

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 20 January 2020**

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

Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, J Wallace, R Beadle, D Bradford, L Caffrey, D Duggan, T Graham, S Green, M Hall, R Mullen, B Oliphant and J Simpson

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): P Foy

**CR26 MINUTES**

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2019 be approved as a correct record.

**CR27 ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received a report which provided an overview of health and safety performance for 2018/19 of Gateshead Council and identifies key priorities for 2020.

The Council continues to use the principles of the HES guidance, and key priorities are Plan, Do, Check, Act. These principles underpin the Council's safety management system and operational processes and procedures as per the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and arrangements.

The Committee were advised that all managers are supported by the Health and Safety team and as part of an ongoing cycle everything is regularly reviewed. If any issues are identified they are addressed promptly.

The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service have visited a number of premises and have not issued any notification letters to the Council.

The Occupational Health unit continues to run at full capacity which includes support to NEPO and CAB. The use of the counselling service continues to grow and the Council is being reactive if necessary. It has been found that this is helping employees to stay at work or if they are off sick helping them to get back to work quicker.

Options are being explored to run various support groups which are something which employees have asked for.

It was noted that councillors had asked for an idea of the costs of non-attendance at appointments. This had been calculated at approximately £19,500 with officers looking at the worst-case scenario basis for the calculation. There is a whole range

of reasons why employees are not attending appointments, sometimes it is employee error, sometimes it is manager error, sometimes an employee has been on holiday.

The Committee had previously been advised of a new scheme for employees where they can quickly be referred to GO Gateshead. Of 40 employees who were referred 32 took up the and to date 12 have completed the programme.

Checks made to ensure that things are happening via, reporting to the quarterly Corporate Health and Safety Committee, Senior Management Group and Health and Safety officers utilise a spreadsheet for the recording of hazards identified by employees. If necessary, incidents are investigated with findings and recommendations reported back to responsible managers.

In terms of internal assurance the Asbestos Management Team is responsible to the Strategic Director, Communities and Environment, within Council Housing, Design and Technical Services, the team works closely with the Health and Safety Team and during the course of the reporting period have continued to carry out the asbestos re-inspections, update and deliver registers and provide technical advice to schools which have bought into the asbestos management package. Officers have also review the corporate asbestos management plan and made any required changes.

During the reporting period Health and Safety officers visited all schools and other sites when they were notified that contractors would be working. 104 sites have been visited and activities were monitored, risk assessment, method statements and training records were checked. No major issues were identified.

The health and safety team will continue to work with group management teams to continually improve health and safety management systems including policies, procedures and arrangements. Health and safety officers will deliver the corporate audit programme, and the fire risk assessment programme. Occupational Health will continue to meet all statutory requirements by fulfilling health surveillance programmes. Work will continue on the co-ordination of employee wellbeing events throughout the year with the emphasis being placed on the principles of THRIVE. Group management teams and head teachers will be informed of any significant changes to the Council's corporate health and safety policies and procedures or when action is necessary because of any health and safety failing via a health and safety briefing note. Senior Management Group will be advised on a quarterly basis on the progress being made and any issues to address.

RESOLVED - That it be noted that the Committee is satisfied that the actions taken are appropriate and effective to maintain or improve the Council's health and safety management system.

## **CR28 THE WORK OF THE TACKLING POVERTY IN GATESHEAD BOARD**

The Committee received an update on the work of the Tackling Poverty in

Gateshead Board. The work identified and influenced by the Board seeks to mitigate the impact of poverty across Gateshead by encouraging place based and partnership approaches to delivering interventions across Gateshead and its communities.

Following the first Gateshead Poverty Conference in February 2018 steps were taken to create a strategic board made up of senior figures from within the Council and its partners from the private and third sectors. The board is chaired by Deputy Leader Councillor Catherine Donovan with Alison Dunn, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Gateshead in the role of Vice Chair.

To date in February 2018 and July 2019 two very well support poverty conferences have taken place with over 300 delegates in attendance and 15 speakers who are leaders in their field. These conferences led to the creation of the board and the identification of 7 key themes of work:

- Food Poverty
- Fuel Poverty
- Child Poverty
- Housing
- Financial Inclusion
- Financial Education
- Employment Skills and Wages

Since the initial conference in February 2018 a great deal of intervention has taken place to tackle many of the injustices associated with poverty and in particular the key themes identified, including:

