, F Geddes, J Green, J Turnbull,  
K Dodds, S Dickie, S Hawkins and K McClurey

#### **CPL15 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December be agreed as a correct record.

#### **CPL16 MATTERS ARISING**

It was noted with regards to the Housing Improvement Plan some end to end mapping work has been done a report will be brought back to the next Committee to show some of the pilot schemes that have been undertaken.

With regards to issues with customers unable to access the phone lines. The issue has been identified and ICT are working on a solution. Officers have also been recruited into the team which should improve issues.

#### **CPL17 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK - SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22**

The Committee received a report and presentation to update on the performance on the delivery of Council priorities for the 6 months period April to October 2021.

The development of the new approach to performance management began in autumn 2020. Stages included engagement with councillors through Advisory Groups and Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Engagement with employees has taken place on a regular basis through employee workshops and Management Team discussions. Engagement with partners has taken place at the Health and Wellbeing Board with the Voluntary and Community Sector (Connected Voice).

The Performance Management and Improvement Framework is approved by Cabinet and Council. All of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of the Council will consider performance assessments appropriate to the role and remit of each Committee on a six monthly basis.

There are some risks and limitations to highlight in relation to the six month reports. It is clear that the Council is still responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and that service disruptions have impacted on performance at the six month stage. The Council's Business Impact Assessment and Business Continuity Plan framework has enabled the Council to prioritise critical services to ensure that they can still be delivered.

The development of the Performance Management and Information Framework is ensure it remains a relevant tool for the Council to understand how well it is delivering against it agreed priorities.

The aims of the Performance Management and Information Framework are to deliver Thrive, give clarity on Priorities, inform how resources are allocated and budget determination and measuring the impact to inform policy and resource decisions.

The framework is based on the 6 policy objectives of the HWB Strategy and an organisational health check.

The analysis has highlighted some area where improvements have been made as follows:

- More people are moving from Vulnerable to Coping according to LIoN data, although more assessment is needed to understand movement across the themes.
- External assessment from OFSTED rated as Good providing reassurance
- The Voluntary Undertaking with the Social Housing regulator has been successfully completed
- Budget savings are regularly monitored and 97.5% of savings are projected to be achieved in 2021/22

Some actions which have been identified as part of the response to improve performance:

- A new budget approach has been agreed in the context of the MTFS
- Business Impact Assessments and Business Continuity Planning is continuing to address service pressures and service disruption.
- Work is ongoing to develop and implement an effective employee engagement framework in response to new ways of working and improve employee morale.
- Work will continue to take forward the customer experience and digital improvements to service delivery whilst ensuring there is support for people who are unable to access services digitally.
- Development of Community Wealth Building

The next steps in the process are as follows;

- Align the Performance Management and Information Framework to the new budget approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2021 to inform cross

- council reviews and zero based budgeting.
- Further develop the priorities and actions as part of the iterative approach
- Take the six month performance reports to Cabinet for consideration in March
- Bring a year end report to Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee were advised with regards to Housing there are two big areas which are causing concern. The first area is the Housing Delivery Target. We need to keep numbers up and delivery on new homes. The priorities for development are monitored by this Committee.

Tenant Satisfaction is a big issue, the Regulator will have more powers and will inspect on a cyclical basis every four years. They will be looking at our customer satisfaction to decide where/when the inspections will kick in.

The Housing Improvement Programme is the biggest area of dissatisfaction.

It is not all areas of concern there are some achievements. We have the new HRA Business Plan which we need to keep on top of, we are not allowed to have a negative balance. We have developed the Asset Management Strategy. The New Homelessness Strategy and Charter has been approved at Cabinet and the Review of Allocations and Lettings is underway. We are making sure we link up with other work across the Council, Mental Health Work and it plays into Thrive and the Council's ambitions for Thrive. We have a successful Community Renewal Fund bid and there is a project up and running on the impact housing can have in giving people confidence.

The Housing Improvement Change Programme with the work on repairs and maintenance some of which has been triggered by member feedback. The three key outcome messages are to: Support Thrive, Improve Customer Satisfaction and Efficiencies.

It was noted that customer contact is really important to get right communication, contact, quality and timeliness are all important and can currently be fragmented. We need to get better and look at areas where we can join up. The Action Plan for the Housing Compliance is in place out the Regulatory Intervention.

Further reports will be brought back to this Committee over the coming months.

The Committee heard about issues with regards to the Environment and the Economy. Significant areas of the economy have been impacted by Covid-19 in particular there are currently a lower number of active businesses this is thought to also be due to Brexit and impacts on the supply chain.

There has been a significant increase in costs within the construction industry, fuel poverty increasing is having a real impact on residents day to day lives and causing significant financial difficulties. In terms of areas of excellence there are four key areas of focus. Work has started on the Conference and Exhibition Centre we have hosted some major events in Gateshead, including two Diamond League events. The Council administered £18m of Grant Funding to business early in the

pandemic. This was successful given our early involvement of Audit in making sure we carried out the proper checks before businesses accessed the grant.

It was requested that information on Community Wealth Building be brought to a future Committee. It was also suggested that in areas where it was relevant a section on Community Wealth building be included in individual reports.

