

## **GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 16 April 2018**

**PRESENT:** Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, J Wallace, D Bradford, L Caffrey, M Charlton, P Foy, J Green, S Green, M Hall, M Henry and N Weatherley

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): T Graham, J Kielty, M Ord and K Wood

#### **CR31 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED -** That that minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

#### **CR32 SUPPORT TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR - PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Committee received an update from the Voluntary and Community Sector on the work they have been doing in Gateshead. Newcastle CVS carried out a survey in January 2018 across both Newcastle and Gateshead, however, the results can be read with reference to Doing Good in Gateshead, the survey of Gateshead's Voluntary and Community Sector carried out in 2017.

168 responses were received to January's survey and were received from directly contacting around seven hundred and fifty organisations. The breakdown of the type of the respondent group illustrates that as usual, smaller community organisations are under-represented in those who responded. However, the profile of the respondents is similar enough to that of registered charities in Gateshead and Newcastle to be able to draw reasonable assumptions.

The Voluntary and Community Sector can be divided into three different groups. The first group is the large number of smaller and community organisations mainly with an income of under £25,000. The second is the group with an income of usually £25,000 to £500,000. The third is the small number of larger registered charities with an income of over £500,000.

Alongside the survey Newcastle CVS ran a search of the Charity Commission website for registered charities and Charitable Incorporated Organisations listed in Gateshead, however, results of the search cannot be considered definitive. There are charities working with Gateshead communities which will not be registered in Gateshead and therefore don't appear in a search. Also the register changes on a daily basis as the commission has become more efficient at removing dormant charities.

In addition to searching the Charity Commission website Newcastle CVS carried out a similar search of Companies House data to find out how many Community Interest Companies and mutual are currently registered in Gateshead.

The estimate of voluntary, community and social enterprises in Gateshead are around:

- 321 registered charities based in Gateshead
- 24 mutuals
- 30 CICs
- Between 960 and 1300 small, local groups, activities and organisations
- 516 local charities that are not based in Gateshead, but cover Gateshead in their activities.

Key Findings from the Survey are as follows:

- **Funding and Sustainability** – is the most pressing issue for voluntary and community organisations in Gateshead and Newcastle. This is regardless of whether they are small, medium or large organisations.
- **Increase in Demand in Services** – seven out of ten organisations have noted an increase in demand for their services in the last year.
- **Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers** – this is the second largest area of organisational challenge.
- **Optimistic of Future** – despite the challenges the majority of respondents remain optimistic about the future of their organisations and over a third want to increase the number of beneficiaries.

The key challenges for people using the services and facilities was the impact of, Welfare Reform, Universal Credit and Personal debt. The rate of change and short terms grants and contracts were having a de-stabilizing effect on medium and larger size organisations in relation to staffing, accommodations and strategic planning and engagement.

Certain groups of people were identified as having additional needs that weren't being met, in particular refugees and asylum seekers, young people and older people.

The themes of loneliness and isolation, not just around older people were also raised. The withdrawal of the public sector was becoming more noticeable and a number of services were harder to access due to changing criteria.

The big challenge remains of greater demand, fewer resources and more clients having more complex needs. The issue of the number of clients with a much high level of needs and more problems needing resolution is a major challenge.

RESOLVED – that the information contained within the report be noted.

CR33

## STRATEGIC RESILIENCE AND EMERGENCY PLANNING FRAMEWORK UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the last six months in relation to the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework.

The framework has recently been refreshed and this was presented to Corporate Resources OSC in September 2017 followed by endorsement at Cabinet in December 2017.

The Emergency Response Team has been involved in responding to a number of diverse incidents and planning for a pre-planned operation once again over the last six months.

