

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 14 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)
Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, J Wallace, D Bradford, L Caffrey, S Green, M Hall, J Raine and J Simpson

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor(s):

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Duggan, P Foy, T Graham, R Mullen, B Oliphant, N Weatherley and K Wood

CR14 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

CR15 GATESHEAD COUNCIL APPRENTICESHIPS

The Committee received a report on the Council's strategy for the delivery of apprenticeships within the Council.

In 2017 the Government introduced a number of changes to the apprenticeship system as part of their strategy to delivery three million apprenticeships by 2020.

The three key changes introduced by the Government were:

- The introduction of the apprenticeship levy;
- The proposed introductions of a public sector apprenticeship target; and
- The transfer from Apprenticeship Framework to new Apprenticeship Standards

The introduction of the levy means that organisations with a payroll bill of over £250,000 per month, (£3m per year) are subject to a levy of 0.5% of their gross monthly pay bill. The Council's levy is estimated at around £668,000 per year, including that due for maintained schools. A payment is made each month into the Council's levy account. The Council can draw down from that fund to pay for apprenticeship training. There are strict criteria around the use of the fund, for example it cannot be used to pay wages or non-apprenticeship training costs. There is a maximum of 24 months in which to use each annual levy payment, which operates on a rolling basis, thereafter unspent funds are inaccessible and returned to the Treasury.

The public sector apprenticeship target applies to all public bodies that have 250 or

more employees. The annual target requires 2.3% of the workforce to be started on an apprenticeship, Gateshead Council employs approximately 7000 staff including those in maintained schools, therefore this would require approximately 160 apprentices to be enrolled annually to meet the target. The Government have acknowledged that they have set a stretched target and also stated that they expect that all organisations will strive to meet the target and will take steps to improve apprenticeship take up year on year.

Apprenticeship Frameworks are being phased out, with new Apprenticeship Standards introduced which have been developed in collaboration with employers in order to be more specific to individual business need rather than applying broadly to business sectors.

There are over 250 Apprenticeship Standards being phased in over time, covering a wide range of occupations and providing the opportunity to achieve qualifications up to level 7 (Post Graduate level).

Following the introduction of the changes in 2017 two scoping exercises have been undertaken with services to identify demand for apprenticeships across the Council. Discussions took place with Service Directors, and in some cases the management teams, to explore where apprenticeships could be utilised to support transformational change and deliver corporate objectives and service delivery. The scoping activity included looking at areas where the Council provides funding for staff to study for professional qualifications, which could, in future, potentially be covered by an apprenticeship. This would result in a direct saving to the Council as funds would be accessed from the levy rather than from the Council's revenue budget.

Briefing sessions were also held with senior managers and numerous communications have been sent to employees to promote awareness. The Council's Learning Skills service delivers apprenticeship training in a range of subjects including business administration, customer service, leadership and management and Teaching Assistant apprenticeships. To access all other types of apprenticeship training, the Council has been required to establish a procurement process which is compliant with Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regulations. Providers who meet the criteria in relation to quality of provision, health and safety and safeguarding are included on the Council's approved list of providers and can bid to deliver apprenticeship training as demand arises.

Despite efforts to publicise apprenticeships across the workforce and put arrangements in place for delivery, the take up of apprenticeships has remained low, with consequential impact on levy spend. This is the general picture across many areas in the public sector.

Low take-up of apprenticeships has been due to a number of issues:

- Concerns from managers over the requirement to spend 20% of time 'off the job' in training, and the impact that has on service delivery.
- A lack of available Apprenticeship Standards resulting in the continuation of traditional academic qualifications rather than apprenticeships. This is due to

new Apprenticeship Standards being rolled out by the Institute for Apprenticeships as and when they are approved for delivery.

