

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 4 December 2023

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, D Burnett, H Weatherley, H Kelly,
J Turnbull, V Anderson, A Wintcher, S Gallagher, P Burns,
K Walker and L Brand

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): A Geddes, F Geddes, K Dodds, S Dickie,
P Maughan and D Welsh

CPL88 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Committee held on 23rd October 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL89 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK – SIX MONTH UPDATE – 2023-24

The Committee received a report on the Council's Performance Management & Improvement Framework, reporting performance on the delivery of Council priorities for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. An overview was given of performance relevant to the role and remit of Housing, Environment & Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The framework has been put together to support Gateshead Council's THRIVE strategy. It was noted that some metrics included in the report are annual measures which are reporting figures at a six-month mark.

The data identifying key areas already, those being;

- Budget pressures continue to provide a significant challenge.
- Continuing demand pressures being face by services, which are compounded by the ongoing recruitment and retention issues.
- The cost-of-living and high interest rates are impacting the financial challenges facing many residents.
- The economic climate continues to make things difficult for many businesses in the borough.

A presentation was also given to the Committee on making data accessible for scrutiny, including a demonstration of Power BI and how this can be used to track data for the Office for Local Government.

The Committee noted that a more visual view of the data would support better public and scrutiny understanding of the presented content.

The Committee were advised measures are being continuously reviewed to understand where changes may be needed to ensure PMIF remains robust and relevant.

RESOLVED:

- i. Comment on the 6-month report at Appendix 1 and identify any areas for further scrutiny.
- ii. The OSC recommended the performance report to Cabinet for consideration in January 2024.

CPL90 HOUSING PERFORMANCE MONITORING Q2

The Committee received a report to update members on the Housing performance results at the end of quarter 2, 2023/24.

The Performance Management Information Framework has been developed to ensure the council achieve their Thrive outcomes, in addition a separate suite of performance measures have been developed for the Housing, Environment and Healthier Communities directorate. The performance measures were developed to underpin the delivery of the council's strategy across all tenures and not just limit to Council Housing.

The performance results set out in appendix 1 for the committee are comparing current performance against the 2023/24 targets. Green – Achieving target, Red – Not achieving target and Amber – not yet reported.

Quarter 2 shows there are 43 KPI's which are reported on;

- Five indicators are green, this shows we have achieved the annual target.
- Four indicators are amber, this shows we have not met the target set but performance has increased on the previous year.
- 13 indicators are red, this means we have not yet met the target set and the performance has decreased compared to the previous year.
- 21 indicators are not measurable. Of these indicators:
 - 13 are Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) and will be reported traffic lighted when the survey results are reported in quarter 4 2023/24.
 - Two indicators are measured and will be traffic lighted at year-end.
 - Two indicators are new for 2023/24, reported quarterly and is set with a baseline target. Data collected in 2023/24 will be used to set targets for 2024/25.
 - Of the remaining four indicators all reported quarterly with annual targets set for 2023/24. The KPI's are measured via a numeric count and will be traffic lighted at year-end.

Quarter 2 performance indicates 9 out of 12 measurable performance indicators can be traffic lighted as on target or improving, which relates to 41%

of measurable indicators.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted their views on the Key Performance Indicator results.

CPL91 HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Committee received a report seeking their views on Gateshead Council's complaints performance for the first six months of 2023/24.

Complaints and Compliments:

The Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaint Handling Code (CHC) sets out its expectations that social landlords develop a positive complaint handling culture, and that accountability and transparency are key elements.

The code states that governing bodies of social landlords should receive regular updates on complaint performance to allow for scrutiny. It has therefore been agreed with the Chair of HEHC OSC that officers will present a housing complaint's update to OSC on a six-monthly basis. In addition, a complaints update will also be taken to HEHC Portfolio on a six-monthly basis.

In July 2023 to be compliant with the HO the Council adopted a two-stage process for handling complaints. Stage 1 complaints will be responded to in 10 working days, and stage 2 will be responded within 20 working days.

In the first six-months of 2023/24 there was 115 stage 1 complaints compared to 2022/23 where there were 46 complaints. Whilst Stage 2 showed 29 complaints in 2023/24 compared to the 11 in 2022/23. Even though the number of complaints has increased this should be seen as a positive improvement.

The council achieved 53% response rate of responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days. Of the 29 complaints escalated to stage 2, 83% were responded to within the target of 20 working days.

It has been challenging changing the process to response to a two-stage review process. A complaints dashboard has been developed that provides data on all open complaints. The complaints dashboard also provide insight into common complaint trends and recurring issues. Furthermore, the Regulator of Social Housing requires social landlords collect and report a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) from 2023/24.

- Complaints relative to the size of the landlord.
- Complaints responded to within Handling Code timescales.
- Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints.

A review of the stage 1 complaints identified the following;

- 77 complaints received were related to Repairs and Maintenance, the key

themes being;

- o Time taken to complete the repair.
 - o Poor communication
 - o Failing to keep appointments.
- 22 complaints from Neighbourhood Services, the key themes being;
 - o Anti-Social Behaviour – handling of cases
 - o Damage to property
 - o Service Charges
 - o Condition of estate/external areas

These themes continued into stage 2 with majority of the complaints being repairs and Maintenance and Neighbourhood Services. Tenants were requesting a review of their stage 1 complaint as they were dissatisfied with their stage 1 outcome.