Some of the issues included:

- Fire at the former Springs Health Club, Low Fell – 25 March 2018
- Property fire at Newbolt Court, Gateshead – 18 March 2018
- Adverse Weather – 27 February – 4 March 2018
- Operation Caritas – 15 January 2018

Some of the exercises the emergency response team have been involved in include

- Critical Level Workshop – March 2018 – this was a multi-agency workshop that was held to explore the preparedness, response and recovery plans when the UK Terrorism Threat Level is raised to critical from the result of a terrorist incident
- Exercise Skynet – February 2018 – the purpose of this exercise was to test the multi-agency response to a cyber-attack on IT systems and the associated command and control structure.
- Simulated Fire Fighting Exercise – February 2018 – this was a simulated exercise led by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service in conjunction with the Gateshead Housing Company. It involved testing a new system of work using Breathing Apparatus and hose management and deployment elements of a new high-rise procedure – this took place at Eslington Court.
- Site Incident Officer Training – December 2017 – in conjunction with Northumbria Police this was specific training for the council's Emergency Response Team Site Incident Officers which involved looking at roles and responsibilities using a previous incident that was experienced within Gateshead.
- Exercise Resilience Rat – November 2017 – this was an exercise led by the Armed Forces and involved the exercising of a MACA (Military Assistance to Civil Authorities) request.
- Exercise Border Reiver – October 2017 – this was a multi-agency national safety and security exercise led by Police Scotland supported by Northumbria Police and the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum. The exercise was Tier 1 and involved the activation of COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A) to test the collective central government responses to an emergency.

As part of all operations, exercises and incidents that are managed by the Council, a debrief process is completed to ensure a thorough analysis of the actions undertaken can be reviewed.

The report also provided updates on progress within the Themed Areas over the last six months.

**Building Resilient and Stronger Communities** – working with businesses, the voluntary sector, partner agencies, communities and individuals to ensure they are better prepared for and able to recover from emergencies.

- The Council in conjunction with Northumbria Police has established a Gateshead Business Resilience Forum. The purpose of the group is to bring key organisations and businesses within the Gateshead area to collaboratively work together within the resilience and emergency planning arena.
- Following the tragic Grenfell Tower Block Fire, a seminar was provided for councillors in October 2017 with an insight as to how a similar emergency and resilience situation would be responded to within Gateshead, along with a reminder of the Emergency Response Guidance for Councillors.
- A Northumbria Voluntary Emergency Liaison Group has been established which is chaired by the Council. The purpose of the group is to work with key organisations within the Northumbria area to look at the voluntary sector coordination in emergency response and recovery and to consider the various capacities and capabilities that exist within this sector.

**Assessing Risk** – identifying hazards and threats that may affect Gateshead implementing measures that may prevent an emergency or incident occurring:

- The Council's new Pandemic Influenza Plan was endorsed by Cabinet in January 2018. Work is currently ongoing, being led by Gateshead to look at reviewing options of the provision of Personal Protection Equipment.
- Over the last 18 months, a sustained volume of work has taken place to review as to how the Council would respond to a terrorist attack situation. This has involved looking at lessons learnt from the exercising over the court of this year and incorporating them into the council's plans and protocols to improve the responses to these types of incidents.
- The Resilience and Emergency Planning Team provided a recent report and presentation at the Audit and Standards Committee in March 2018. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the risks associated to the Council within the Resilience and Emergency Planning function; provide an overview of the Community Risk Register and how the Council operates to mitigate and manage those risks.

**Enhancing our partnership arrangement to respond and recover** – the effective response and co-ordination of arrangements in the event of an emergency or incident occurring

- An out of hours Duty Officer System has now been implemented within the Council's Emergency Response Team. A rota has been implemented with the current HQ Co-ordinators which ensures that the same person isn't receiving all the calls and responding to issues.
- Following a presentation from Northumbria Local Resilience Forum in 2017, the seven Chief Executives within the North East Combined Authority Area (NECA) requested a Strategic Table Top Emergency Response Exercise. This was led by the Council and provide an opportunity for the Chief Executives to discuss strategic level responses to a major emergency and develop a shared understanding of mutual aid arrangements and assistance between local authorities.
- The Council has strengthened it's working arrangements with the Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. This was tested during the adverse weather very recently during February and March with regular teleconferences and the sharing of response arrangements and plans as the incident developed.

It was queried whether anything had come out of the de-brief in regards to the adverse weather, it was noted that this was not yet completed but feedback overall was very positive.

It was queried whether the planning for the flu pandemic was necessary, in particular with regards to the purchase of PPE. It was noted that initially a supply of 3 months of stock would be purchased on a rolling basis. It was also noted that this is something which is on the National Risk Register and which we are therefore obliged to include in our own.