- The essential requirement for all apprentices to evidence English and Maths at GCSE level or Functional Skills level 2, when they may already have degrees and other professional qualifications.
- Insufficient providers being able to successfully join the Council's 'Approved List' due to failures (or their inability to provide sufficient information) on health and safety and/or safeguarding matters.
- Insufficient providers in the region to deliver the types of apprenticeship programmes the Council requires.
- Providers in the region cancelling, or deciding (sometimes at a very late stage), not to run apprenticeship training due to insufficient numbers of learners to form viable cohorts.
- Providers failing to submit bids leading to re-runs of procurement competitions which can delay the procurement process, with a knock-on effect of delaying the recruitment of apprentices.
- The disparate way requests for apprenticeship training have been managed with various elements being managed by different services and an overall lack of corporate resource to provide a co-ordinated approach.

The Council has taken action to address these issues:

- Due to the number of providers failing both the health and safety and safeguarding elements of the procurement process on their first submission, the requirements have been reviewed in conjunction with the Council's Health and Safety team. It has been agreed that only apprenticeship training which falls within construction/engineering will be subject to high-risk assessment. All other type of the apprenticeship training will be deemed to be low risk and will demonstrate compliance through self-assessment. This should result in few providers failing the procurement process and having to reapply, thus allowing more providers to be listed on the procurement framework.
- With regards to safeguarding the majority of failures were in relation to statutory guidance which is a legal requirement which providers should already have in their policy to comply with the law. Therefore, it has been determined that standards in relation to safeguarding should not be lowered, and that the Council will continue to check that the policy submitted by the provider is legally compliant.
- To maximise levy spend and address some of the issues, an Apprenticeship Co-ordinator has been recruited for a fixed term period of two years. The remit of the Apprenticeship Co-ordinator is to:
 - Be responsible for the development and implementation of an apprenticeship strategy and delivery plan.
 - Manage the HR aspects of apprenticeships to maximise take up.
 - Be responsible for the contract management of providers to ensure apprenticeship training can be delivered to a high standard.
 - Manage the technical aspects of the procurement process in terms of the dynamic purchasing system and associated procedures.
 - Engage with training providers to encourage participation and drive up

- apprenticeship delivery.
- Work in partnership with other organisations to share resources and promote joint procurement of training providers.

An apprenticeship strategy has been developed, the aims of the strategy are to:

- Embed a positive apprenticeship culture
- Maximise workforce capability
- Support the continuous professional development of employees
- Develop workforce diversity and inclusivity
- Engage with schools to maximise benefits from the levy
- Engage with training providers and other local authorities and employers to maximise apprenticeship provision with the region

It is also the intention to explore the passporting levy funds to other organisations to fund their apprenticeship training. The intention is to work with organisations in the Council's supply chain, partners and community and voluntary organisations within the borough to identify opportunities to passport levy funds to support apprenticeships. Priority will be given to allocating the fund to those organisations who are working closely with the Council to deliver the Thrive Agenda.

The LGA will also assist with mapping apprenticeship standards to Council job roles and look at the development of career pathways within a specific service area. The Council will use this framework to replicate the approach in other services.

The next steps are to seek endorsement of the draft strategy from the LGA and within the Council. This will include consulting with LearningSkills, Economic Development and Trade Unions. A delivery plan will be developed which sets out the actions required to deliver the strategy. This will align to the Council's workforce plan, and once approved, the strategy and delivery plan can be implemented in accordance with agreed timescales.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee were satisfied with the draft Apprenticeship Strategy.
 - (ii) That the Committee were satisfied with the future direction of apprenticeships within the Council.

CR16 NEW GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report setting out proposed areas for improvement from the new guidance on Overview and Scrutiny.

New statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local government and combined authorities has been published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. The guidance has been produced following a commitment made by the Government in early 2018 following on from the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into overview and scrutiny.

The revised guidance is light touch and aims to raise the profile of scrutiny committees and increase the effectiveness and relevance of their work.

A central theme of the statutory guidance is the importance of a strong organisational culture which supports scrutiny to provide effective challenge and a commitment to scrutiny across an authority, not just amongst those members and officers with a scrutiny role.

