

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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

**Monday, 17 June 2024**

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

Councillor(s): D Burnett, V Anderson, L Brand, S Dickie,  
K Dodds, S Gallagher, F Geddes, P Maughan, M McNestry,  
Park, Turnbull, J Turnbull, K Walker and D Welsh

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): A Geddes, H Kelly and A Wintcher

**CPL1 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last Committee held on 29 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record, with the addition of the chair thanking the outgoing vice-chair Councillor Thomas Graham for his many years on the Committee.

**CPL2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**CPL3 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK - YEAR END  
PERFORMANCE 2023/24**

The Committee received a report which provided the Council's performance and Improvement Framework year end report. The report outlined the delivery of the Council's priorities for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. It also provided an overview of the performance relevant to the role and remit of this committee.

The analysis of the performance for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 against each of the six policy objectives of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the balanced scorecard that is set out in appendix 1. The areas of particular interest to this Committee were highlighted in the report, however, the full performance management and improvement framework across all priority areas was outlined in appendix 1.

The report outlined the challenges, achievements, actions, and resources for each policy objective. It also included performance data including strategic and operational measures and is informed by qualitative and quantitative assessment to inform policy and resource decisions.

A review of the current PMIF will undergo a review to ensure that the information provided but the framework continues to add value to decision making process and reflects advancements in technology.

It was requested if the structure of the data was outlined to show what are targets, and how they are improving over time, it was noted that this is the biggest constraint the team face as there is no online dashboard, however, this is going to be part of the review process to be able to show data in a more effective way.

It had been noted in the data there was an increase in expenditure for B&B and temporary accommodation, and how the Council plan to reduce this cost going forward. It had been noted to the Committee that supported housing had funding for 62 new bed spaces from November 2024 and within the housing action plan it would be improving and developing preventative work to reduce the expenditure on temporary accommodation.

Further analysis of the data showed there had been an increased in resignations and if there was further information into why it has increased. The committee noted that the employee survey is still live, and once they have the data this can be fed back to the Councillors, but HR would be using this to create action plans to create a better working environment. It was further noted that a leaver survey has been operating for only a few months and would soon be receiving data, but this can be fed back.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Committee noted the report
- (ii) The Committee welcomed the year end performance report attached to the main report at Appendix 1
- (iii) The Committee recommends that the performance report to Cabinet for consideration in July 2024

#### **CPL4 HOUSING KPI - TARGET SETTING**

The Committee received a report which provided an update on proposed targets for Housing, Environment and Healthier Communities key performance indicators 2024/25.

In January 2024 an annual review took place where all KPI's were reviewed following S.M.A.R.T methodology. This will ensure all targets remain challenging and demonstrate the Council's commitment to improve service delivery.

It was noted a number of changes were suggested to be changed for 2024/25 reporting, those are;

- the two following KPI's will be amalgamated into one;
  - Total households initially assess as owed a homelessness duty and;
  - Households with dependent children owed a duty under the homelessness Reduction Act Child and Maternal Health
  - New KPI title; 'Total households assess as owed a Statutory homelessness duty.
- KPI title change will be;
  - From - % of households that remained in existing accommodation.

- To - % of homeless households that remained in existing accommodation.
- The proposed new indicator will measure the people that were sleeping rough, and data is collated by officers visiting areas where people sleeping rough congregate.
  - Total households assessed and owed a homelessness duty who were sleeping rough at time of application.
  - New - Number of people who have slept rough in Gateshead over the course of the period.
- The Council are now required to adhere to the Act definition for damp and mould data capture and reporting to reflect Awaab's law. Therefore, this KPI has a baseline target of % of damp and mould cases that have been successfully resolved.

It had been requested if the information in relation to homelessness is accurate or a guess, however, the Committee were reassured that the figures are either a visual aid or part of the homelessness assessment.

In regard to Damp and Mould, it was noted that this is one of the biggest complaints Councillors receive from their constituents and would like to request a further report on this topic to bring to the OSC, this was noted by the Clerk and service. The Committee were advised that this will be a multi-service report and will take a little bit of time.

On the 30th June 2023 the regulator published submission guidance on what information the Council is required to submit. To ensure compliance with the Regulators requirements we have split the original KPI's above into individual KPI's as below and developed individual targets. See appendix for additional commentary.

- New - Number of anti-social behaviour cases, opened per 1,000 homes (including hate incidents).
- New - Number of anti-social behaviour cases that involve hate incidents opened per 1,000 homes.
- New - Number of stage one complaints received per 1,000 homes.
- New - Number of stage two complaints received per 1,000 homes.
- New - Percentage of non-emergency responsive repairs completed within the landlord's target timescale.
- New - Percentage of emergency responsive repairs completed within the landlord's target timescale.

Where performance data is available for 2022/23 and 2023/24 it is used to identify trends to help inform 2023/24 targets.

