GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 28 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor N Weatherley (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, V Anderson, B Clelland, S Dickie, Diston, F Geddes, S Hawkins, H Kelly, P Maughan and A Wheeler

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Burnett, K Dodds, A Geddes, M Hood, Reay, J Turnbull and R Waugh

CPL49 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

(i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL50 REVIEW TO ADDRESS SKILLS SHORTAGES & INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES - SIX MONTH UPDATE

The Committee received a report setting out progress made against recommendations to Cabinet by the OSC following a review of work to address skills shortages and increase employment opportunities.

It was highlighted from the report the scope of the review requested by the OSC was to examine the existing approach to tackle skills shortages and maximising the take up of local employment opportunities by appropriately skills individuals from the resident workforce. It was noted that the review aims, and objectives all fell in line with Gateshead Councils Thrive agenda.

From the report it was advised that in June 2019 the Council launched Work Inspiration Gateshead, a new programme aimed at inspiriting young people to broaden their horizons and be ambitions. It was further stated that in partnership with Gateshead College and the North East Business and Innovation Centre, the 18-month initiative will deliver a series of sector insight and inspiration events. It was also noted that local businesses involved in the programme will give 11-16 year olds an insight into industries and careers that may not have existed in the North East. The Committee were also provided with an overview of events that have taken place.

The Committee were advised that further sector insight events are being planned for Autumn 2019. It was further noted that the Council has continued to coordinate a Gateshead Careers, Education Information, Advice and Guidance Network involving all Gateshead Secondary Schools, SEND schools, Gateshead College and the Pupil

Referral Unit.

From the report, it was highlighted that digital skills will be increasingly important for work. It was noted that only 35% of North East residents are considered to have 'digital skills for work'. It was advised that the Council has secured the commitment of 23 primary schools from across the borough to establish a new Code Club as part of a programme to ensure that all children has access to coding opportunities to address the digital skills gap in the region.

An overview of schemes to improve access to work and in work progression was provided which included the launch of Gateshead Council's 'Gateshead Works'. The Committee were also advised that the Council has secured European Social Fund in May 2019 for a new £398,000 programme to help secure 260 of the most disadvantaged employed and economically inactive residents in the borough. It was further noted from the report that a funding extension has also been secured to continue the Building Better Opportunities 'Wise Steps' project to engage and support a further 200 residents.

The report highlighted that Universal Credit has had a significant impact on the welfare system. It was noted that the Council is helping residents to navigate and utilise Universal Credit to ensure they are not disadvantaged when accessing work.

It was asked what influence services have over bus routes; it was noted that the Council are in regular contact with Go Ahead Northern regarding connectivity across Gateshead. It was also noted that a bid has been made to the Transforming Cities fund in addition to work being done to address climate change issues in the region.

An additional question was asked regarding which wards the residents who have been supported were from; it was advised this information would be pulled together and circulated following the meeting.

A discussion took place regarding the resourcing of the various programmes; particularly staffing. It was highlighted that learningSkills currently employ 75 full time delivery staff in addition to 80 sessional tutors. Further discussions took place on the use of the Governments apprenticeship levy and the competitive process of bidding for funds. A comment was also made on the uncertainty around the availability of ESF funding post-Brexit.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

CPL51 COMMUNITY SAFETY ANNUAL PRIORITIES

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the key activities that were coordinated and delivered by the Gateshead Community Safety Board within the last six months in order to address the strategic priorities outlined in the Strategic Partnership Plan 2019/20.

It was noted that the Board has a statutory duty under the Crime and Disorder Act to produce an annual intelligence-led Strategic Assessment along with a Partnership

Plan. It was highlighted that the strategic themes agreed by the Community Safety Board for delivery in 2019/20 are:

- Anti-social behaviour and environmental crime
- Domestic abuse
- Restricting and tackling drug supply
- Hate crime and tension monitoring
- Preventing violent extremism

A summary of crime performance was provided from the report in addition to an update of progress made to date against the Board's priorities. The Board were also advised that several key actions will be progressed in the next six months which were to:

- Carry out a systems-thinking review of how we tackle anti-social behaviour to ensure we have the right approach.
- Re-establish the Strategic Domestic Abuse Executive Forum and create local Action Plan (linked to elements identified within Domestic Abuse Bill).
- Pilot a new daily approach in relation to the functioning of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) process.
- Complete Domestic Homicide Reviews and to implement recommendations and key learning points.
- Continue to develop bespoke projects and initiatives to drive out hate crime and to combat any increased community tensions/cohesion.
- Strengthen our links with other thematic partnerships – including Health and Wellbeing and Safeguarding Boards.
- Consider the role and remit of Gateshead Community Safety Board partners in the newly created Violence Reduction Unit in Northumbria.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme and to seek additional funding to continue with the project from March 2020.

It was asked what work is being undertaken to prevent ASB and environmental crime caused by adults. It was advised that an integrated offender management is in place for this. It was further noted that contact and guidance for Magistrates is also part of the solution.

