

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 28 November 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillor P Foy (Chair)  
Councillor(s): J Wallace, R Beadle, D Bradford, S Green,  
M Henry, B Oliphant and M Ord

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor(s):

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): John Eagle, L Caffrey, T Graham, J Green,  
M Hall, A Thompson and N Weatherley

**CR24 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2016 be approved as a correct record.

**CR25 CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT - DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received an update report on the progress made against the Council's Corporate Asset Strategy and Management Plan and the performance of the property portfolio.

The report outlined the proactive approach being taken to the management of the property portfolio and the outcomes were welcomed by the Committee.

It was commented that Councillors have continued to challenge the use of the Dryden Centre and that it should be an area for future focus. It was confirmed that the site could potentially be used for housing, however, it was reported that the Council trades from the Dryden Centre therefore work is underway to identify an alternative site which will safeguard this income stream.

The Committee suggested that the Dryden Centre could be closed if the trading activity was relocated to Gateshead Town Centre, either at the Civic Centre or in partnership with Gateshead College. It was commented that parking facilities exist within the town centre and that the location would be more accessible by public transport.

It was commented that there is space available within the Civic Centre and it was queried whether the building is being used effectively.

It was reported that office staff based at the Dryden Centre can be accommodated within the Civic Centre but that an alternative location to trade from has yet to be

identified.

It was queried whether the reduction in energy consumption takes into account the reduction in the number of buildings held by the Council. It was confirmed that property rationalisation has contributed to the reduction in energy consumption in addition to the energy efficiency works. It was agreed that a breakdown of the factors be provided.

Business cases were prepared and assessed prior to energy efficiency works being approved and carried out. Once the works have been completed, the same process will be followed for energy generation schemes. This approach was welcomed by the Committee.

In respect of carbon emission monitoring, the use of weather corrected figures was queried. It was clarified that changes in weather can result in a 15% variance in gas consumption figures therefore the weather correction calculation deducts this variability.

It was commented that there is much evidence of borough-wide energy efficiency schemes and this was praised. It was suggested that activity could now focus on energy generation schemes, such as the installation of solar panels on properties within the Council's housing stock.

It was recognised that centralisation will generate savings, however, it was commented that the Council should seek to maintain a public interface with residents in localities. The Committee was pleased to note that work is being undertaken to maintain the delivery of some services from within local communities, by linking with schools, GP practices and other partner organisations.

It was agreed that a performance report be received in respect of the Council's Music Service which is based at the Dryden Centre.

Information was sought on the operation and performance of the Civic Centre heating system along with timescales for maintenance works. It was noted that a survey has been carried out on both the Civic Centre heating system and switchgear and that works will be carried out as part of the Strategic Maintenance Programme, however, works to the heating system can only be carried out in the summer season when the system is not in use. A separate update will be provided to the Committee in relation to this.

The Committee requested information in respect of the Public Sector PLC including performance information for monitoring purposes.

- RESOLVED:
- i. That the information be noted.
  - ii. That the Committee was satisfied with the level of progress made to date. The Committee highlighted the use of the Dryden Centre as an area for future focus.
  - iii. That a visit to the Gateshead Town Centre District Energy Scheme be organised (when operational) and that an

- invitation be extended to all Councillors.
- iv. That a performance report be received in respect of the Council's Music Service.
- v. That a breakdown of the factors contributing to the increased energy efficiency of properties be provided.
- vi. That an update be provided to the Committee in respect of planned works to the Civic Centre switchgear and heating system.

**CR26 THE COUNCIL PLAN - SIX MONTH ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY 2016/17**

The Committee received a report on performance and delivery for the period April to September 2016 in relation to the Council Plan 2015-2020.

The achievements, key actions and areas for improvement were set out in the report.

A presentation was also delivered outlining the performance of Customer Services and updating on the progress of the digital projects which are underway.

The Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider, in more detail, the results of both the Resident and Employee Surveys. It was agreed that this be added to the Committee's current Work Programme.

