

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Monday, 13 March 2023

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, D Burnett, H Weatherley,
J Turnbull, V Anderson, A Wintcher, S Gallagher, P Burns
and D Welsh

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor(s): J Adams

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): A Geddes, F Geddes, H Kelly, J Reay,
K Dodds, R Waugh, S Dickie and P Maughan

CPL58 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 30 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL59 HEALTH CHECK OF COMMUNITY CENTRES

The Committee received a report providing an update on the current assessed 'health' of participating Community Centres further to the Council's review of community centres.

The Committee were reminded that the Council's review of Community Centres had saw a wholesale shift in responsibility from a network of buildings/centres previously managed or resourced by the Council towards a current network of 37 community centres/buildings now entirely managed/leased independently. It was noted that this shift reflects the level of efficiency savings experienced by the Council, numerous building reviews and a consequential and beneficial move towards greater independence for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

It was reported that there is a need and desire to work with and retain an effective network of community buildings across the borough to provide flexible and accessible space for the community. It was stated that to achieve this Gateshead's VCS had been supported by the Council's Neighbourhood Management Team (NMT), Gateshead Voluntary Organisation Council (GVOC) and Connected Voice along with other partner organisations to take greater responsibility and sustain the Gateshead network.

A detailed breakdown from the health checks was appended to the report for information; it was highlighted that:

- Most community centres are performing well
- There is a need to increase volunteer numbers in some areas
- Health and safety and building compliances are a priority of the health checks

A comment was made from the committee that elderly/aging volunteers may struggle with the upkeep of community centres and could be given some leeway in terms of the standards they must meet as part of the health checks. Officers acknowledged this challenge; it was noted again that there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining new volunteers and that the existing cohort would undoubtedly struggle at times. It was further stated that health and safety regulations are applicable to both volunteers and employees and that whilst the community centres featured in the report are now independent, they can contact partners for additional support if needed.

The Committee agreed that the use of the word 'inspection' in the report was not appropriate; a comment was made stating that softer and more supportive terminology should be used. This feedback was noted by officers. The Committee also discussed the challenges faced by independent organisations in securing funding to support activities and upkeep of the centres; it was acknowledged that funding streams can be restrictive and difficult to acquire. The Committee also noted it's thanks to officers for their work in supporting community centres in Gateshead.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.

CPL60 CONSTRUCTION SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on Construction Services during its service review process.

The Committee noted that each area of Construction Services had undergone a review; it was reported that this had followed a 'form follows function' rationale that has informed recruitment and system needs. Attention was drawn to the update reported on recruitment; it was stated that the restructure began with 111 new posts to be recruited to but resulted in 164 vacancies due to various redesignation of roles and internal promotions.

It was further reported that 49 external appointments had been made alongside 47 internal promotions. The Committee also noted that 19 posts have been held for review as the service changes are implemented and that 49 posts remain vacant including 19 trades staff, 5 surveyors, 13 Customer Operations staff, 1 Service Manager and 1 Section Managers.

An update was provided on the backlog of Council House repairs; officers advised that good progress has been made since the previous report and that there are currently 850 repairs outstanding. The Committee were provided assurance that vulnerable tenants and emergency repairs were being prioritised.

From the report, it was noted that the empty homes repair team is now working to incrementally improve targets to reduce the number of void properties in Gateshead.

The Committee also received an update on damp, mould and condensation; officers advised that new and innovative solutions were being implemented where appropriate and that overall, the Council now has 1139 known cases of damp, mould and condensation that are in progress of resolution.

The Committee praised the work of Construction Services and acknowledged the difficulties faces by both internal and external factors. The Committee expressed concern that void properties continue to take too long to be made fit to let; this feedback was noted by officers who shared the concern and noted that void properties reduce income to the Council in terms of rent and council tax.

A question was asked regarding compensation for tenants who have their personal property damaged because of damp and mould. The Committee were advised that there is a comprehensive complaints and compensation process in place at the Council and that each case would be looked at on its own merits. The Committee noted that many properties in Gateshead suffer from damp, mould and condensation due to their construction and age and that it is not always a consequence of the tenants' lifestyle.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.

CPL61 THE FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT ACT 2010: ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report providing an update on progress in the implementation of the duties and responsibilities of Gateshead Council as lead flood authority.

There were no questions or comments made for this report.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive a further progress report in March 2024.

CPL62 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the annual work programme report for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the information in the report and endorsed the provisional work programme.
- (ii) The Committee noted that further reports would be brought to the meeting to identify any additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.