

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 16 October 2017

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)
Councillor(s): J Wallace, L Caffrey, M Charlton, T Graham, S Green, B Oliphant, M Ord, N Weatherley, S Ronchetti and J Kielty

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): R Beadle, J Green, M Hall and M Henry

CR11 MINUTES

RESOLVED

- (i) That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2017 be approved as a correct record.

CR12 IMPLEMENTATION OF GATESHEAD VOLUNTEERS PLAN - ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received an update on the Volunteer Plan report. The Volunteer Plan was derived from one of the Council's Vision 2030's six big ideas – 'Gateshead Volunteers'. This will be the final update of the plan before it is refreshed for 2018.

Gateshead Volunteers seeks to achieve the following outcomes which were summarised:

- The voluntary and community sector thrives within Gateshead
- Vibrant, sustainable communities through a culture of supporting community and voluntary sector organisations in the delivery of local services
- Volunteering recognised as important in career development
- Volunteering frameworks that help volunteers develop their skills
- Gateshead known as a national leader in promoting and supporting volunteering
- Social responsibility is achieved through local businesses participating in supporting volunteers

It was explained that since the volunteer plan was launched in 2013 the number of registered volunteers has increased from 50 to 1,687. Additionally, there has been an estimated 82% increase in volunteering within Gateshead from 4,426 to 8,065. The current estimate of the number of volunteers across Council services and within the voluntary and community sector is:

- Community Links - 60
- Countryside & Environment - 500

- School Governors - 1,200
- General School Volunteers - 900
- Community Centres - 800
- Youth Offending Team - 25
- Youth Council - 30
- Children Centres - 50
- VCS Organisations and others - 1,000
- Sports - 400
- Heritage, Events & General Culture - 500
- Libraries - 800
- Employee Volunteers - 50
- Private Sector Employee Volunteers - 250
- Jewish Community - 1,500
- Total – 8,065

It was noted that there has been an increase in external organisations participating in voluntary opportunities; this has an economic investment of £123,863 being calculated for Gateshead in 2016/2017. Organisations including Virgin Media, Costa Coffee, Gateshead College and the National Citizenship Service have participated. It was also explained that the targets set for informal and formal volunteering have been achieved.

An overview of the Council's engagement with TUC and Volunteering England was provided. A joint charter entitled 'Strengthening Relations' makes it clear that volunteering is distinct from paid work. The Council's Volunteers Plan principles endorse and support this.

The Committee were advised that during Gateshead Volunteers Month (June 2017) 106,189 hours of volunteering were recorded. This equates to £1,380,457 economic value and is a 5% increase on the previous year.

It was noted from the report that in May 2014 the Gateshead Council Employees Volunteering Policy was refreshed enabling employees to request up to 15 hours paid time to volunteer in Gateshead over a 12 month period. This needs to be matched by at least 15 hours pro rata of employees own time. Currently there are 60 employees registered as volunteers although it was also noted this figure is likely to be higher due to underreporting.

A summary of Environmental 'Friends of' Groups was given. Throughout Gateshead there are a number of different Friends of Groups that support the community and enable them to form informal 'Friends of' groups to support with the maintenance and upkeep of Gateshead's open spaces and parks. It was advised that lessons have been learned around the necessity for public liability insurance for these groups and a procedure has been established to enable 'Friends of' groups to receive tailored support around tasks within designated open spaces.

The Committee were updated on the joint work between Neighbourhood Management & Volunteering and students from Northumbria University. Four students from the University formed a consultancy as part of a project for their

Master's Degrees. The consultancy was tasked with identifying improvements needed to the volunteer recruitment process. The main findings from the report concluded that the current volunteer recruitment process has some issues including:

- Being outdated (being first implemented in 2013)
- Is unable to deal with the fast flowing increase of volunteers
- Will be unsustainable in the current format
- Putting administration pressures on the one officer supporting the process

The main improvement identified was for the current process to move to an online platform; this will be developed in partnership with Open Lab at Newcastle University.

Future actions identified in the delivery of the Volunteers Plan are:

- Create a new Volunteers Plan
- Create a new management system to record volunteers, employee volunteers and volunteer hours contributed by voluntary groups as well as Council services, are collated in one location in partnership with Newcastle University
- Continue promotion of the Employee Volunteering Scheme
- Identify opportunities for group volunteering projects for teams
- Explore arrangements for joint working with other agencies and external organisations
- Consider how volunteers can add further value to current services provided by Gateshead Council
- Continue to develop and promote the corporate volunteer opportunities
- Continue to provide lead support for volunteering with the Voluntary & Community sector as well as for council service projects and roles
- Develop closer working relationships with Trade Unions regarding the creation of further volunteering opportunities

It was asked if the new online system would allow local organisations to register and source volunteers for their projects; the committee were advised this would be possible as well as matching individuals to organisations with volunteering opportunities. It was also noted that the new website would sit separate to Gateshead Council's website however a link would be provided via the main site.

A question was raised about the potential cost of developing and running the new website. It was explained that there would be no cost to the Council for developing the website due to the partnership with Newcastle University and that the cost for the maintenance of the website would be low. More detailed information regarding cost will be provided to the Committee when it is established.

A comment was made that many residents who volunteer within Gateshead are individuals or groups who chose to volunteer off their own backs. It was noted that registering as a volunteer via Gateshead Council was not a prerequisite however in doing so individuals and groups can be appropriately vetted and supported in the voluntary activities they chose to undertake. The Committee were advised that there are focus groups planned as to how best to develop this scheme with the University.