Compared to previous guidance, which concentrated on explaining the legislation, the new guidance is practically focused and grounded in the experience of scrutiny in local authorities since the 2000 Act. It leaves scope for local practice and does not intend to be prescriptive.

Following review of the areas highlighted in the new guidance it is considered that Gateshead already has in place much of what is set out in the guidance, however, it is proposed that the following represent potential areas for improvement.

- Executive – Scrutiny Protocol
 - The guidance suggests the development of an Executive – Scrutiny Protocol as a positive means of defining the relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny and providing a framework for managing /mitigating any differences of opinion.
In Gateshead we already have a protocol in place relating to Cabinet attendance at OSC meeting and it is considered that this could be widened further to cover several matters raised by the guidance eg managing disagreements between scrutiny and the executive, reflect the good practice already in place around early engagement with the executive regarding scrutiny’s future work programmes and set out the position in relation to scrutiny’s powers to access information.

- Whistleblowing
 - As part of establishing a strong organisational challenge culture the guidance, for the first time, references whistleblowing. It suggests that whilst scrutiny has no role in the investigation or oversight of whistleblowing arrangements the findings of independent whistleblowing investigations might be of interest to scrutiny committees as they consider their wider implications.

At this point in time, the Council’s Monitoring Officer has advised that there have been insufficient whistleblowing cases in Gateshead to identify any emerging themes / issues to enable scrutiny to have a worthwhile role. Therefore, at this stage, councillors are asked to note their potential future scrutiny role in this area.

- Communicating Work of Scrutiny to Wider Council
 - The guidance also indicates that Councils should take steps to ensure that all members and officers are made aware of the role scrutiny

committees play in the organisation. The guidance indicates that a means of achieve this could be by some reports and recommendations being submitted from scrutiny to full Council rather than solely the executive, taking account of the relevance of the reports to the Council's business and its capacity to consider and respond in a timely manner.

However, having regard to Council's capacity to consider additional reports from scrutiny it is considered that it would be sufficient to submit an annual report to full Council on scrutiny's activities in order to raise awareness of ongoing work.

- Following the Council Pound
 - The guidance suggests that the Council may wish to consider, when agreeing contracts with organisations using public funds to deliver goods and services, whether it would be appropriate to include a requirement for them to supply information to or appear before scrutiny committees.

It is considered that there is significant potential in the role scrutiny could play here, in the context of a number of areas of council policy, existing and emerging in terms of achieving value for money and outcomes with regards to local employment and training; climate change; and other areas of corporate social responsibility and social value generally.

As this is a large area for consideration, it is proposed that a workshop is organised for Corporate Resources OSC during November 2019 (which has as part of its remit, efficiency, value for money and procurement) so that they can better understand, explore and prioritise the role that scrutiny could play here.

The workshop will be led by Andrea Tickner, Service Director Corporate Commissioning and will explore scrutiny of the following options:

- Overall Review of Council third party expenditure (eg key value high spend areas, which suppliers, contracted and off contract/local and national suppliers
- Process – taking councillors through a particular tender process and what has been achieved on a previous contract
- Social value and what is being achieved

It was suggested that all councillors maybe should be invited to the workshop.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the information provided in the report be noted
 - (ii) That the proposals for improvements be endorsed.
 - (iii) That all members of the Council be invited to the workshop –

following the council pound.

CR17 THE IMPACT OF THE GATESHEAD THRIVE FUND 2018-2019

The Committee received a report and presentation from The Community Foundation on the Gateshead Thrive Fund and to seek the Committee's view on the impact of the Gateshead Thrive Fund during 2018/19, looking at how it has helped to support, develop and build capacity in the voluntary and community sector.

