

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 1 April 2019

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): J Wallace, R Beadle, D Bradford, L Caffrey, M Charlton, D Duggan, P Foy, T Graham, J Green, S Green, M Hall, M Henry, J Kielty, B Oliphant, N Weatherley and K Wood

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): W Dick

CR24 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

CR25 IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT IN GATESHEAD

The Committee received a report and presentation with regards to the implementation of Universal Credit in Gateshead.

The Committee were advised that Universal Credit has been implemented in 2 phases in Gateshead. In 2015 the "Live" service was introduced for single, non-householder, no children, new job seeker allowance claimants. The rollout of "Full" service in October 2017 was for new claims and change of circumstances. All Universal Credit claims are made via an online application resulting in a single household payment paid monthly in arrears.

The support the implementation of Universal Credit, the Council agreed a Delivery Partnership Agreement with DWP up to 31 March 2019 to provide Universal Support, which mainly included assisted digital support and personal budgeting support. With effect from 1 April 2019, Citizens Advice has become responsible and is funded by DWP for "Help to Claim" support. This is only to assist claimants with their on line claim to the first payment stage. Citizens Advice has not been funded for Personal budgeting support.

The Committee heard from Dr Mandy Cheetham with regards to the research she had undertaken in partnership with Newcastle University. The research used qualitative methods and the team undertook interviews with Universal Credit claimants living in Gateshead (22), Newcastle (10) and South Tyneside (1). Interviews also took place with staff working in Gateshead in Housing (4), the Local Authority (11) and VCS Orgs (22).

The Aims of Universal Credit were to simplify the benefits system, make work pay,

reduce fraud and error and encourage people into work.

Some of the issues identified by claimants are as follows:

- Online claims process
- 5 week assessment period difficult to manage/delays
- Advance payments
- Incorrect awards
- Monthly payments
- Deductions (leaving people in hardship and destitution)
- Resolving issues difficult (passing people from pillar to post)
- Appeals process overlong
- Increased debt / borrowing (reliance on friends and family)
- Impact on claimant's physical / mental / social / financial health / housing security / employment prospects

Some of the comments from staff include:

- If you wanted to devise a system that discriminated against people with learning disabilities, this would be it ... it absolutely particularly discriminates against people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities
- If you're not au fait with a computer, it can be really a bit daunting
- The impact has been horrendous

Its hitting people that can least afford it the hardest with an increased risk of rent arrears, risk of eviction, effects of sanctions, increased hardship / debt/fuel and food insecurity, embarrassment and shame, cumulative impact of welfare reform, deteriorating mental and physical health, anxiety, stress and stigma, relationships with family and friends, social isolation, increased demands on wider LAVCS services, staff burnout.

A comment which came through the research with regards to the pressure on the NHS, for example a sanction saves DWP £1000, is there potential to cost the NHS £10,000 as the sanction leads to a hospital admission.

Staff feel like there is no compassion, no mercy, nothing, staff also feel like they are punishing people and it is as if you are benefits you don't deserve a quality of life. It also seems that people telling staff that they want to kill themselves will have an impact on the staff's mental health and wellbeing.

Recommendations within the report were highlighted as follows:

- Halt Universal Credit roll out
- Monitor and review effects before managed migration
- Update equality impact assessment
- Implement recommendations from VCS/UN
- Monitor wider costs / impact on public spending
- Develop and integrated poverty reduction strategy

- Challenge stigma and discrimination
- Build local partnerships
- Support the VCS
- Lobby for change / adequate resources
- Use learning

It was queried if the research show that where Universal Credit has been rolled out that there is an increase in the use of foodbanks. It was noted that there has been an increase in the use of foodbanks in Gateshead.

It was noted that it had been calculated that a person applying for Universal Credit would need £1000 in savings to get through the minimum of 5 weeks it takes to have their application considered, it was noted that most people would not have £1000 of savings.

It was queried about how open staff were when it came to talking about the impact on their own mental health and whether we are seeing staff suffering. It was noted that staff did talk about how difficult it was for them seeing the suffering Universal Credit was causing is emotional. It was also noted that staff working part time with young children may also be impacted upon.

RESOLVED – That the information contained within the report and presentation be noted.

CR26

REVIEW ON HELPING TO INCREASE SUPPORT TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR - EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION 4

The Committee were reminded of the sessions which had taken place so far, session 1 provided the Committee with a summary of the Gateshead VCS infrastructure and the Council support still available to the sector. The Committee also heard from Dr Jo Price, Chair of Trustees at the Comfrey Project who offered an insight into the work of her charity in Gateshead and how working with the Council is making a difference to the lives of Gateshead's refugees and asylum seekers.

The second evidence gathering session included presentations from Brighten Ryton and Dunston Activity Centre, highlighting the excellent work that both organisations undertake in their respective localities and the Committee discussed how the organisations could work better with the Council and other partners.