It was queried whether there would be any changes to the annual exercise in light of any future decisions relating to devolution. It was noted that this will be an annual exercise and currently there are no plans in place to change the attendance.

- RESOLVED**
- (i) That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.
  - (ii) That it be noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are satisfied with the progress achieved within the last six months.
  - (iii) That a further report be submitted in September 2018.

#### **CR34      FREEDOM OF INFORMATION - ANNUAL REPORT 2017**

A report was presented to provide the Committee with details of the number of requests for information received under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017. The request handling procedure was developed in response to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which placed legal obligations on public authorities to deal with written requests for information held by them, in recorded form at the time a request is made.

The procedure has three steps, the first of which is ‘providing the information’ requested within the statutory timescale of 20 working days. There is an electronic tracking system in which to log requests. This tracking system provides a full audit trail of how the request has been handled and provides template response letters, which fulfil the statutory requirements of the Act.

The first stage relies on quickly providing the information requested, subject to the application of any exemption and payment of any necessary fee. The second stage requires the Council to have an internal review process so that, if a requester is dissatisfied, they have an avenue of complaint, which is separate from the corporate complaints process.

The third stage give the requester the right of appeal to the Information Commissioner if he/she is still dissatisfied, following the internal review.

1617 requests were received during the period 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017, this represents a 34.7% increase on requests received in the previous year and a 685.7% increase since the implementation of the Act in 2005.

Of the requests received 90.48% were dealt with within the 20 day timescale. This represented a decrease of 3.77% in performance on the 2016 figure of 94.25% but is still high amongst other Councils.

Two requests were subject to internal review and the original decision maker’s decision was upheld in both cases.

Two requesters have exercised the right of appeal to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner upheld our decision to withhold information. One related to pre-planning application advice and another to a prosecution case.

Most requests come in by email now, 1605 by email, 21 by letter. Requests for information vary considerably and are difficult to categorise. We receive a lot about procurement and contracts, some environmental information requests, some asking for information about staff, some asking for policies and information about how decisions have been made.

As a result of reducing resources and in an effort to continue to improve the timeliness of responses and minimise the impact of any increase in requests the following measures have been taken:

- Services are now proactively publishing more information online, as information published online is exempt from disclosure under the Act as it is “information easily accessible by other means”, all staff have to do is send the requester a link to where they can obtain the information.
- Published data as required by the “Transparency Agenda”
- Trained more information champions in March 2018 to replace staff who have left.

Further information was requested regarding trends and types of FOIs

received.

**RESOLVED** - That the information contained within the report be noted. That further information and analysis, if available, would be included in the end of year performance report which will be discussed at the next meeting.

**CR35**

## **REFRESH OF THE VOLUNTEER PLAN 2018**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were provided with a report to provide an update on the progress to improve the opportunity to volunteer in Gateshead and consider a draft volunteer plan for 2018-2021. The plan offers a new set of commitments to support residents and community organisations in Gateshead to help each other out.

Gateshead Councils Volunteer Plan has been in existence since 2013 and in that time the numbers of residents participating in volunteering has steadily increased.

The 2013 plan also incorporated a pathway to process volunteering requests. Since the creation of the plans there are over 1,800 residents registered with the Council with over 8,000 volunteers helping out across our communities.

Volunteers in Gateshead provide help to a range of council services, most notably in the environmental, social care, health and sport and community centre areas.

The Volunteers Plan has provided a co-ordinated approach to volunteering in Gateshead. The plan was structured around key principles which aimed to support volunteers as well as organisations delivering volunteering opportunities.

The plan has remained largely unchanged since 2013 and it is timely to review the plan in line with the Council's recently adopted Making Gateshead a Place where Everyone Thrives agenda which will now supersede the current council plan. The pledge "Support our communities to support themselves and each other" is at the very heart of the Council's approach to volunteering.

Registered Council volunteers have increased from 50 (2013) to 1,853 (2018). Currently an estimate of over 8,000 volunteers (2018) active within Gateshead as a whole across all types of services and projects. There was as estimated 4,000 in 2013. Corporate Volunteer Days continue to grow in demand, an estimated 2,000 (2018) individual volunteers have taken part in corporate and group volunteering activity since 2013. The estimated economic value to the Gateshead community of corporate and group volunteering activity is estimated at £125,943. Each individual volunteer has an economic value £104 per day.