- A successful bid for £204K from the DfE to deliver a Holiday Activities and Food Programme in Gateshead, enabling Gateshead to offer over 12,000 free places on holiday and food clubs across Gateshead
- A second poverty conference planned and hosted by Gateshead with 10 respected speakers and 150 delegates in attendance was held in 2019
- The creation of the Gateshead Community Food Network
- The Red Box Project, now Project Tom via the Gateshead Youth Council
- The introduction of LEAP and ECHO supporting fuel poor households (the only LA in the North East at the time of the launch)
- Delivery of Fuel Poverty Awareness Training to several frontline Council employees and external partners plus further delivery of accredited City & Guilds qualifications “Fuel Debt Advice in the Community” for the Council’s THRIVE team and further courses planned for 2020
- Financial Education in Primary Schools via Newcastle Building Society and their annual charity boardroom challenge
- Two planned talks on finance and poverty to be delivered to students in year 11 and above at Heworth Grange and St Thomas More secondary schools and a further talk for teaching staff within Heworth Grange
- Retirement talks for Council employees via Newcastle Building Society
- Fraud and scams awareness sessions in partnership with Barclays and Northumbria Police

- Ongoing work with Gateshead Schools and EducationGateshead to offer poverty proofing the schools day resources free of charge to all schools in the borough
- Created a Gateshead Poverty Truth Commission in partnership with the Methodist Church in Blaydon to ensure that the voices of those residents with lived poverty experiences are both heard and considered when creating future policy. An official launch event is to be held on 5 March 2020
- Worked closely with NEFirst Credit Union to facilitate a move to a prominent new shop front premises on Jackson Street, with a likely late January opening
- Also with NEFirst Credit Union, continue to work in partnership to grow their Gateshead presence across communities, encourage more employees to save via salary deduction (payroll saving), and embed the credit union in all financial inclusion related intervention going forward, including the relationship with the England Illegal Money Lending Team

The Board have agreed that the following areas of work are priorities for 2020 and will run alongside the work already ongoing:

- Financial Inclusion
- Financial Education and Poverty Proofing Schools
- Employment Skills and Wages

In addition the Board also seeks to align its work to the six priorities in the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, particularly the pledges around 'fair employment and good work for all' and 'ensure a healthy standard of living for all'.

The board is also considering hosting a further major poverty event for 2020 following the success of both conferences in 2018 and 2019. The Board will also be responsive to need and will direct and allocate priority and/or resources as and when it is deemed appropriate.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

## **CR29 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE - ANNUAL REPORT - 2018/19**

The Committee received a report referred by Cabinet as part of the performance management process, in order to ensure that the Corporate Complaints Process is operating satisfactorily.

The corporate complaints procedure has three steps, the first of which 'problem solving', relies on the quick resolution of complaints by employees and their managers and does not require the complaint to be recorded. The second stage the complaint is recorded, there is a formal investigation into the complaint and a written response is sent to the complainant usually within twenty working days. The final step enables those complainants who remain dissatisfied to request the Chief Executive (or Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company) to carry out an independent review of the matter.

In the year 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019:

- 191 complaints were recorded
- 593 compliments were recorded
- 31 complaints were the subject of an independent review by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company undertook 17 reviews

The following points for note have arisen from the statistics for 2018/19:

- 191 complaints were recorded in 2018/19 compared with 258 in 2017/18 a decrease of 67.
- 593 compliments were recorded for the year 2018/19 compared to 466 in 2017/18 – an increase of 127.
- The number of complainants requesting a review of their complaint by the Chief Executive increased by 4 to 31 in 2018/19. The Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company carried out 17 reviews in 2018/19 compared to 14 in 2017/18.
- There were 129 complaints regarding quality of service. This is the largest of the six categories although a complaint can fall into more than one category.
- The proportion of complaints found to be fully justified decreased from 36.6% in 2017/18 to 24.2% in 2018/19.
- In addition, the proportion of complaints found to be partially justified decreased from 24.7% in 2017/18 to 17.6% in 2018/19.
- Most importantly, the Council's managers used the information gained through the monitoring of complaints to improve the provision of services.
- The computerised recording system made it easier to track and respond to complaints. However, this system now requires an upgrade that reflects the new structure of the Council and provides improved statistical interrogation and analysis. A new corporate complaints system is currently being developed using the case management features of the Council's Digital Platform to handle corporate complaints.
- There has been a decrease in the number of complaints recorded by the Council during 2018/19. Additionally, there has been a decrease in performance of the percentage of complaints resolved within target timescales for the both the Council and the Gateshead Housing Company from 75.2% in 2017/18 to 64.9% in 2018/19.

During the course of 2018/19, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigated 28 complaints. Of these 16 were closed after initial enquiries, 6 were not upheld and 6 were upheld partially or fully. Each case has provided learning opportunities in terms of review policy, maintenance of records, the operation of systems and the provision of guidance and training to staff. The Council maintains a good working relationship with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and all cases have now been settled to their satisfaction.

Throughout the year the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has produced a number of focus reports. These highlight particular subjects or systemic issues coming from casework. They draw on lessons learned from complaints and have included recommendations on good practice. These reports may be used to

inform reviews and case studies undertaken by the Council's overview and scrutiny committees. The Ombudsman also has an Advisory Forum comprising members of the public who have used their service, representatives from Local Authorities and those who act as advocates for the public. The Ombudsman has also, in consultation with the Local Government Association, produced a workbook for Councillors that can be access via the Local Government Association's website.