In addition, benchmarking data from HouseMark is used to identify our current quartile position and compare current performance against the wider housing sector. We aim to improve our performance towards the top quartiles or the next available quartile in the shortest possible time, except where we are performing at top quartile

already.

For indicators where no benchmark comparisons exist or previous performance data, we have set targets at a level that we feel is achievable and appropriate taking into consideration any influencing factors.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Committee noted the report
- (ii) The revised set of KPI's and their targets for 2024/25 were agreed

## **CPL5 TENANT SCRUTINY REPORT - STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS**

The Committee received a report on the outcome and recommendations from the completed customer scrutiny review of Housing stage 1 complaint responses.

A scrutiny review is a tool used widely across the social housing sector to give tenants the opportunity and power to hold their landlord to account for decisions and performance. It is also a mechanism for building in influence on decision making and provides an opportunity for a reality check on service delivery.

The Council had been advised there was a high percentage of tenant dissatisfaction in their approach to complaint handling. Therefore, in 22/23 a focus group of tenants and leaseholders was set up supported by officers to conduct a satisfaction survey a review the results.

The results showed in 2022/23 only 21% of tenants were satisfied with the Council's approach to complaint handling, this increased to 26% in 23/24. A review concluded the following;

- Inconsistency in the structure of the letter
- Jargon and unclear language
- Responses don't feel personal
- The Council's understanding of the complaint
- Investigating Officers contact details either missing details, or not enough options for the customers preferred contact method;
- Inconsistent Housing Ombudsman information
- Lack of information on outstanding actions
- Too much detail
- Reading age
- Quality of communication
- Timescales for escalation
- Impartiality
- Consistency

The recommendations were as follows;

- Review and update the current standard letter template and ensure it's implemented across Housing Services.

- The addition of a paragraph to the letter template to ensure the investigating Officer agrees a communication strategy with the resident as to how and when any outstanding actions will be communicated.
- Add the Investigating Officer's contact details to the first page of the letter, rather than in the text at the end of the letter. This would help the customer to see this information straight away and refer back to if they need to get in touch.
- Ensure that the language used in letters is clear and understandable. The person writing the letter should make sure that there is no jargon used. If there are some technical things to discuss in the letter, these should be put into simple terms so they are understandable for everyone.
- Deliver further training to officers responsible for investigating complaints. Training could include:
  - Reminding Officers to ensure letters are quality checked before being sent, this includes being checked by another Officer.
  - Reminding Officers where to find the template letters to ensure older versions with outdated information are not used.
  - Ensuring appropriate contact details are provided for the investigating officer in the letter.
  - Guidance on appropriate language when writing a complaint response letter.

The focus group also identified it would be beneficial to introduce a centralised team to handle all complaints about Housing Services.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Committee noted the report
- (ii) That the committee commented and endorsed the report and recommendations

## **CPL6 HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

The Committee received a report on to seek the views of the Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement for 2023/24.

Housing Complaints Process 2023/24

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has introduced a framework of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) that all social landlords must collect and report on from 2023/24. In relation to Complaint handling these include:

Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to complaint handling:

The survey was carried out on the telephone and compared to the data from 2022/23 satisfaction has increased by 5%. However, satisfaction does remain comparatively low when compared to the Council's other TSM scores.

Complaints relative to the size of the landlord:

Our aim is to provide the RSH the number of complaints received per 100 properties. In 2023/23 the target had been exceeded by registering 13 complaints per 1000 homes. In total 429 stage 1 complaints were received during 2023/24 and 56 stage 2 complaints.

Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales:

To be compliant with the CHC a two-stage process has been adopted for housing complaints with a target of 10 working days to respond to stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage two complaints. The HO target of 10 days for responding to stage one complaints has proven to be challenging and only 29% were responded to within the timescale for 2023/24. Stage two target of 20 working days was better with 71% responded to within timescale.

Improving Complaint Handling Performance and Customer Experience

The service redesign of complaint handling has focused on repairs and maintenance is to identify barriers to performance and propose solutions to enhance the service as it receives the most complaints, however, poor performance and low customer satisfaction with complaint handling apply across all Housing Services.

A report setting out the finding and recommendations will be discussed with the Housing Leadership Team in June 2024 and a response agreed. An update will be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

Complaint trends:

Complaint trends are an effective tool for identifying areas of risk, testing culture, and checking if there is a disconnect between policy and practice. During 2023.24 the following summarise the main housing complaint themes

- Time taken to complete a repair
- Estate Maintenance
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Boundary maintenance
- Damage to property.
- Communication

Compliments:

In addition to complaints, it is encouraged to record compliments that are received about colleagues and services. During 2023/24 a total of 73 compliments were registered. Of these 19 were internal compliments from other officers or managers and 54 were from customers. Broken down by service area:

- Repairs and maintenance 31
- Neighbourhood Housing Services – 27
- Multi-storey team - 6
- Neighbourhood Relations -3
- Investment -2
- Lettings - 2
- Rent and Income -2

Key themes from compliments include carrying out repairs to a good standard, helping to resolve an enquiry quickly and effectively, providing practical guidance including bidding on a new home and giving general advice on arrange of issues.