Formal volunteering target of an increase to 25% achieved 51.9% this is a 188% increase on the target. Informal volunteering target of an increase to 40% achieved 67% this is a 97% increase on the target

The Neighbourhood Management & Volunteering Team currently support over 100 groups and organisations from Gateshead's VCS around the development of

volunteer roles and matching of suitable volunteers. Gateshead's fifth Volunteers' Month, took place in June 2017. Throughout June, 106,189 hours were recorded on the volunteer totaliser which equates to £1,380,457 economic value. This is a 5% rise from 2016. Volunteer's month will return in 2018 with both the totaliser and the volunteer's month grant.

General areas of volunteering include: Countryside & Environment, Sport & Leisure, Vulnerable Adults, over 50's, children & young people, community centres, Schools, cultural activities, community safety, community resilience, and others. There are currently an estimated 25 Friends of groups at various locations throughout Gateshead. With an average of 15 members per group this is an estimated 375 volunteers. These groups all have their own individual aims and objectives as well as support needs.

It is proposed to change the language associated with the next version of the plan. One of the findings of the research was that when many residents were asked whether they volunteer the answer often given was no. Even though it was known that these residents did volunteer in a range of ways, when the question was rephrased to do you help out? The answer given was more often than not yes. With this in mind it is proposed to give the new volunteers plan Helping Out in Gateshead. This again supports the Council's approach to helping everybody to thrive.

The three commitments which form the plan from the Council perspective are

- We want to support our residents to help out as much as possible in Gateshead communities
- The Council wants to support as many people as possible to volunteer and get involved
- Whether it's helping a neighbourhood, running a community centre or providing support or activities our commitment is to help residents get involved.

It is hoped the plan will achieve the following

- Increase the number of people that help out by 1000 a year
- Increase the economic benefit of helping out by £100,000 per year
- Increase the number of community groups, charities businesses registering volunteers (on the new system)
- Increase the number of volunteer days by 50
- Increase the amount of volunteer roles available within Gateshead to over

It is proposed that the principles are still relevant to have in place and are:

- Working with our community groups, charities and voluntary sector to identify what help they need and connect residents that want to help out.
- Work with local businesses to find ways in which they can help in Gateshead communities
- Working with trade unions to continue to consider how volunteers add further value to current services provided in Gateshead.
- Encourage everyone in Gateshead to promote helping out and share their experiences and examples.

The Committee noted that whilst the Gateshead Awards are fantastic it is quite sad that not everyone can win. It was queried whether there would be a possibility to change the format somehow.

It was noted that we all know the value of volunteering and it was felt that the idea of having a digital platform was a good one and would make all the difference, however, this would only make a difference to those who are computer literate.

It was noted that the contract for the CVS is currently out to tender. Clarification of the scope of the contract was given.

**RESOLVED -** (i) That the comments of the OSC be noted  
(ii) That the current progress of the refresh of the Volunteers Plan be noted.

#### **CR36      OSC WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW**

The Committee were provided with a report which looked at the review of the work programme for 2017/18 and the provisional work programme for 2018/19.

On July 2017 Cabinet agreed to pilot a number of changes to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Gateshead aimed at ensuring Overview and Scrutiny in Gateshead

- Is first and foremost member led
- Enhances the leadership role of OSC Chairs and Vice Chairs in driving forward directing and sharing individual OSC work
- Enhances engagement and involvement with OSC members in shaping the focus of the work of specific OSCs
- Creates stronger relationships/linkages with the Executive
- Enables Overview and Scrutiny to better understand and track how it is

influencing Cabinet Policy/ Decision Making going forward.

The views of the Committee is sought on the Annual Review of the Work Programme and the Committee are asked to agree the emerging issues for 2018-19.

- RESOLVED - (i) That the emerging issues for 2018-19 Work Programme be agreed  
(ii) That the provisional Work Programme be referred to Council on 24 May 2018.  
(iii) That further reports will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.

**Chair.....**