From 1 April 2013 the Localism Act 2011 extended the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman to cover all social landlords, including Councils. The Housing Ombudsman is able to consider complaints in so far as they related to the provision or management of housing. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman continues to investigate complaints about allocations and the lettings policy. During 2018/19 the Council has been contacted by the Housing Ombudsman in respect of 7 cases as presented to the Cabinet.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the information in the Annual Report be endorsed by the Committee.
  - (ii) That the Committee is satisfied that the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure is operating satisfactorily.

### **CR30            PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S WORKFORCE PLAN**

The Committee received an update report on the progress of the Council's Workforce Plan. The purpose of the Council's Workforce Strategy and Plan is to ensure the Council has a workforce that can support delivery of services our residents want and need, services that provide value for money, are fit for purpose, flexible and customer focussed. The strategy outline how the Council aims to ensure it has the right people, with the right skills and behaviours, working in the right jobs, at the right time.

The workforce strategy is based on five themes, skills and behaviours; recruitment and retention; pay, reward and recognition; wellbeing and engagement; and performance and change.

A workforce plan provides a detailed delivery plan for each of the five themes. The plan is a dynamic document which is continually developed to respond to the Council's current workforce requirements, and to prepare for future changes.

The following update is on the progress made since the last report to Committee in October 2018.

#### **Gateshead Leadership Development Programme (GLDP)**

The Council seeks to maintain and develop strong, diverse and competent leaders who can deliver its corporate and public service ambitions. Therefore, a key priority is to invest in the development of our employees as leaders of the organisation, so they are equipped to deliver services to support the Thrive agenda.

The content of a new leadership development programme is currently being drafted,

once finalised, it will be rolled out to the leadership team, service managers and all other managers within the Council. Ultimately if resources allow, the ambition is to provide leadership development to those employees who are not yet in management positions but are 'ready' to move up, therefore developing leadership potential.

### **Coaching Culture**

The modern employer is expected to support and engage its staff in the work they do, to help unlock their potential and maximise the overall performance of the organisation. One drive for this is to adopt a coaching style in the conversations we have with each other and in the way we work.

### **Learning and Development Framework**

A learning and development framework is available on the intranet as a one-stop shop for managers and employees to access information on courses and other resources and guidance to support their development. The framework has been in place for some time and the Workforce Development Team is currently evaluating its content, with a view to streaming the available modules and move to a greater emphasis on e-learning as a flexible, cost effective way of providing training.

### **Mentoring and Coaching**

One of the initiatives identified in the Council's Workforce Plan which will build leadership capacity is to provide opportunities for employees to access mentoring to support their development. Mentoring is a development technique based on the use of one-to-one discussions to enhance an individual's work skills, behaviour, performance and/or knowledge and involves a more experienced employee using their greater knowledge, experience and understanding of the work or the workplace to support the development of a more junior or less experienced employee.

### **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships are government funded work-based training programmes for people aged 16-65, combining on and off-the job training. Recruiting apprentices and using apprenticeship programmes for current employees helps organisation to grow their own talent by developing a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce.

The HR/Workforce Development team is leading on the Council's apprenticeship programme with the development of an apprenticeship strategy and delivery plan which aims to:

- Embed a positive apprenticeship culture
- Maximise workforce capability by identifying and promoting a range of suitable apprenticeship opportunities for new apprentices and existing employees
- Provide advice and support to managers on apprenticeships
- Negotiate apprenticeship training programmes on behalf of the Council
- Support and reflect the council's wider responsibilities e.g. as a corporate parent and achieving targets for care leavers entering apprenticeships

- Engage with training providers and other local authorities to maximise apprenticeship provision within the region

Work is ongoing to develop an employee recognition scheme, and officers are in the process of working on a Financial Wellbeing Scheme. This month a salary sacrifice scheme is being introduced for employees who wish to make Additional Voluntary Contributions to a pension fund which would allow them to increase benefits which can be withdrawn from 55 onwards.

Work is ongoing to update the workforce strategy and plan and officers are currently talking to service directors with regards to their needs.

It was suggested that there should be something with regards to Equality and Diversity. It was noted that it is not listed as a separate theme but is touched on.

It was suggested that in terms of the development of staff there should be a way of looking at work staff do outside of the Council which may mean they have skills which could be transferrable to support their work within the Council. The Council does offer an Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme which gives employees the opportunity to develop new skills and gain experience which may be transferable to the workplace.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the report be noted.

### **CR31 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME REPORT**

The Committee received it's Annual Work Programme Report. The report highlights any changes to the work programme for the municipal year.

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

**Chair.....**