It was queried whether the Council is resourced to respond to emails and calls that may be generated by the content of the Gateshead Now Newsletter. It was reported that content to date has not generated a significant number of queries or requests, however, it was highlighted that within 1 hour of the Green Waste Scheme being featured in the newsletter there was a noticeable increase in online payments being made for this service.

A request was made by and for the Committee to consider the issues related to digital inclusion along with potential interventions by the Council and its partners, particularly as many residents without access to ICT can often require the Council's services the most.

It was commented that the reduction of cash desks will have contributed to the increase in online transactions, therefore performance data was requested in terms of cash collected overall.

It was suggested that features could be included in Gateshead Now to help increase voter registration and improve the overall turnout at elections (potentially by promoting postal vote sign up).

One Councillor commented that the significant increase in residents responding that roads and pavements need improving and that traffic congestion is an issue, could be attributable, in part, to the Council's Transport Strategy and the recent implementation of some contentious schemes. It was requested that the Transport

Strategy be reviewed.

It was requested that the Resident Survey analysis includes information by ward.

- RESOLVED:
- i. That the Committee was satisfied with the activities undertaken during April – September 2016 in relation to the Council Plan 2015-2020.
  - ii. That the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet at its meeting on 24 January 2017.
  - iii. That the Committee's Work Programme be updated to include a separate opportunity for the Committee to consider, in more detail, the results of both the Resident and Employee Surveys.
  - iv. That the Resident Survey analysis be compiled to include information by ward.

**CR27 CASE STUDY - EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND THE COUNCIL PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received a report on the work undertaken to monitor the impact of spending proposals over the period of the 2011/12 to 2016/17 budgets, that were identified as potentially having a significant impact in terms of the protected characteristics determined by the Equality Act 2010.

The report included an assessment of the impact that occurred following implementation, along with mitigating activities.

It was clarified that there was a typographical error in the report and that 24 budget decisions were monitored and not 27. All 24 were listed in the report.

- RESOLVED:
- i. That the approach to identify and monitor potential equalities impact of budget decisions (and any mitigating actions) be continued.
  - ii. That the recommendations of Service Directors, as outlined in the report, be approved.
  - iii. That a further report be received in autumn 2017, on proposals where the impact is considered not to have been fully mitigated.

**CR28 REVIEW OF ABSENCE IN THE COUNCIL - MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee received the nineteenth update on progress to reduce absence within the workforce. The statistics included in the report related to the period 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016.

The previous figure reported to the Committee for average sickness days per Full

Time Equivalent (FTE) was 10.25 days' absence for the period 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015. The same calculation for the period 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016 was 8.83 day's absence per FTE which indicates that absence levels are falling.

The report detailed the many and varied actions to reduce absence since the last report.

The Committee was satisfied with the actions taken and considered it appropriate to continue to receive separate monitoring reports specifically on the management of sickness absence.

It was suggested that future reports should make clear whether absences within service areas are made up of many employees being absent for short periods or individual employees being absent long term. It was clarified that 63% of recorded absence is employees who are absent for four weeks or more.

In response to the finding that stress, depression and mental health issues continue to be the largest cause of absence, it was queried whether any assessment is being carried out at the point of recruitment or promotion, to ensure employees can manage the demands of the roles they are placed into.

It was put forward that the resource could be targeted to services where absence due to stress is most pronounced or by targeting training to employees who may find moving into new roles more demanding. Activity could be piloted in areas or situations before wider implementation.

- RESOLVED:
- i. That the actions to reduce sickness absence within the workforce are appropriate.
  - ii. That the scope of the data included in the reporting of sickness absence management is as required, with the additional future inclusion of tables to show absence within service areas.
  - iii. That the separate reporting of the management of sickness absence be continued.
  - iv. That the newly appointed Senior Occupational Health Advisor be invited to address the Committee when it next considers the management of sickness absence within the workforce.

**Chair.....**