

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 14 March 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

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

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

CPL21 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was noted that the first initial of Cllr J Reay had been accidentally omitted on the attendance list of the previous minutes; this is to be updated.

RESOLVED:

- (i) Acknowledging the above, the minutes of the last meeting held on 31 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL22 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the support provide by the Council and its partners to local businesses, job seekers and the wider community affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

From the report, the Committee were advised that the Council continues to provide support for businesses and the self-employed. It was also reported that by 31 December 2021 the Council had paid out over £76.6m to around 5,000 businesses and had awarded over £77m in Retail Discount rate relief.

The Committee received a summary of how the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) had been spent to protect local businesses, livelihoods and jobs. It was also noted that due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant the hospitality and leisure sectors had seen increased cancellations and reduced footfall, the Committee were advised that in response to this, the Government had provided a package of measures to support such businesses.

It was reported that the Council continues to deliver individualised, person-centred employment support to all residents via the 'Working Gateshead' programme. It was highlighted that this programme provides support to residents regardless of the employment status thus filling the gap in mainstream provision where eligibility criteria can restrict access to support. An overview of the work being delivered by officers was provided; this included work from Gateshead's community hubs and at

partnership events.

The Committee also received an update on the work being done to tackle youth unemployment; support for these demographics was reported to come from schemes such as the DWP's Kickstart 'Gateway' and Wise Steps. From the report, the Committee were then provided with details in relation to the Council's emergency community support (such as emergency food provision) in addition to support for community vaccinations.

The Committee noted its concern that the provision of emergency food vouchers is due to end. The Committee agreed that some residents would still need them, particularly as the cost of living is increasing. Officers advised that the funding for this provision is to cease on 31 March 2022 but that alternative offers are being looked at via partners and the voluntary sector. The Committee were advised that residents who are struggling should seek support from Gateshead Citizens Advice.

The Committee agreed that the use of community hubs in Gateshead had been of benefit to residents, particularly those who had struggled throughout the pandemic. It was highlighted that whilst the hubs had been supported by the Council but that in the future the Council's presence will reduce and be allocated dependent on need. The Committee was also reminded that the Councillor Support Fund is currently underspent and that this funding can be accessed by Members for use in their communities via the Members Support office.

The Committee noted its thanks to officers for their support to local businesses and residents thus far.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update and information in the report.

CPL23 UPDATE ON MANAGEMENT OF ALLOTMENT SPACE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work of the Council's Allotment Officer.

It was reported that the allotments officer had been employed since November 2020 with the aim of resolving a number of issues, this included the waiting list, overgrown plots and invoicing. The Committee were advised that the waiting list has been reviewed and that applicants pre-2019 have been contacted to see if their application is still current. It was also noted that there are currently 925 live waiting list applications down from 1123 since the review.

From the report, the Committee were advised that historical unlettable plots are being identified with a view to bring them back into use; it was also noted that some overgrown plots are being offered out with a rent-free period as an incentive for residents to accept.

The Committee were advised that regular monitoring of outstanding invoices is taking place and that 'notice to quit' letters had also been issued where necessary. It was highlighted that this work has contributed to reducing the number of applicants

on the waiting list for an allotment.

A discussion took place on the use of allotments for horses; it was reported that some sites had been used for horses, albeit illegally, for a number of years. It was reported that where required, the Council's legal department have been involved to resolve this.

It was highlighted that the Council's web-team have been tasked with developing an interactive map on the Council's website to provide information regarding the Council's allotments; this would include annual charges information.

The Committee questioned whether it was known if some allotment sites were being sub-let. Officers advised that where this is suspected; a visit will take place and the tenant will be asked to provide identification and proof of address.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update.
- (ii) The Committee requested a further update on the work being done by the Council's Allotments Officer in 12 months.

CPL24 THE COUNCIL AND PARTNERS APPROACH TO LOCALITY WORKING

The Committee received a report seeking views on the development and progress to date of locality working.

From the report, the Committee were advised that locality working is a commitment of resources and expertise to specific places that might otherwise be centrally or universally deployed. It was highlighted that this could include place, people, property, technology and money.

For information, it was reported that locality working is not a housing or neighbourhood management initiative, the creation of mini civic centres in community locations or the evolution of existing community hubs. It was highlighted that locality working is about creating a new operating model for all council services.

It was reported that the design and configuration of roles and working principles should achieve a number of objectives outlined in the report. It was further noted that there would be a phased roll out of locality working across the borough starting in the south. The Committee were also advised that running parallel to this it is proposed that partnership work with the voluntary and health sectors continues.

The Committee acknowledged that the proposals for locality work were currently conceptual and supported the ideas outlined in the report. The Committee noted that they would look forward to seeing how locality work is benefiting residents and services in practice. The Committee were reminded that as plans progress they would be consulted.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the update in the report.

CPL25 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work progressing in response to the Climate Emergency declaration.

It was reported that the Council had commissioned an independent environmental audit of operations in 2020 using the Investors in the Environment methodology, it was highlighted that following the audit, the Council received a silver accreditation.

From the report, it was noted that in 2021 Sustainability Implications Assessments had been agreed at SMG which will require reports to Cabinet where negative implications for sustainability had been identified. The Committee were also advised that the Council's Ways of Working group are continuing to progress towards a policy of new ways of working to contribute to carbon reduction targets, building upon savings already made.

It was noted that the Climate Emergency team continue to work closely with the procurement team to monitor carbon emissions from the Council's supply chain. It was also highlighted that the Council had procured a new carbon monitoring tool, SmartCarbon.

From the report, the Committee were also provided with an overview of the Council's existing achievements and work to reduce carbon emissions; it was also reported that the Council, in connection with a number of food networks in Gateshead are looking to link the goals of reducing food waste and food poverty.

A discussion took place on the use of cars in the borough, it was noted that the Council and its partners will continue to encourage alternative transport methods to reduce emissions. The Committee also acknowledged that the efforts to reduce carbon emissions were a personal responsibility for individuals, with advice and guidance from the local authority.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the progress of the work being carried out in response to the Climate Emergency.

CPL26 HOUSING PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on housing performance results at the end of quarter 3.

Appended to the report for information was performance data set out against each performance indicator.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive additional performance updates at a future meeting.

CPL27 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the update report on the current position with regards to the Work Programme. The Committee requested that an update on the work being done by the Council's allotments officer be added to the Work Programme for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the provisional work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year.