

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 22 January 2024**

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

Councillor(s): C Buckley, R Beadle, D Bradford, D Burnett, B Clelland, T Graham, J Green, S Green, M Hall, J Simpson, J Turner, J Wallace and K Wood

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): D Duggan and D Weatherley

**CR21 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

**CR22 FINAL REPORT ON REVIEW OF LEISURE**

The Committee received a report explaining why Cabinet took a decision to close two leisure facilities in July 2023.

The final report was sent to the Committee for comment, and it was agreed recommendation 9 will be kept under review.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee considered the information provided in the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed on the final report.

**CR23 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S FUEL POVERTY ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received a report to be updated on fuel poverty and the implementation of the fuel poverty action plan.

The National Energy Action (NEA) estimate there are currently 6.5 million households in poverty, unable to afford to heat their homes to the temperature needed to keep warm and healthy. This figure of 6.5 million significantly exceeds their previous prediction, which in October 2021 was 4.5 million.

The government uses the Low-Income Low Energy Efficiency definition to consider if a household to be fuel poverty. This means three important elements are used to determine if a household is fuel poor: household income, household energy requirements and fuel.

The fuel gap is used to provide additional income to bring a household to the point of not being fuel poor.

The most recent data available is from 2019 however, we estimate this will be much larger in 2024. The data tells us living in urban areas are most likely to be in fuel poverty whilst rural households have the largest poverty gap.

It is estimated that Gateshead has in excess of 12,000 fuel poor households, this is a conservative estimate and one we believe will continue to rise year on year. In response to this Gateshead Council created a Health and Wellbeing Implementation Plan within which there is a commitment to “develop local support and food networks to reduce food and fuel poverty.”

Gateshead Council have developed a fuel poverty action plan which has been supported from Council reserves. The priorities in the action plan and next steps are;

- **Information gathering and sharing.**
  - Continue to develop our advice, information, and guidance around fuel poverty, increase our distribution network and signposting tools.
  - Create a Gateshead Fuel Poverty Forum to bring cross sector partners together to ensure we have a full understanding of all the work, opportunities, and challenges around fuel poverty in Gateshead and can respond in a targeted way.
  
- **Signals and targeting of groups most at risk.**
  - We will continue to work with partners to maintain a programme of energy road shows.
  - We will continue to develop the tools available to support our Warm Space hosts to signpost and make good referrals.
  
- **Improving energy efficiency.**
  
- **Income maximisation and reducing fuel costs.**
  - Continue to fund advice, information, and guidance for Gateshead residents.
  - Seek to create a small grant programme to continually develop our Warm Space Network.
  
- **Ensuring adequate fuel/energy advice and support is readily accessible to residents.**
  - Continue to develop and improve the on-line advice, information, and guidance resources on the Council’s website.
  - Continue to inform residents and provide signposting information

through various communication channels.

- **Campaigning for policy change.**

- Recruitment of Service Manager for the Communities and Volunteering Team. We anticipate the eventual post-holder will play a critical role in the further development of policy and supporting senior officers to lobby effectively.
- Develop a media campaign and communication strategy to identify and promote campaigning priorities.

The Committee discussed in detail how their residents can gain advice and information for their energy bills. The Council's website has information on for support and guidance, residents can also speak to Citizen Advice who can advise on different grants available and refer them to the Green Doctor. The Green Doctor will visit the resident's home and assess how energy efficient it is, they can then advise based on the assessment.

The Green Doctor is current receiving over 600 referrals which is more than average and are looking to bring another service to accommodate the level of referrals.

The Committee were notified in the cold weather damp and mould will grow in homes. In winter residents will naturally coverup the drafts in their homes, however this reduces the air circulation with damp and mould increasing. If residents are struggling with damp and mould, there is a household fund available through the Council that residents can be referred to. There is no guarantee the household fund will continue; the team are working hard to keep the fund going as it will have a detrimental impact on the region.

The Committee also queried standing charges, are you still charged if the heating is not used? The Committee were informed standing charges are charged daily even if the heating is not being used, this is a common question amongst the public, but it is also a common issue that has significant financial implications to residents.

The Committee raised issues on the quality of the current housing stock, and how much in repairs were required to make homes suitable and more economically efficient. There are ongoing discussions to identify all houses in that need work to make more efficient, there is also ongoing conversations within the private sector, as a Council we can look to join these projects up.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee gave their opinions on the proposed next steps.
- (ii) The Committee noted the year long prohibition.
- (iii) The Committee noted the DWP Household Support Fund.

## REPORT

The Committee received a report to provide a summary update on action taken to implement the recommendations of the review on the Community Wealth Building.