A concern around the safeguarding of individuals and organisations was raised. It was noted that appropriate safeguards should be put in place for the new system to protect those who are registered by ensuring that opportunities listed and the individuals registered are genuine and safe.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the comments on the progress of the implementation of the Volunteers Plan are noted.
- (ii) That the future actions identified in the delivery of the Volunteers Plan are considered.

CR13 SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee received an update report and presentation on the ongoing partnership working between Gateshead Council and the Newcastle Voluntary Service (NCVS).

In April 2016 Council agreed to enter into an agreement with NCVS for the provision of support, development, networking and representation to the voluntary and community sector in Gateshead. The agreement with NCVS was extended from March 2017 to September 2017.

Cabinet will be asked on 17th October 2017 to agree to a further extension to the agreement until 31st March 2018 to allow a joint procurement exercise to take place with Newcastle City Council.

Since April 2017, 102 groups have been engaged with 35 groups being provided with funding advice.

CVS are offering support via several projects and schemes including:

- SkillsBridge
- HAREF (Health and Race Equality Forum)
- Attended Gateshead Diversity Forum
- Building a Stronger Britain Together
- Well Newcastle Gateshead (BSC)
- Engagement with senior leaders around health, crime/safety and arts

The NCVS expressed that they would like to continue work with Gateshead. It was noted that the support that NCVS have provided to organisations has been valuable and feedback was positive. It was noted that the grant application process can be complex for organisations and often requires someone with specialist knowledge

and experience, this support has been provided by NCVS. Additional thanks were given to NCVS for the support provided at the Birtley Hub and the Elgin Centre in Deckham.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Committee note the information provided.
- (ii) The Committee commented positively on the report with reference to the performance and activities delivered by Newcastle CVS.

CR14 IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY - PROGRESS UPDATE

An update on the implementation of the Workforce Plan was provided to the Committee.

The plan was devised and implemented in 2015 with the aim of ensuring the workforce are able to support the delivery of the sustained transformation to achieve the services residents want and need. It was highlighted that it is important for staff and management to be equipped with the right skills to do their jobs both now and in the future.

An issue that was highlighted from recent employee surveys suggests that management across the Council is unfair and inconsistent. To remedy this mandatory training has been implemented for managers to attend in recruitment and selection, dealing with capability and competency issues, undertaking an investigation and sickness absence. To date around $\frac{1}{3}$ of managers have attended.

The committee were advised that the employee survey in 2016 highlighted that only 47% of employees across the Council had an A&D in the 6 months prior to the survey and that underperformance going unaddressed was affecting morale. To improve this, the A&D and the competency framework have been revised and simplified.

The new A&D process was rolled out in April 2017 with an initial deadline for completion by the end of June 2017. It has become clear this deadline was a struggle for managers to achieve so this was extended to the end of August 2017. Recent figures show around 53% of A&Ds have been completed – feedback for this shortfall suggests that many of the outstanding A&Ds belong to staff who are on long term sick, are new staff or are staff in the process of leaving the Council's employment. It was noted that a new task and finish group would be established to look at the ongoing implementation of the new A&D process. The Committee were advised that the new performance rating tool on the new A&D process is likely to be implemented from January 2019.

An update on the Talent Management element of the Workforce Plan was provided. A priority of the plan is that all employees have the opportunity to learn and develop. It was noted that managers should be having conversations with staff to discuss the learning and development opportunities available to them. Service Directors from each group have been appointed Talent Management champions and will be

responsible for ensuring that talent management is embedded within their service.

A summary of the apprenticeships system which took effect from April 2017 was provided. The apprenticeship system includes the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, the introduction of the public sector apprenticeship target and the new apprenticeships standards. The committee were advised that work has been undertaken to scope out the current and future demand for apprenticeships within the Council and that to meet the target the Council is required to start 2.3% of the workforce on an apprenticeship annually.

A review of the Council's employee recognition policy was provided. From the report it was noted that the Council wants to ensure there is a culture of recognition where employees are praised for the good things they are doing. Employee recognition can be provided both formally and informally and employees are to be consulted on what and how recognition tools should be used.

The issue of Low Pay was highlighted from the report. Further changes will be implemented following the outcome of the 2018-2019 pay negotiations.

A question was asked about the use of the A&D process with regards to manual workers such as refuse collectors and how targets can be set for these roles. It was advised that work with service directors in these areas has taken place to simplify the A&D process so that it can be applied to manual roles.

A comment about the importance of employee recognition was made; a question around how Members can provide feedback on behalf of constituents was asked. This feedback can be provided directly to service directors or via the Council's Have Your Say compliments and complaints process.

A concern around the feedback from the employee survey highlighting inconstant management was noted. It was highlighted again that this feedback is being logged and that the mandatory training for managers is being rolled out. It was also noted that service specific bespoke training is also being made available for managers.

A question about offering financial incentives for staff was asked. In answering, it was noted that nothing is being ruled out at present and that the Council are looking at a range of benefits to offer.

It was asked what the performance ratings within the A&D are, these were confirmed as: Exceeded, Achieved, Partially Achieved and Not Achieved. It was noted that no employee should be attending their A&D and be surprised with their rating – it is expected that most employees will be given an 'Achieved' rating.

It was asked about the age range of apprentices the Council hopes to attract. This information was not available however the Committee were advised that the Council is not focussed on any specific age and hopes to attract apprentices of all ages, particularly through the use of the apprenticeship levy.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the comments of the Committee on the Workforce Plan and it's effectiveness be noted.
- (ii) That the Committee consider further updates on the progress on an annual basis.

CR15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the 2017/18 work programme for information.

RESOLVED

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

Chair.....