

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Monday, 5 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, A Wheeler, D Burnett,
F Geddes, H Weatherley, H Kelly, Reay, J Green, R Waugh,
S Dickie, S Hawkins, Anderson and P Maughan

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): B Clelland, J Turnbull and K Dodds

CPL82 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 8 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL83 CONSTITUTION

The Committee received a copy of the constitution setting out the remit and the terms of reference of the Committee.

The Committee noted the constitution and welcomed new members to the meeting. A discussion took place on the Thrive agenda and noted frustration on behalf of constituents that many of them are not thriving; particularly those who reside in the most deprived wards of the borough.

The Committee requested additional support and training from officers to ensure that the role of the Committee is fulfilled as per the constitution. It was noted that the remit/terms of reference for the Committee is extremely broad and that there may not be equal opportunity to give each area appropriate time for scrutiny, particularly with a reduced number of meetings across the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the constitution.

CPL84 HOUSING PERFORMANCE & COMPLIANCE MONITORING

The Committee received a report and presentation providing an overview of housing performance and compliance monitoring.

From the presentation the Committee were advised that there had been a need to change the governance and reporting arrangements for housing services; an overview of regulatory requirements, the White Paper: The Charter for Social Housing Residents and the Building Safety Bill was also provided.

It was reported that tenant involvement and empowerment was a key consideration.

The Committee noted that a new Resident Influence Panel is to be established to scrutinise services. It was also highlighted that a new buildings assurance board is to be established with reports from this meeting being presented to the Committee.

A summary of performance reporting and compliance reporting was presented; it was stated that the Committee would receive quarterly reports covering factors such as fire safety, electrical safety and data management. The Committee were further advised that updates would be presented on the Transformation Programme which would include updates on risks and issues arising.

The Committee requested support and training from officers so that they could fulfil their role appropriately when scrutinising housing services and new developments. Officers advised that this could be arranged in the coming months.

A discussion took place on the Housing Revenue Account; it was stated that this account does not have enough funds in the long-term but that this is largely due to the Council not having control over rent rates. It was also noted that existing housing stock needs a lot of improvement in terms of fire safety and compliance. The Committee were also provided with further details on the role of the Strategic Housing Board in managing housing issues such as voids and performance.

It was asked whether the Council's bidding process for housing allocations was under review; officers advised that this was happening. The Committee also requested a list of officer contacts within Housing Services who could be contacted directly; it was noted that a directory is being developed for Councillors.

RESOLVED:

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

CPL85 PROPOSED APPROACH TO PROGRAMME OF IMPROVEMENT OF GREEN SPACES

The Committee received a report with an update on the improvement of green spaces for Gateshead.

From the report, the Committee noted that the borough of Gateshead stretches almost 13 miles and covers 55 square miles making it the largest of the five Tyne & Wear authorities. It was highlighted that there are 28 parks and 120 fixed play sites with various facilities managed by Gateshead Council. The Committee also noted that the Council works with partners such as Durham Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission and local conservation groups.

The Committee received a verbal update on the programme of improvements to green spaces within the borough. Further details of the programme were appended to the report.

The Committee asked whether there was to be a review of allotments in Gateshead; a comment was made that the waiting lists are extremely high and that some allotment sites are not being used. Officers advised that a review of the current waiting list is underway. It was further noted that the service now has a dedicated

allotments officer to ensure that allotment sites are being used appropriately.

A comment was made highlighting The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy; officers advised that they were aware of the initiative. The Committee also noted that open and green spaces have a positive impact on the mental health of residents and that open spaces are being blighted by off-road motorcyclists. It was noted that Northumbria Police are working with the Council's Community Safety Team to improve the problem which is not unique to Gateshead.

A question was asked about the leasehold of Chase Park; the Committee were advised that a collaborative approach is being taken with planners so that suitable access can be maintained to the park.

The Committee noted that the handover of some of Gateshead's Bowling Greens to local clubs had been successful.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the planned programme of improvement to green spaces.

CPL86 NEW PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK - UPDATE

The Committee received a report and presentation providing an update on Performance Management & Improvement Framework (PMIF) Implementation.

