

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Monday, 18 October 2021

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, D Burnett, F Geddes,
H Kelly, Reay, J Green, J Turnbull, K Dodds, R Waugh,
Anderson and P Maughan

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): A Wheeler, H Weatherley, S Dickie,
S Hawkins and K McClurey

CPL1 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 5 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL2 COVID-19 UPDATE

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee agreed to receive this update at a future meeting.

CPL3 COMMUNITY SAFETY PRIORITIES UPDATE/PROGRESS

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the key activities that have been coordinated and delivered by Gateshead Community Safety Board within the last six-months to address strategic priorities outlined in the Strategic Partnership Plan 2020/23.

The Committee also received information relating to the impact of, and some of the potential emerging themes of Covid-19 related crime and disorder within Gateshead.

The Committee agreed to receive a more substantive update on this matter at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive a more substantive update at a future meeting.

**CPL4 PROGRAMME OF IMPROVEMENT OF GREEN SPACES WITHIN THE
BOROUGH**

The Committee received a report providing a full update on the current and planned

programme of improvement of green spaces in Gateshead.

It was reported that the Committee had received an introductory report outlining the areas and themes that would be covered in detail within the report. The Committee received a breakdown of the current and planned programme of improvements, this information was also appended to the report for information.

The Committee acknowledged the importance of green spaces within the borough; it was noted that there had been increased usage of such space throughout the pandemic.

A discussion took place on the use and definition of allotments; it was confirmed that plots allocated as an allotment must be 75% cultivated with the remaining 25% being used for related storage. A comment was made noting that there are some allotment plots being misused across Gateshead; the Committee noted frustration that there are many people on the waiting list for an allotment whilst many of those currently being used are being left in disrepair or being used wholly for storage.

Officers advised the Committee that a new allotments officer had been appointed to the Council; it was highlighted that this role had been established to ensure that allotment space across Gateshead is being used appropriately. It was noted that the allotments officer would also be conducting a review of the current waiting list.

The Committee also discussed the use and maintenance of cycle paths within Gateshead. It was noted that information relating to cycle routes within Gateshead can be accessed online via the Go Active website.

A question was raised on the use of TTRO's at Riverside Park to control traffic; it was confirmed that event organisers bare the cost for these when they are used. It was asked whether alternative powers could be used instead of TTRO's, such as Police powers; officers advised that it is dependent on the nature of the event as to whether the Police would support with a road closure or the diversion of traffic. It was further noted that TTRO's are most appropriate for events planned in advance.

A further question was asked regarding the environmental investment scheme as detailed within the report. It was highlighted that all Councillors had received a briefing on the matter earlier in the year. The Committee were advised that seven new members of staff had been appointed with a foreman to clear up 'unloved' areas of land across Gateshead. It was confirmed that this team would also be deployed to support in the removal of fly tipping.

It was asked what flood alleviation works are in pace at Eslington Park; officers advised that they would provide an update on this at a future meeting once more details are established.

The Committee enquired about the Council's use of volunteers to support with the maintenance of open and green spaces, the Committee also acknowledged the success of asset transfers, particularly to those who use Gateshead's bowling greens. It was stated that the Council's neighbourhoods and volunteering service are proactive in recruiting volunteers for various roles to support the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee considered and noted the updates provided within the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive further updates at a future meeting.

CPL5 HOUSING PERFORMANCE AND COMPLIANCE MONITORING

CPL6 HOUSING REGULATORY STANDARDS SELF-ASSESSMENT (REPORT & PRESENTATION)

The Committee received a report and presentation providing an update on the Regulatory Standards self-assessment and action plan.

It was reported that as a social housing landlord, Gateshead Council must ensure that it is fully compliant with all aspects of Regulatory Standards and that robust governance arrangements are in place to provide assurance and scrutiny.

An overview of the existing regulatory standards was provided, this included the 'Home Standard' which sets out expectations for registered providers of social housing to provide tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service. The Committee were advised that for each regulatory standard a self-assessment had been conducted which rated each standard as 'good', 'satisfactory' or 'requires improvement'.

The Committee were advised that the Council had achieved 65% average compliance across four consumer standards and rent standards, further details were appended to the report for information.

The Committee questioned the planned changes to the housing allocations process; officers advised that these changes were being developed in consultation with partners and stakeholders with a view to being presented at Cabinet next year.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the progress made to date.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive additional updates on housing performance and compliance monitoring at a future meeting.

CPL7 REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (PRESENTATION)

The Committee received a presentation providing an update on the repairs and maintenance service.

From the presentation, the Committee were advised that a service improvement plan had been developed with support from Pennington Choices. It was reported that the plan takes into consideration matters such as the Support Service Improvement Plan as well as organisational culture, compliance and safety.

The Committee received an overview of progress made to date from the presentation; it was highlighted that home working and hybrid working had been factored in to how the service intends to develop. It was also noted that Covid-safe

measures are also considered in addition to improvements with online systems.

Officers provided an update on the Council's Asset Strategy and 5 year plan; additionally, the Committee were also advised 31 apprentices had been recruited to support the service. The Committee were provided with an overview of barriers facing the repairs and maintenance service, this included a backlog in repairs as a result of the pandemic as well as pend up demand in the system.

The Committee were presented with an overview of options to improve the backlog; officers acknowledged that there was no easy fix for the current situation. The Committee were also advised that housing services no longer have the internal capacity and resource to deliver services at the same level as before. Officers advised that the option of procuring services was an option but that this requires a 12-16 week lead in.

A summary of the Resource Utilisation Review was provided; it was highlighted that this would include a review of commercial data, performance information and telematics.

The Committee were also provided with an overview of actions identified as part of the 'Service Improvement Plan', it was noted that of the 46 actions identified, 43 had been complete.

The Committee thanked officers for the honest presentation and acknowledged that the repairs and maintenance service had struggled, particularly as a consequence of the pandemic.

The Committee commented that they often have difficulty contacting officers to follow up on residents' queries; officers advised that a composite list of contacts was being pulled together and that this would be shared with Councillors.

The Committee noted the recruitment off apprentices was welcomed, particularly in the current climate where there are skills shortages across industries. Officers advised that there is to be a rolling programme for the recruitment of apprentices. It was asked whether there was a gender breakdown available for the apprentices who had been hired; officers advised that this information was not to hand but overall there had been few female applicants.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update from the presentation.

CPL7a Housing Compliance

The Committee received a report and presentation slide providing an update on progress to the action plan contained within the voluntary undertaking entered into with the Regulator of Social Housing on 29 November.

It was reported that a draft follow up report was received from Pennington Choices on 5 October 2021 which reviewed the domestic property portfolio compliance position subsequent to the embedding of new governance arrangements and

clarification of the communal area compliance data held of the Council's systems. It was highlighted that Pennington Choices have upgraded all areas to reasonable assurance.

The Committee were also advised within the report that in response to the risk from a lack of operational resource in Gateshead Construction Services for building safety compliance work, an additional managerial role to address this is being progressed. It was noted that this role would be developed to deliver operational compliance via specialist contractors.

It was noted that Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue had carried out an interim visit to Redheugh and Eslington Court and had advised they were satisfied with progress on the fire action plan for the buildings. From the report, the Committee were also advised that all high-risk asbestos works had been completed across the Council's housing portfolio. The Committee also received updates on electrical safety, gas safety, water safety and domestic lifts within the report.

RESOLBED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.

CPL8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the annual work programme report 2021-22. The report set out the current programme for the year with the schedule of meetings and topics appended.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the work programme report.

Chair.....