

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 25 April 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, D Burnett, F Geddes,
H Weatherley, H Kelly, J Reay, J Turnbull, K Dodds,
R Waugh, V Anderson, P Maughan and K McClurey

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): A Wheeler, J Green and S Dickie

CPL28 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL29 IMPACT OF BREXIT – ON BUSINESSES LARGE AND SMALL

The Committee received a report seeking views on the ongoing impact of Brexit on businesses large and small in Gateshead and the North East.

From the report, it was noted that although the UK formally left the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020, the unwinding of such a long standing, intertwined relationship is complex; the exit process is expected to continue for some time, spanning trade, regulation, investment, competitiveness, access to finance, labour, and goods. It was highlighted that Gateshead Council is working collaboratively with local and regional partners to:

- Gather intelligence, understand, and monitor the impact of these changes for businesses.
- Support businesses to navigate the EU Exit transition period, build business resilience to adapt successfully to a post Brexit economy.
- Continue investing in the local economy to ensure businesses, the workforce and residents thrive.

It was reported that there has been implication for businesses large and small due to changes to international trade and regulation. It was also noted that changes to customs and border checks on goods entering the country have also impacted to ability for businesses to trade depending on the type of goods involved.

The Committee were advised that local business research and intelligence has shown that businesses are concerned about the rising price of energy, raw materials, goods and labour. It was further reported that in March 2022 a Team Valley manufacturer reported a 10% increase in the price of steel imported from

Europe.

It was highlighted within the report that intelligence gathered by Business Gateshead's Strategic Account Management (SAM) function corroborates business disquiet about rising prices. The Committee noted that a Gateshead based packaging manufacture reported a 70% increase in the cost of polymer and other raw materials. It was also noted that wider supply chain issues included increased delivery lead-in times due to EU labour shortages in the logistics sector.

Additionally, the Committee were advised that food producers are also reporting recruitment and workforce capacity issues and problems with logistics due to a lack of European labour.

The Committee were provided with an overview of business reaction to the New Free Trade Agreement in addition to details of the North East Trade and Export Strategy, this strategy aims to support businesses across the region to:

- Counteract the impact of EU exit on established trading relationships.
- Build on existing export strengths.
- Develop new export capabilities.
- Diversify into new global markets in sectors and countries with long-term growth potential.

The Committee were also provided with details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. It was noted that the Government has replicated elements of EU investment in regional and local economies with some key differences that were summarised.

It was concluded that businesses large and small across Gateshead have experienced unprecedented change and uncertainty following EU exit, compounded by the pandemic, global forces and competition for materials and skilled labour.

The Committee were advised that in the medium-term businesses will require ongoing support to mitigate inflationary cost pressures, to invest in long-term growth, skills development and job creation. Assurance was provided that the Council will continue engaging with the local business community to allow companies to access the support they need to thrive in the borough. The Committee were also provided with case studies to illustrate the support being provided by the Council to local businesses.

The Committee questioned what support is being provided to local businesses being impacted by the skills shortage. Officers advised that this was a regional issue, particularly for smaller businesses. It was highlighted that there is a skills agenda and work ongoing with education providers to bridge the gap in skills. It was also noted that ESF replacement funding is to be used.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the North East EU Exit group which covers the LA7 authority areas. It was noted that intelligence is shared monthly. The Committee were also advised that support is available via the Council and some voluntary sector organisations to support small-medium businesses with applications to bid for funding.

The Committee expressed thanks to officers for the work they are doing. The Committee also requested an additional update on the impact of Brexit on businesses within Gateshead at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the information within the report.
- (ii) The Committee requested an additional update at a future meeting; this is to be added to the Work Programme.

CPL30 UPDATE ON REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (PRESENTATION)

The Committee received a presentation providing an update on the Council's Repairs and Maintenance Improvement Plan.

From the presentation, the Committee were advised that an examination of the existing system had taken place to establish purpose, trawl data and to understand what matters to residents. It was highlighted that a 'paper redesign' based upon this learning was to be undertaken to make improvements and to set up and test a new approach to the handling of the repairs and maintenance of Council stock. It was also reported that a new system would be launched from September 2022 considering all learning and changes needed.

It was noted that an analysis of negative comments regarding repairs from residents in an August 2021 survey had found the following:

- 71% referenced time taken to attend and fix (sometimes speed, sometimes convenience)
- 40% referenced ineffective repairs and/or ineffective visits
- 40% referenced poor/unclear communications
- 21% referenced the general state of their property over and above the repair issue

The Committee were advised that this information had been valuable in the design of the new approach to repairs and maintenance, it was also noted that communication with customers needed to improve.

An overview of system conditions and performance was provided, it was reported that more than 1 in 2 jobs are not completed when attended. It was further noted that first time fix capability is very low and that this needs to improve. The Committee noted that improvements needed to be made in the diagnosis of repairs and that the current capacity for staff to handle calls is critically low. It was further noted that demand prevention through proactive presence in the community is worthy of exploration.

From the presentation, the Committee were shown the emerging design principles of the improved system. The Committee were also advised that a dedicated team is to be set up to handle the current repairs backlog.

The Committee supported the proposal that puts the customer/tenant's needs at the front end of the repairs and maintenance system. It was acknowledged that Councillors were dealing with increasing queries and case work from residents who are frustrated with their dealings with the Council on the matter of repairs and maintenance.

A discussion also took place on performance monitoring and the use of KPI's. It was noted that standardised timescales for repairs did not always work; it was further noted that it is important for the customer to have an officer take ownership of their request and that updates and communications between the customer and the Council are clear and honest.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.

CPL31 HOUSING PERFORMANCE AND COMPLIANCE MONITORING

The Committee received a report providing an update on outcomes of the Regulatory Standards self-assessment and ongoing governance arrangements for the monitoring and reporting of progress to ensure compliance. Appended to the report for information was a table of progress made to date against the Regulatory Standards self-assessment.

A question was asked on the impact of the resident's influence panel; the Committee were advised that this is going well. The Committee were reminded that the panel is made up of 11 members which includes tenants, leaseholders and officers.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report and the progress to date.

CPL32 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the report setting out the current work programme for the 2021-22 municipal year in addition to a summary of the development of the 2022-23 work programme.

The Committee were advised that line with usual practice, partner organisations will be consulted on the emerging issues for each OSC for 2022-23 with a view to OSCs considering any feedback/additional suggestions/ endorsing their respective work programmes at their June 2022 OSC meetings and referring them to Council for agreement.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the work programme for 2021-22.