The Committee were provided with a reminder of the aims of the PMIF; it was highlighted that the framework aims to enable effective delivery of the Council's Thrive policy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

A summary of themes and measures was provided; the Committee noted that there were several cross-cutting themes. It was also reported that the policy objectives would aim to:

- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a health standard of living for all, in accordance with international law on economic and social rights and;
- Create and develop health and sustainable communities and places

From the presentation, the Committee were taken through a summary of the PMIF balance scorecard. The Committee also received information on the importance of continued engagement with employees and partners. It was highlighted that consideration would also be given to the Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Health and Care Systems Board framework and the voluntary and community sector.

Officers advised the Committee that there is to be a gradual implementation of the framework from April 2021 with 6-monthly reporting to Cabinet and quarterly reporting to OSC.

The Committee noted its frustration that they were not seeing evidence of what has been achieved through the Council's Thrive policy. A comment was made noting that

there are increasing levels of deprivation across Gateshead and that dependence on services such as foodbanks was rising. The Committee also noted disappointment at the loss of youth services throughout Gateshead over the years and that anti-social behaviour across the borough was still prevalent.

The Committee acknowledged the efforts of the Council and officers in developing the framework. It was noted that the work being undertaken is valuable but that more needs to be done in the short term to support the most vulnerable residents.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report and presentation.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive additional updates on the PMIF at a future meeting.

CPL87 COVID -19 UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation providing an update on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

From the presentation, a summary of support to businesses was provided. It was reported that over £55 million in Retail Discount rate relief had been provided and that 12,790 payments totalling £35,628,079 had been issued across a variety of schemes for businesses impacted by the pandemic.

The Committee noted that support had been provided via a Support Hub with dedicated web pages and online resources; it was highlighted that the page had received over 30,000 visits. It was also noted that 1-2-1 support, advice and guidance in relation to financial entitlement, discounts and other financial support had been provided to over 2,500 businesses.

A summary of the Shop Local Shop Safe campaign was provided; the Committee also acknowledged that the ability of businesses to survive or thrive during the pandemic was heavily influenced by the sector in which the business operated. It was reported that businesses within the leisure and hospitality industries had been impacted significantly due to national and local restrictions.

From the presentation, the Committee received an update on support for individuals in terms of employment support and skills. The Committee also received a summary on the support provided to young people via the DWP Kickstart 'Gateway' to help businesses access funding to create job placements for 16–24 year-olds.

The Committee noted that there has been an increase in demand for Class 1 drivers nationally; it was stated that to achieve Class 1 status it could cost individuals up to £1,000. The Committee asked whether the Council were able to provide support to Gateshead residents who would like to achieve their Class 1 status. Officers advised that this demand has been exacerbated by the growth of companies such as Amazon; officers acknowledged that support was needed to enable individuals to achieve this license and that discussions with the DWP and partners are taking place.

A discussion took place on the use of furlough; concern was noted that some residents could lose their employment when this scheme ends. The Committee were advised that employment support officers are working with many residents who are currently furloughed to explore their options.

The Committee thanked officers for all of their hard work throughout the pandemic; the Committee noted that the support received by both businesses and individuals had been extremely valuable.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.

CPL88 HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES & FOOD

The Committee received a report providing an update on the delivery of the Easter Holiday Activities and Food Programme.

The Committee received a summary of the scheme for context; it was highlighted from the update that DfE funding to the value of £850,000 had been allocated for use over the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays for benefits-related Free School Meal recipients and vulnerable children.

From the report it was noted the current plan of confirmed summer clubs is to be delivered in 44 venues providing 21,000 places across 6 weeks to approximately 1,450 children per day. The Committee also received further details of the activities available from the report; this included sports, work-skills, cooking and cycling.

The Committee were shown how free school meal eligible households had been mapped to allow for efficient planning of the schemes. It was highlighted that 95% of households eligible were within a short commute of a summer programme location.

RESOLVED:

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

CPL89 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the annual work programme report 2021-22. The report set out the current programme for the year with the schedule of meetings and topics appended.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the work programme report.