The Board were also advised that incidents are mapped to identify trends and areas of need where intervention work can be targeted. It was noted that this work is being done alongside partner organisations.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.
(ii) The Committee agreed to receive a further update in six months.

CPL52 HOUSING STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation and report providing an update of progress against the actions in the Housing Strategy that was agreed at full Council on March 2019.

From the presentation an overview of Gateshead Housing Vision was provided highlighting that Gateshead's Thrive Agenda was a driver in ensuring that people and families are at the heart of all that is done. It was also noted that as part of the Gateshead Local Plan 2010 – 2030 the service will ensure that the residential offer provides a choice of top quality accommodation in sustainable locations to meet people's current and future needs and aspirations.

An overview of housing tenures across Gateshead was provided as well as data to show changes in housing tenure from 2001. The Committee were also provided with a graph to demonstrate housing need in the context of an aging population amongst other factors.

The Committee were advised of the key objectives for housing support which included providing the most appropriate range of housing related support to help residents access and sustain a home. It was also highlighted that by delivering a wider prevention agenda, the causes of vulnerability, health, social and economic inequity can be addressed.

From the presentation an overview of housing support was provided which included a summary of the Homelessness review as led by The Gateshead Housing Company. Additional details were also provided on housing standards objectives and housing supply.

The Committee noted that regular monitoring of the cross-council group action plan would continue in addition to the production of a Asset Management Strategy.

It was asked what work is being done to ensure that housing developers allow for the provision of social housing in new developments. It was noted that as part of the Core Strategy the Council have more powers to ensure that affordable housing is part of the package when developments are built on Council Land.

An additional question was asked as to whether there were more plans for schemes such as Innovation Village. It was stated that there are plans; it was also noted that accelerated construction provides additional Government funding as houses are built more quickly.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the report and presentation.

CPL53 PRIVATE RENTED PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee received a report and presentation to provide an update on the Council's approach to dealing with some of the issues in the private or privately rented sector.

It was highlighted that there are 67,000 private or privately rented properties in Gateshead. It was stated that the team undertakes a wide range of action including dealing with the regulation of standards, selective landlord licencing in specific areas and dealing with ASB across the borough.

From the presentation the Committee were provided with an overview of the Private Sector Housing Team and their additional priorities which included providing advice and support to both landlords and tenants. A summary of what the team deals with regularly was also provided which included involvement with issues of disrepair and verminous properties.

It was noted that as part of the Council's Thrive agenda, the Private Sector Housing Team are going the extra mile to solve problems that are not the norm. It was also stated that the team are using an intelligence and knowledge led approach with more enforcement action against persistent offenders.

Within the presentation an overview of facts and figures were provided as follows:

- 75% reduction in reported crime in Selective Licensing Areas since 2018. Includes identifying and eliminating brothels, prostitute rest houses, accommodation for trafficked people or modern-day slaves and cannabis farms.
- Helping individuals in debt to landlords and utility suppliers to make payment arrangements therefore avoiding eviction and preventing homelessness.
- Unannounced inspections – carried out early morning and late evening jointly with police and priority based on demand for Police and Council services.
- Improving lives – many filthy or verminous properties usually very complex circumstances,
- increased use of Improvement Notices to improve property conditions where category 1 or 2 hazards exist.
- Use of civil penalties of up to £30k More landlords being fined for being evasive & non-compliant – tackling the worst first! 20+ so far.
- Compliance with Licence conditions – monitoring turnover of tenants with Council Tax and getting straight back into properties.
- Modern day slavery – Bentinks, Hotel Express
- Supported Operation Benelli -Organised Motorbike thefts, drug supply and serious violence
- Tackling ASB – Robust use of powers to deal with these problems including:
- Community Protection Warnings
- Community protection Notices
- Abatement notices
- Injunctions
- Attending court for non compliance and seeking conviction
- Significant contributor of referrals into 'Public Service Reform' team – 12 recent cases
- Other enforcement teams using Op Vienna officers – notified of caravan. Police investigated found individual wanted on warrant for over a year with a large supply of heroin.
- Working with Trading Standards and 'Tobacco dog' to tackle illicit supplies in community.

Officers presenting offered an open invitation to Councillors of the Committee to spend some time with the Private Sector Housing team should they wish to find out more about the work being done.

The Committee noted that the presentation had been interesting and that a Members Seminar to expand on the issues raised would be beneficial.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the report and presentation.

(ii) The Committee requested that a Members Seminar take place for further information.

CPL54 NEW GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report providing an update of proposed areas for improvement arising from the new guidance on Overview and Scrutiny.

From the report a summary of proposed areas and issues for consideration was provided; it was noted that Gateshead already has in place much of what is set out in the guidance. The following areas were suggested for improvement:

- Executive – Scrutiny Protocol
- Whistleblowing
- Communicating work of scrutiny to wider Council
- Following the Council Pound

Details of the above were provided within the report for the Committee.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

(ii) The Committee endorsed the proposed areas for improvement.

CPL55 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the report setting out the provisional work programme for the municipal year 2019/20.

RESOLVED:

(i) The Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme.

(ii) The Committee agreed that the Work Programme be brought back to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair……..