

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

Monday, 7 November 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): A Geddes, D Burnett, H Weatherley, H Kelly,
J Reay, J Turnbull, K Dodds, R Waugh, S Dickie,
V Anderson, P Maughan, A Wintcher, S Gallagher, P Burns
and D Welsh

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): T Graham and F Geddes

CPL39 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL40 CONSTRUCTION SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the current position within Construction Services during the service review process.

From the report, the Committee noted that a new senior management team was now in place within the service. Attention was also drawn to a new joint local agreement for revised working arrangements with a new salary structure from 1 September 2022.

It was explained that recruitment is currently underway within the service to fill 100 posts; the Committee were advised that these posts would support the service in providing additional customer support and improve customer service delivery. It was also reported that staff are to be recruited to support clearing the backlog of repairs and increase the turnaround time for bringing void properties to lettable standards.

From the report, the Committee were advised that 26 contractors and 3 inhouse teams are now assigned to backlog repairs. It was highlighted that £2.5m additional cost has been identified within the HRA to fund the works.

It was further noted that recruitment is in progress to add two additional in-house void squads from November 2022. It was explained that this is expected to increase inhouse delivery from 16 to 24 properties per week. The Committee were also advised that contractor performance is averaging 7 properties per week and additional contractor resource continues to be sought.

It was noted that operational changes to job-ownership by employees has started; this has resulted in a reduction in daytime jobs being passed over to out of hours

services. From the report the Committee were also provided with an update on efficiencies made to the storage of items and improvements being made to reduce waste.

The Committee were also reminded that the service has improved communication with tenants as well as Councillors through the introduction of texts to residents and a new members enquiry direct e-mail.

The Committee welcomed the service changes made to date; particularly the improvements in customer service and the work being undertaken to reduce the repairs backlog. A question was asked regarding the discontinuation of over 1000 items from stores; officers advised that this stock would be sold off where possible with additional items being used up on repairs; it was also stated that there would be some items that would need to be disposed of.

The Committee questioned how customer feedback fed into performance management; it was explained that the results of customer satisfaction questionnaires were being collated and that the new text system to gather feedback would improve the efficiency of the service gaining feedback. It was confirmed that the monitoring of performance and productivity was also ongoing.

A question was raised regarding outstanding fencing repairs in the borough following on from the recent storms. Officers advised that these repairs were being prioritised with many hundreds of fences having already been repaired. It was noted that all fencing repairs would be complete by March 2023.

The Committee thanked officers for their work and efforts. It was requested that a further update be received from Construction Services in March 2023.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive a further update in March 2023.

CPL41 HOUSEBUILDING UPDATE (PRESENTATION)

The Committee received a report and presentation providing an update on the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

From the update the Committee were provided with a summary of Gateshead's Housing Strategy and an overview of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy to illustrate how the Housing Delivery action plan feeds into each. It was highlighted that the strategic aims of the plan are to:

- Promote the delivery of a range of homes
- Develop more affordable homes
- Enable independent living
- Regenerate places
- Build partnerships

An overview of workstreams was also presented, these were:

1. **Direct Delivery:** The HRA Business Plan confirms an intention to build 400 new council homes over the next 10 years (2021-2031).
2. **Registered Providers:** Engagement of registered providers (RP's) via the Housing Providers Partnership.
3. **The Gateshead Regeneration Partnership (GRP):** Created in 2013, GRP aimed to build 2400 new homes by 2033. 411 new homes to date, with a confirmed pipeline of 400 homes relating to 3 sites. Further 7 sites allocated to GRP with a development potential of 845 homes.
4. **Market Delivery:** To support and enable investment from large volume national developers as well as encourage the growth of local SME's.
5. **Specialist and Supported Housing Delivery:** evidence led needs assessment will be concluded by Autumn 2022.
6. **Regeneration Delivery:** A commitment to develop strategic regeneration frameworks and masterplans for 'vulnerable' places in Gateshead such as Felling, High Street South, Chopwell, Teams and Bensham.

It was also explained that quarterly reports would be presented to the Council's senior management group, Portfolio, Strategic Housing Board and Cabinet. It was also confirmed that there would be ward member briefings on progress being made.

The Committee questioned what steps the Council are taking to engage with property developers. It was noted that there is a development framework for sites. It was also explained that the Council can offer developers incentives such as permissions in principle to build or grant funding to make improvements to existing sites. It was further noted that the Council conduct soft-market testing with developers.

The Committee expressed frustration at the delays witnessed in having some vacant sites redeveloped; a comment was made stating that vacant sites can attract anti-social behaviour and fly tipping. It was acknowledged that some sites have been vacant for longer than the Council would want; the Committee were advised that progress is being made, it was also noted that the business plan for the joint venture is to be reviewed. The Committee also expressed the need to build new housing in light of the current cost-of-living crisis, a comment was made suggesting that many private sector tenants would be turning to social/Council housing due to increased rents and evictions.

A further question was asked regarding developments at Dunston Hill; it was reported that a masterplan has been drawn up for the site that is awaiting developer agreement. The Committee were advised that new housing is important to the Council in terms of new homes bonuses and increased council tax revenues.

The Committee discussed the delays in developments at Gateshead High Street. A comment was made noting that works here seem to have stalled and that many of the empty properties could be put to temporary use. Officers advised that the project manager for the High Street would be providing timeframes before Christmas; it was also noted that discussions with Homes England are to take place soon.

The Committee raised the issue surrounding the use of Section 106; it was agreed that an update on Section 106 would be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.
- (ii) The Committee requested a report on Section 106 at the next meeting.

CPL42 HOUSING PERFORMANCE AND COMPLIANCE MONITORING

The Committee received a report providing an update on the outcome of the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) review.

The Committee were reminded that during 2021/22 the current suite of 49 Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) have been reported on a quarterly basis to HEHC Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and six-monthly to Strategic Housing Board (SHB). It was noted that in order to ensure that the KPI's remain relevant, challenging and support key objectives a review commenced in March 2022.

From the report, the Committee were provided with an overview of the review; it was also highlighted that the review also reflected the introduction of a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures by the Regulator of Social Housing. It was also explained that 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures have been incorporated into the proposed new suite of KPI's.

Appended to the report were the new KPI's to be introduced from 1 April 2023.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee agreed the proposals reported.

CPL43 IMPLICATIONS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE - TENANT REPRESENTATIVE ON THE OSC

The Committee received a report providing an update on proposals for up to six tenant representatives to attend the OSC.

It was reported that during the Housing Review (that led to the decision to bring Housing Services together within the Council) there was a strong message from Council tenants that whilst they supported this change there was also a desire for tenants to have a direct voice within the Council and the opportunity to influence how services are delivered.

The Committee were provided with an overview of existing measures in place to engage tenants with services; this included the Resident Influence Panel and the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

It was proposed that members from the reported panels join the OSC as tenant representatives.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee agreed with the proposal reported.

CPL44 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the annual work programme report for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the information in the report and endorsed the provisional work programme.
- (ii) The Committee noted that further reports would be brought to the meeting to identify any additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair.....