The Gateshead Fund was established in 2011 to support, develop and build capacity in the Borough's voluntary and community sector and to help strengthen communities. The outcomes of the Gateshead Fund are:

- Increased capacity building and sustainability within the voluntary and community sector
- Increased provision of services by the voluntary and community sector
- Improved clarity and equity in commissioning processes
- Simplified and proportionate application and assessment processes
- Developing and mobilising volunteers
- Supporting and building relationships within communities
- Supporting residents to build their communities and improve what is already there
- Retention and expansion of councillor community champion role

Council agreed a £300,000 budget allocation for the Fund for 2018/19 which, together with the agreed carryover of underspend and returned funds, equated to an overall available fund of £443,460 which was assigned as per the following:

Thrive Fund Main Grant	£255,360
Thrive Community Grant	£60,000
Tyneside Crowd	£30,000
Local Community Fund	£66,000
Talented Athlete / Sporting Individuals grants	£10,000
Gateshead Volunteers Month Grant	£20,000

The Community Foundation for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland continued to administer the fund in accordance with its agreement with the Council, which runs until July 2020.

A copy of the annual impact review of the fund has been circulated. This includes a breakdown of how the fund has been allocated and examples of some of the applications, and a breakdown of the Volunteers Month small grants and Sporting Grants to individuals.

Newcastle City Futures, the multi-sector partnership of which Gateshead Council is a member, contracted with SpaceHive to set up a new crowdfunding platform which has been called Tyneside Crowd. It provides an opportunity for people and organisations in the Tyneside area to collaborate on creative and innovative projects to improve and celebrate the places where they live, work and study. Tyneside

Crowd also provides an opportunity for grant makers to place funding programmes on the platform; The Thrive Fund ring fenced up to £30,000 to support eligible projects from Gateshead with up to £2000 of project matched funding. No projects were supported during the financial year.

The Local Community Fund allocation of £3000 per ward was agreed as part of the Gateshead Fund budget proposal. The £66,000 budget is part of the overall Thrive Fund but is administered by the Council's Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering Team separate to the main fund arrangements. The amount available was augmented with £40,600 underspend carried forward from 2017/18. As in previous years, the majority of activities supported were varied, small in scale and impactful, delivered by local groups within communities. Over the year £98,500 helped support 164 projects and activities, ranging from events across the Christmas festive season, school holiday activities for children and families and equipment for community lounges and community festivals.

The Gateshead Thrive Fund continues to provide a significant financial resource supporting the viability and sustainability of a number of Gateshead's key community groups and organisations, helping them to maintain their positive impact in the community and contribution to the delivery of the Council's Thrive Agenda.

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

CR18 HELPING OUT - VOLUNTEER PLAN - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received an Annual Update report on the implementation of Gateshead's Volunteer Plan, now known as Helping Out.

Gateshead Council has adopted the Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives and this will now supersede the current Council Plan. The pledge "Support our communities to support themselves and each other" is at the heart of the Council's approach to volunteering.

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/2020 to 2023/24 states that the Council will continue to seek to mitigate demand pressures within services by capacity building within communities, including where appropriate work with partners and volunteers.

In April 2018 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the content of the Volunteers Plan Refresh. The plan offered a new set of commitments to support residents and community organisations in Gateshead to help each other out.

There are now 2825 volunteers registered in Gateshead Council (originally 50 in 2013 and 1978 in 2018). As a very conservative estimate there could be as many as 8,000 – 10,000 volunteers actively helping across our communities.

Volunteers in Gateshead provide help to a range of council services and voluntary groups, most notably in the environmental area, social care, health and sport and community centres.

Corporate volunteer days continue to grow in demand, with a total of over 125 individual organisations requesting tailored bespoke volunteer days supporting an estimated 2,500 individual employee volunteers (as at 2019). The economic value to the Gateshead community is estimated at £219,995.

Gateshead's seventh Volunteers Month took place in June 2019. Throughout June 128,199 hours were recorded on the volunteer totaliser which equates to £1,666,587 economic value for 2019. That's an increase of 15,048 hours over the month and an increase of economic value of £195,624 from the figures in 2018.

In 2019 the funding available for Volunteers Month was incorporated into the main Thrive Fund. Grants of between £250-£3000 are available to support groups in different areas including volunteering. Projects can be delivered at any time and unlike previous years are not confined to June. This provides groups with more flexibility for their projects and activities.