RESOLVED - (i) That the comments of the Committee be noted.  
(ii) That the report be presented to Cabinet at its March meeting for consideration.

## **CPL18 HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received a report to update on Housing Performance Results at the end of Quarter 2. This meeting is too early to report Quarter 3 results.

It is important that the Council robustly monitors a wide range of performance measures to ensure that its key housing services and functions are effective and responsive to the needs of residents, are compliant with any regulatory requirements and offer good quality and value for money.

The new framework of Housing indicators can be broadly broken down into five objectives:

- Increase the supply of, and access to suitable affordable homes
- Ensure the effective management and maintenance of the Council's homes
- Reduce homelessness
- Housing Revenue Account 'health'
- Resident Satisfaction

The framework was presented to and approved by the HEHC OSC at its meeting on 30 September 2021. Some performance indicators are reported annually and therefore performance for 2021/22 will not be reported until year end.

Four of the performance indicators in the report relate to customer satisfaction measured by a survey of all tenants, this was carried out in October 2021.

A lot of the responses were sat in the middle of the scale so neither / or in terms of satisfaction with Gateshead Council. The Regulator for Social Housing has signalled a move to a more proactive regulation regime of social landlords including local authorities. This includes the introduction of a set of detailed customer satisfaction measures which will be mandatory for all social landlords to collect, publish and submit performance to the regulator. The proposed indications have been published for consultation and it is expected that they will be introduced during 2023/24.

The proposed satisfaction measures including:

- Keeping properties in Good repair
- Maintaining Building Safety

- Effective Handling of Complaints
- Respectful and Helpful Engagement
- Responsible Neighbourhood Management

It is expected that with the improvements being made to services there will be an overall impact on customer satisfaction, however, as we put the emphasis on service re-design it may be the offer isn't at a standard and this would lead to a satisfaction dip.

The Rent and Income Team will feature in the next report. An update on the new indicators and the implications for social landlords will be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

It was queried what the level of sickness was like in repairs team. It was noted that currently out of 100 staff there are 20 vacancies, 20 on sick and 5 have just handed in their notice. It was noted that Newcastle are offering more money for electricians than we are paying our site managers.

It was suggested that if we do a survey and someone is having a bad day it might be that you'd get a negative response. It was noted that the survey is to give a degree of feedback and tracking to see if there has been a service failure.

RESOLVED - that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

## **CPL19 BUILDING SAFETY COMPLIANCE**

The Committee received an update on the current position with regards to building safety and compliance within the Council property portfolio.

Gateshead Council own and operate over 350 non-domestic buildings and 19100 domestic properties across the Borough. The Council has a duty to identify and manage hazards within its buildings and to ensure specific levels of health and safety are maintained usually met through risk assessment and planned maintenance programmes as well as reactive repairs and timely remedial actions.

With regards to Domestic Buildings the following key risks have been identified:

- Legionella Risk Assessments have not resumed
- There is a lack of internal resources to complete remedials from risk assessments and inspections
- Crowhall Towers safety programme has been impeded by asbestos
- Management of specialist contractors failing to meet programme dates
- Strain on budgets from statutory fire structural surveys and fire strategies
- Fire safety plan at Redheugh and Eslington Court not fully implemented
- Active 'headhunting' of staff.

Fire risk assessments are up to date but the December target for high rise block remedials was not met, 6 of 12 are now targeted to be completed in January and we

are waiting for an update on the remainder. The Fire Safety Act has changed existing legislation, a lot of which came from Grenfell. We have a qualified person in our team, however, there are only 3 in the Country and he is potentially being offered jobs all over the world. The impact of losing this member of staff will cost approximately £400,000 in contractor fees.

With regards to the overall domestic risk profile we are prioritising the highest risk. With regards to the Non domestic properties if you control the building you need to have a competent person to keep the building safe. It has not always been the case that there have been qualified/experienced staff to work in the buildings. Some buildings are not always listed on electronic systems. It is the intention to look at one building at a time we need to look at the leases and see whether we have retained the repairs and maintenance function. An action plan is in place to recover compliance and monitor and maintain compliance.

It was queried whether this was in relation to buildings transferred already or those in the process of being transferred. It was noted that this is for all buildings. These issues will result in a slowing down of the initial process of transfer.

A process has been agreed and an initial condition survey will be undertaken and cost options provided. We need to make sure the building is safe when they move in and they need to know what they have to do to make sure to keep the building safe.

It was queried that on domestic properties where we are aware of asbestos are we making residents aware. It was noted that where we have asbestos we are undertaking an ongoing risk assessment with regards to the butterfly roofs we have only just now identified them and we are part ceiling lofts off. It's there but as long as its not disturbed it will be fine. Once the ongoing programme is commenced information will be made more public.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted.

## **CPL20 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the update report on the current position with regards to the Work Programme. The Committee were advised that the Results of the Covid-19 Survey has been dropped into the issues to slot in. It was also requested that Community Wealthbuilding be an issue which can be brought to the Committee to be considered.

RESOLVED -

- (i) that the provisional programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be noted.
- (ii) that the Committee will receive further reports to identify any additional policy issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.