In 2022 the Corporate Resources and Overview Committee agreed the scope for the Community Wealth Building review was focused on;

- Making community wealth building central to Gateshead strategic direction through its strategy.
- E-learning modules to be developed on community wealth building which are available via the intranet for all staff across the Council.
- Review spend analysis of the top 100 suppliers to identify where contracts could be delivered locally, addressing gaps in the local supply chain and those opportunities offered to local suppliers.
- Explore the development of social enterprises through the work of Economic Development.
- Improve SME's access to contract opportunities through improving our internet pages and having a greater presence on social media.
- Supporting the development of a more inclusive economy by working with other organisations to embed community wealth building through the Community Practice meetings and discussions at Anchor institute meetings.

After a number of evidence gathering sessions the final report on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023 identified 10 recommendations, those being;

- Recommendation 1 – continue to drive community wealth building through commissioning and procurement, recruitment, and economic development activity.
- Recommendation 2 – procurement documentation and communications should be reviewed to ensure that there are no barriers for local SME's (where this is possible).
- Recommendation 3 – undertake further investigation as to why local organisations do not engage with tender processes.
- Recommendation 3(a) – further networking activity for local suppliers and CVS's should be explored by Economic Development.
- Recommendation 4 – ensure that all officers engaged in commissioning and procurement activity across the Council undertake the e-learning community wealth building module.
- Recommendation 5 – continue with the engagement with anchor organisations to explore joint working on the following:

- Commissioning and procurement activity
  - Recruitment drives and skills development
  - Reviewing of land and property assets held by anchor organisations in Gateshead to see if they could be re-purposed
  - Develop a carbon reduction/energy transition approach with anchor organisations
  - To undertake workforce analysis, identification of gaps with parts/cohorts of citizens more distant from the labour market –
- Recommendation 6 – further develop the social value work through the newly appointed Social Value co-ordinator role and by working with the VCSE sector, schools, voluntary groups, and internal colleagues to maximise social value benefits through future procurement opportunities. Look to develop ‘Our Gateshead’ web page to include social value ‘asks’, this would allow VCSE’s, schools and voluntary groups, to submit social value requests and tenderers to see what those requests are and commit to deliver them during their contract period.
  - Recommendation 7 – Continue to develop and grow the generative economy working with local organisation to ensure they are fit to compete to maximise their success in future tender and quotation opportunities through pre- procurement market engagement sessions and by encouraging suppliers to attend the NEPO Business Club events.
  - Recommendation 8 – support the development of the social economy and alternative business models, including cooperatives and community interest companies that have the potential to provide goods and services that meet community need and address gaps in Council and anchor organisation supply chains.
  - Recommendation 9 – consider developing a social value framework for all planning and development to maximise future planning activity to maximise social and community benefits including residents access to employment opportunities arising from major regeneration projects through the Gateshead Works Service.
  - Recommendation 10 – Continue to explore opportunities for collaborating with the Anchor Alliance set up by the North of Tyne Combined Authority to enable us to build on the Anchor organisations we work with.

In the next six months the following actions are planned:

- Recommendation 2 – the review of procurement documentation will be completed, and new documentation implemented in accordance with the Procurement Act.
- Recommendation 4 – officers involved in commissioning and procurement activity will have to complete the Community Wealth Building Training when they participate in a procurement process. The draft Community Wealth

Building Policy will also be shared.

- Recommendation 5 – the Anchors will continue to meet and explore opportunities for further joint working to retain maximum wealth in Gateshead.
- Recommendation 8 – the Council will continue support the development of the social economy and alternative business models including intensive work with the 2 groups that are interested in progressing the Community Asset Transfers of the leisure centres that were closed by the Council.
- Recommendation 9 – the Council will continue to support Gateshead to Thrive through the development of Social Value within the Borough, through promoting Gateshead Exchange and the use of Social Value Toolkit in procurements.

The Committee were introduced and given a demo to the Gateshead Exchange website. This is a service designed to bring suppliers, schools, colleges, community groups and voluntary, community and social enterprises together.

On the website there are options to request or offer support in various ways i.e., materials, volunteers, or a specific service. When a request is submitted procurement will review and match with the appropriate partner. The website is regularly reviewed to ensure the requests are still warranted.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee are satisfied with the progress to date.
- (ii) The Committee are satisfied with the impacts to date.

## **CR25 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee reviewed the work programme and noted the following changes;

A report on Regent Funeral Services will be brought to a future meeting of the Corporate Resources OSC.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the proposed amended programme.
- (ii) The Committee noted the work will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.

**Chair.....**