For the first time The Gateshead Awards were held in June this year to link into Volunteers Month and increase the recognition of volunteers. The awards were held on the evening of Wednesday 12 June. The Gateshead Awards highlight the huge investment into the community from volunteers and voluntary groups. There are several categories including, volunteer and voluntary organisation of the year. A winner in each category was announced on the night.

One of the key areas this year has been Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) highlighting how private sector organisations assign their employees to volunteer projects in Gateshead through Helping Out Volunteer Days.

The Helping Out Volunteer Days involve any activities that a voluntary group would benefit from including gardening, painting and even website development.

From October 2018 (following the previous OSC report) until the end of April 2019, Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering coordinated the recruitment of 600+ volunteers to support the World Transplant Games 2019. Without these volunteer roles including; accommodation and hospitality, sports events and venues, social and cultural programme, marketing and PR, transport, logistics and Health and Safety the games could not be delivered.

The Volunteer Plan and systems for the management of volunteer projects had remained largely unchanged since 2013 until the refresh. Therefore some of the systems and processes that support the recruitment and retention of volunteers are now difficult to manage efficiently due to the increasing volume of volunteering requests and the capacity available to process the requests.

Following some research in 2018 and earlier, it was determined that an online system for volunteer recruitment would be the most effective for volunteers, organisations, voluntary groups and Council Officers in Gateshead.

A specification is currently being developed following Gateshead Council's procurement process to identify the most suitable provider to create a bespoke online database. External funding has been sourced by Neighbourhood Volunteering and Management to fund this.

The following priority areas for future action have been identified in order to continue the delivery of the Volunteers Plan:

- Work with a suitable provider to tailor a new online management system to recruit volunteers, record volunteers, promote volunteer roles and match available volunteers to opportunities within Gateshead. The system will also generate specific reports to monitor volunteering which can be reported back to OSC at a later date.
- Continue promotion of the Employee Volunteering Scheme specifically group volunteer opportunities for teams of Council employees
- Look to refresh the application forms for the Employee Volunteering Scheme to remove any barriers to applying
- Development work with the Private Business Sector of Gateshead to determine Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies aims and align them to project development.
- Continue development work and promotion of individual & group volunteering with corporate organisations and provide links to the voluntary sector
- Creation of new group projects using one central form. These will include proposed projects for volunteers and those for community service.
- Continued development of volunteering opportunities on Gateshead Council website and OurGateshead and using the online resource as a space to share experiences and good news stories to illustrate examples of good practice
- Continued development work with local colleges and universities
- Development of young people and volunteering including sixth forms and secondary schools as well as youth groups
- Continue to provide lead support for volunteering within the Voluntary & Community sector as well as for Council Service projects and roles.
- Continue development work with Environmental Friends of Groups including training needs, insurance issues, continued networking with services including insurance, Street Scene & Unions and the bi-annual Friends of Group Conferences.
- Re-establishment of the Volunteer Action Group. A new group will include Gateshead Council Volunteer Coordinators, as well as those from the Voluntary Sector to enable better communication and contacts to develop naturally.
- Continue working relationships with Trade Unions regarding the creation of further volunteering opportunities and FOG's.
- Development work around training in general for volunteers from a central resource point.
- Detailed Annual timetable to be provided highlighting volunteer events and significant dates for projects etc. which will be available on Gateshead Council's website and OurGateshead.
- Development of certificate and presentation to enable recognition of long serving council volunteers and The Gateshead Awards 2020 onwards.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the progress of implementation of the Volunteers Plan be noted.
 - (ii) That the future actions be agreed.

CR19 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received it's Annual Work Programme Report. It was noted that there had been a couple of changes made to the programme the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy Refresh has been added to the December meeting and the Implementation of the Workforce Strategy has moved to the January 2020 meeting.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) that the provisional programme be noted.
 - (ii) that further reports on the work programme may be brought to the Committee to identify any issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair.....