#### Housing Ombudsman Service

The annual Housing Ombudsman report was produced by the HO service for each landlord, and it is expected to be received later in 2024/25. This will set out Gateshead Council's performance in relation to complaints accepted by the HO and will compare Gateshead Council against other social landlords. A copy of the annual report will be included in the next Complaints update report with a full update on determinations made by the HO in 2023/24.

#### Complaint Handling Code – self assessment

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the HO to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints. It also placed a duty on the HO to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued.

The self-assessment was carried out with a focus group of tenants and leaseholders in 2023/24 and identified some updates that are required to the Council's Complaint's policy and to training guidance. A copy of the draft self-assessment is included with this report in Appendix 2.

#### Online Complaint reporting

To refine our approach to handling housing related complaints, enquiries, and compliments submitted online a redesign exercise was undertaken. A survey of customers who had recently used the online service was undertaken and this was followed up with telephone conversations to explore responses in more depth.

In response we have we introduced the following enhancements.

- A new, user-friendly digital form that consolidates all contact types into one accessible format to include a save and resume feature.
- Updated web pages to clearly outline the process and expected timelines.
- Enabling customers to specify their preferred contact methods and timings.
- Refine the form categories to ensure direct routing to the correct service team from the initial contact.
- Implement automatic email confirmations upon submission.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Committee noted the report
- (ii) The Committee provided its view and endorsed the report

## **CPL7 REPAIRS AND VOIDS PERFORMANCE**

The Committee received a report on the current performance of domestic property repairs, including empty properties made ready to let.

The service is currently recruiting to 32 new trade posts, this is to replace non-specialist contractors to improve performance, responsiveness, and value for money. It was queried on where the new posts would work across the service, it was advised 20 posts were specifically for voids work and 12 posts would be within repairs with a mix of trade skills.

Repair inspections increased by 276% in the financial year 2022/23 this was partly due to a rise in complex repairs but also improve first time fixes. Key area identified early in the service review was a regular failure to correctly diagnose repairs with right first-time performance at 36% in March 2022.

Repair Team staffing was resourced in 2022 to manage a projected 54,000 repairs per year supported by contractors. Whilst the repair team increased their productivity by 20% last financial year via various operational improvements, the level of incoming repairs increased by over 28% above resourced capacity to 69,000. The team dealt with 12,000 major jobs, 50% more than the previous year.

It was noted the number of roof repairs have increased and the length scaffolding is left up on resident's properties and causing unnecessary cost and nuisance to the residents. The was advised to the Committee this has been recognised by the service and a new procurement process has concluded and we now have a new contractor in place that should stop this problem going forward.

Construction services made 1,296 empty properties ready for let in 2023/24 compared to the 1,149 in 2022/23.

The number of empty properties undergoing works reduced from 390 at the start of the year to 340 as of 31 March 2024. The current number of properties undergoing works is 328 which is the lowest number in over 4 years. The target is to have no more than 300 properties undergoing works by the end of the financial year.

Whilst the number of work orders completed per empty property has increased, the average cost of making a property ready to let reduced by 4.26%.

The Service has seen an increase in customer satisfaction with the repairs service from 52% in 2022/23 to 69% in 2023/24 a 17% increase and customer satisfaction with the time taken to complete repairs from 42% to 63% a 21% increase.

Right first-time performance increased from 36% in March 2022 to 93% in April 2024.



Appointments kept improved from 50% in March 2022 to 92% in April 2024

Repairs completed in target rose from <50% in March 2022 to 81% in April 2024

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Committee noted the report

## **CPL8 WORK PROGRAMME**

The role and terms of reference of the Committee as previously agreed by the Cabinet and Council were noted.

The report also provided details on the development of the work programme for OSC's and the provision work programme for Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities OSC for the municipal year 2024/25.

The proposed 2024/25 work programme was attached to the main report at appendix 1 and remains provisional as;

- Cabinet may wish to refer further issues to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for further consideration
- It does not take into account of new policy issues which may be identified during the year, which Cabinet may wish to refer to Overview and Scrutiny and
- It does not include issues identified by members of committees on an ongoing basis during the year as a result of scrutiny decisions, call in and council call for action

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the information contained in the annual work programme report be noted
- (ii) The Committee endorsed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's provisional work programme for 2023//24 attached at appendix 1, subject to any amendments
- (iii) The Committee noted that further reports will be brought to the Committee if any priority areas are identified

## **CPL9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business. The date of the next meeting is 16<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

**Chair.....**