In the third session the Committee heard from three key local funders, Community Foundation, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, The Ballinger Charitable Trust and the National Lottery Community Fund.

Today's Committee would hear from Basis@Gateshead.

David Smith, Chief Executive Officer and Phil Conn, Head of Crisis Services presented to the Committee on the current position. Oasis Community Housing is a housing and homeless charity with a Christian ethos and was set up in Gateshead in

1984. The real focus of the charity is about the cause and consequence of homelessness, the work includes supported accommodation, crisis services, employability and domestic abuse support.

Basis is a broad and integrated, direct access offer for anyone in crisis in Gateshead. There is a commitment to replicate the model across the region and have a similar service in Sunderland. The most developed service though is Basis@Gateshead which has been running for 8 years. Basis is a direct access offer therefore anyone who arrives can receive a range of support which is focussed around them, including:

- Tea, toast
- Shower and laundry
- Benefits advice and advocacy, key workers
- Help to rent scheme
- Emergency accommodation, Housing First – Basis Beds
- Employability support and IT suite
- Domestic abuse support groups
- Clinical space opening in the next month
- Links to other services

Over the 8 years the service has been running a lot of lessons have been learnt, a psychologically informed environment has been created, a place where people feel welcome, a captive audience with brief window of opportunity to provide services to someone who may not just have one issue.

The model which has been created is innovative and offers a single service approach. A multi-disciplinary team is in place and whatever issues a person presents with they get the same offer, it is important that people are not being buffered about between different services and a consistent approach is also offered.

Current partners include Housing Options, GP Federation, Mental Health Services, Drug and Alcohol services and other third sector organisations. The service has buy in from Commissions, the Police, Job Centre Plus and it is hoped that this model can be replicated across the North East.

Basis is a great example of how the VCS can collaborate and integrate with public services to reach the most vulnerable in our communities in a more efficient and effective way. The organisation strongly believes that the project supports the Thrive agenda. Many of the individuals supported through the service hub will have multiple and complex needs such as poor physical health, mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions and will have spent time in the care system, prison system or both. Trust has been built within the homeless community over the years and Basis@Gateshead is now considered their safe space. Plans are to continue to work with cross sector partners to bring a range of services together under one roof for this community.

The service already has experience of working with other agencies such as the Gateshead Housing Company, Gateshead College, local churches and schools,

charities such as changing lives, North East Counselling Service and others.

The service has succeeded in getting grant from Gateshead Innovation Fund to co-ordinate all of the work and pull everything together.

It is important that the voluntary sector and the Council find new innovative ways to work together to solve problems. It is important to continue magnetising good will to attract partners, businesses, churches and community groups, all who want to support those struggling in the Borough.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

CR27

CONTRACT MONITORING: INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN GATESHEAD

The Committee received a presentation from Giovanni Spatuzzi, Manager of the Gateshead Infrastructure Team for the contract awarded to Newcastle CVS for support to the voluntary and community sector in Gateshead.

Giovanni advised that the team are now in place for Gateshead, Mark Shilcock is the Our Gateshead Officer and Emma Warden and Barbara Hind are the Infrastructure Officers. Emma will be looking after the Central, East and South areas and Barbara will look after the West and Inner West.

The roles of the team are generic rather than specific and they will help out community and voluntary sector groups with a range of issues. They are a strong team and have a strong knowledge of the voluntary and community sector.

Between August 2018 and January 2019 the following events and activities have taken place:

- 9 networking events have been delivered
- 53 individual organisations supported
- 5 training sessions have been delivered
- 7 organisations supported to submit £789,000 of funding applications, with £690,000 of funding secured
- 1095 groups are listed on the Our Gateshead website with 65,000 visits to the site recorded.

A clear service offer has been developed and recently Chopwell Community Association has been assisted with its governance arrangements and supported Gateshead Access Panel to dissolve and close.

The team have supported Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company in their recent move to Pelaw, and have also supported Leam Lane Community Association and Birtley Community Partnership.

The training sessions included sessions around fundraising for beginners and GDPR.

At the NAVCA Awards, Newcastle CVS won the leadership award and embracing digital for the Our Gateshead website. Newcastle CVS were also nominated in the Collaboration and Partnership Working and Campaigning and Advocacy Categories.

The service are currently going through a rebranding process and will advise of the new name in due course.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the presentation be noted.

CR28 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ANNUAL REPORT

RESOLVED - That this item be deferred to the next meeting.

CR29 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW AND FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received a report highlighting the work of the Committee during 2018-19. The report presented the Committee with a draft work programme for 2019-20. It was noted that changes can be made to the work programme if required during the course of the year. It was noted that it may be necessary that updates with regards to Brexit may need to be moved depending on the position at the time of the scheduled meeting.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) that the information contained within the annual review be noted.
 - (ii) that the provisional work programme for 2019-20 be endorsed by this Committee and referred to Council on 23 May 2019.
 - (iii) that it be noted, further reports will be brought to the Committee to identify additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair.....