The team have been encouraging employees to report when they receive a compliment about a colleague or a service. This has been providing valuable insight into what the tenants think are going well and what they appreciate but also how we can continue to improve the service. Recording compliments allows to boost morale within the team. During the first six months 48 complaints had been registered: 24 for Neighbourhood Housing Service and 19 for Repairs and Maintenance. Further compliments had been registered for Lettings, Neighbourhood Relations Team, and Planned Investment.

Housing Ombudsman Annual Report 2022/23:

The housing ombudsman produce an annual report to summaries the key themes and figures from the previous year.

The 2022/23 report identified;

- An increase of 27% in complaints received compared to previous year.
- Over 6,500 orders and recommendations made to landlords.
- £1.1 million in compensation awarded.
- An increase in maladministration findings, where service requests or complaints are not handled reasonably.
- A decrease in findings of no fault, over half found in the tenant's favour.
- 323% increase in the number of severe maladministration findings from 31 to 131. Of these 112 related to landlords with over 10,00 homes.

The report also provides social landlord with their own Annual Performance report.

- Four determinations (the number of cases decided upon by the Ombudsman).
- Four maladministration findings in two of the determinations.
- No cases of severe maladministration.
- £1,100 awarded in compensation.

Gateshead Council's maladministration rate of 50% was below the national average of 55% for all social landlords with over 10,000 properties. It is also the national average of 62% for local authorities and ALMO of a similar size.

For the first six months of 2023/24 the housing ombudsman accepted three complaints to investigate, one of the complaints resulted in no maladministration was found, the further two complaints are awaiting an outcome. 21 further complaints had been referred through the complaints process. These complaints went straight to the housing ombudsman before reaching out to the council.

One severe maladministration determination relating to a case dating back to 2018 relating to damp and mould. A review has now taken place in how the Council handle and record issues relating to damp and mould, with a new process being agreed and implemented. The new process also includes a best practice identified from the housing ombudsman spotlight report. This new process has been communicated across all tenants.

Complaint handling code:

Social landlords are required to complete a self-assessment to ensure they are fully compliant with the code. Officers have worked with a focus group of tenants to complete the 2023/24 assessment. This has been published online.

Officer Support and Training:

In April 2023 employees were issued with a team brief for an updated complaints process, this was followed up in November 2023 with the Council's performance. Over 100 employees have completed training on the new complaint handling process with further training to come.

The Committee had discussed the new system will be beneficial for the tenants but would like a series of reports and illustrations for further background information.

RESOLVED

- i) The Committee noted its view on performance for complaints and compliments for the period April 2023 – September 2023.

CPL92 COUNCIL VOIDS UPDATE (PRESENTATION)

The Committee were presented with a presentation on the number of empty properties in Gateshead.

The Council sets a budget in accordance with the business plan. The budget looks at the rent coming in, the main source of its income, and the expenditure what we spend the money on. Gateshead have over 18,000 properties, when the budget is set the Council need to take into consideration how many have tenants in and have an ideal number of voids.

The current challenges the Council are facing:

March 2021

November 2023

No of empty properties	642	626
Loss (excluding Ctax)	£3.3m (£1.9m at begin of Nov 2020)	£2.05m at begin of Nov 2
Process of being let	156	162
Held for demolition	18	4
Other reasons	8	56
Undergoing works	436	388
Empty for 6 months	17%	17%
	April - Oct 2022	April – Oct 2023
Properties made ready to let	628	724

The age and condition of the properties returned increases the level of work needed. The service has undergone a review of the repairs process and identified key areas of improvement. Many of the employees have been upskilled in trades to reduce standstill time on properties. A planner has been recruited to look at the void process to navigate various works taking place at the same time.

Other challenges are the change in the housing market:

- Longer stays in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation.
- Pressures on single persons accommodation and family housing
- Some properties reserved for tenants aged 50+ more difficult to let.
- Two-bedroom flats unaffordable to many applicants
- A much larger housing register
 - 13,637 applications for housing in Oct 2023, compared to 6,793 in April 2020
- More applicants with critical or urgent need
- Fewer council properties let each year.
- Greater pressures in terms of the private sector landlords ending/threatening to end tenancies.

The Council are aiming to make further improvements to the service, the team have analysed the current position in detail which has been reviewed by senior management. An implementation plan has been created and agreed. A project team will be working on addressing the challenges around empty homes by the end of March 2024. Workshops are underway to identify specific actions required, with directors overseeing the delivery plan along with a subject expert Campbell Tickell. NEC void management module has already been mapped out with updates to follow to reflect new process. This will be completed in house with the aim of April 2024.

CPL93 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report which provided details on development of the work programme for OSC's and the provisional work programme for Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities OSC for the municipal year 2023/24.

The Committee agreed to defer the update on street lighting in relation to community safety to the January 2024 meeting.

Chair.....