



COUNCIL MEETING

21 April 2016

GATESHEAD COUNCIL

REPORT FROM THE CABINET

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This is the report from the Cabinet. Its purpose is to report on issues for the period March – April 2016.

PROGRESS ON KEY ISSUES

2. PEOPLE

Children and Young People

Gateshead Schools Dance Festival 2016

Almost 2,500 young people from schools across Gateshead, performed at Sage Gateshead on 15 and 16 March, for a two day celebration of dance themed around 'Musicals, Books and Fairy Tales' - this theme was selected by the schools and children themselves. In total, over 74 schools and two community groups participated in the festival, with nursery age children as young as three taking part, alongside more seasoned dancers from secondary schools across the Borough.

Each of the five sessions at this year's festival was opened and closed by professional singer, Channy Thompson, who kindly agreed to attend and support on a voluntary basis. Channy performed on stage with a young dancer from Kingsmeadow Community Comprehensive School. The two-day event also provided the perfect platform for an art based competition where all Gateshead pupils were invited to submit a design for the front cover of the festival programme. The eventual winner, a pupil from Dunston Hill Community Primary school, was announced during the Wednesday afternoon show and invited on to the stage to receive an award in recognition of their work. The event was compered by local radio presenter, Matt Bailey of Capital FM.

The annual dance festival is organised by Gateshead School Sport Partnership and this is the eighth time that the Gateshead Schools Dance Festival has been held at Sage Gateshead. The festival affords young people the opportunity to display their dance skills, as well as encouraging the pupils to develop their creativity and take part in a healthy activity.

Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board

Ofsted has rated the Council's Children and Families Service as 'good', following their inspection at the end of last year. Good practice was seen in a range of areas, including: family support in relation to domestic abuse; fostering support; performance management; and promoting children's rights.

The Ofsted report states that: “Children’s services in Gateshead are good because leaders, managers and workers are highly effective” and that there is a “strong corporate commitment to safeguarding and improving outcomes for all children and young people in the borough”.

Of particular mention is the Council’s response to children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing from home and care, which is described as a ‘particularly strong area’, as well as its highly effective multi-agency approach to safeguarding and managing risk.

The report noted that responses to child protection concerns are timely and robust and that social workers had manageable caseloads, were well supported by managers and that the workforce was stable. Social workers know the children they work with well and as a result, provide good support to meet children’s needs and promote their safety.

Adoption performance is also ‘good’, with good post adoption support; children being well matched with adopters and few delays or adoption breakdowns. Special mention was made of the service having a good record for placing older children and groups of siblings.

While most services were given a ‘good’ rating with examples of very good practices, the experience and progress of care leavers requires improvement. Reasons for this included: not enough care leavers continuing education, work or training beyond the age of 19 and the Council needing to be more ambitious and persistent for this group. Future plans for this group of young people need to be more focussed on positive outcomes.

However, the report acknowledges that all care leavers are offered safe, secure and suitable accommodation and that the arrangements for keeping in touch with and supporting care leavers were effective, with young care leavers valuing the support they receive.

The Ofsted report into Children’s Services also recognises the part played right across the Council by both staff, and councillors, noting that “Elected members take corporate parenting very seriously” and that there is a “strong ethos of collective responsibility across the Council” helping to achieve the best outcomes for children.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was inspected at the same time and requires improvement to be ‘good’, due to issues such as gaps in its membership, monitoring of services and lack of robustness in the analysis of its training. But the LSCB had already identified areas for improvement, which it shared with Ofsted and has put plans into action to tackle these issues.

Ofsted acknowledged that the LSCB has clear strong commitment from key statutory agencies and that good collaborative working had resulted in an effective approach to safeguarding, child sexual exploitation and prevention of extremism.

Apprenticeship Growth

The Council’s learningSkills service has developed nationally into the fifth largest local authority provider of apprenticeships. Over the last five years, apprenticeships delivery has increased from 104 to 694 student/employees (a larger cohort than many colleges). The Government, through their three million apprenticeship target, and

locally the NE LEP, have prioritised apprenticeship growth as a key skills policy, particularly with young people aged 16-18. While nationally there has been little growth (less than 3% in the last 5 years), the Council has expanded its delivery six fold to 272 apprentices aged 16-18.

This achievement has been accomplished by the Council working with over 150 employers and creating a vocational route for young people who may have previously not achieved successfully in education. The growth in delivery has been matched by a growth in quality, with the percentage of successful apprenticeships increasing by 7.6% from 68% in 2010 to 76% in 2015, while quality nationally has decreased from 72% to 69%.

Ofsted Inspection of Adult Learning

The Council's learning Skills service has maintained its 'good' rating following its first short inspection by Ofsted since October 2010.

The inspection found that the effectiveness of leadership and management is good and noted that the service had maintained a relentless focus on addressing the needs of the hardest-to-reach members of local communities during a period of prolonged economic hardship. The numbers of economically inactive learners now make up 70% of all learners compared with 45% at the time of the last inspection. There are now clear routes from non-accredited community learning, through employability programmes, traineeships and study programmes, to apprenticeships. Learner's progression is outstanding.

It was recognised that the service is now one of the largest local authority apprenticeship providers in the country and is becoming a significant provider of skills based training in the area.

It was noted that the community learning programme has been successfully adapted by managers to make it more focused on developing skills for employment or on providing learners with the knowledge and confidence to take up volunteering roles in the community. Community learning is increasingly being used successfully for the most vulnerable unemployed young people and adults as a stepping stone to formal employability provision.

The inspectors recognised there had been successful implementation of a range of new programmes since the last inspection, with an offer for all age groups, and at different levels, in a diverse range of employment sectors, ranging from health and social care to retail. They commented that, across all programmes, learners develop good English and mathematics skills, with the great majority achieving qualifications in these subjects at higher levels than when they first entered the provision.

It was also noted that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and appropriate actions are taken to safeguard learners.

However, there were a number of areas identified where improvements could be made, including increasing the success rates further in study programmes for 16-18 learners by improving the effectiveness of monitoring and short term target setting to support achievement within planned timescales. They also felt that by providing regular reports on the performance and quality of provision to elected members, there would be more effective scrutiny and challenge of the service.

The learningSkills service enrolls over 11,000 people on learning programmes. Since its last Ofsted inspection in 2010, the Council has doubled the volume of learning delivered from £2.1m to £4.2m in a sector that reduced by 23% nationally.

Adult Social Care

Gateshead Older People's Assembly Cosy Crow Café

During 2014/15, Gateshead was one of five areas in the UK selected to pilot the national Malnutrition Prevention Programme. According to the research from the project, it was estimated that over 5,000 older people in Gateshead were affected by or at risk of malnutrition.

In response to the findings, Gateshead Older People's Assembly has launched the Cosy Crow Community Café which operates from Deckham Community Centre. As well as providing hot meals, snacks and refreshments, the café will also be a social meeting place for older people across Gateshead, helping to alleviate loneliness and social isolation.

3. PLACE AND ECONOMY

Environment and Transport

Future of Metro Services

On 24 March, Nexus was given endorsement by the North East Combined Authority to manage Metro operations directly for two years from April 2017, rather than taking up an option to extend the contract with the current operator, DB Regio Tyne & Wear Ltd (DBTW).

A statement from Nexus said that "both Nexus and DBTW are dissatisfied with the structure of the contract. Its financial and operational performance and its outcomes for passengers are not where either of us would want them to be."

This move is one part of a four-point plan for the future of Metro comprising funding for new trains, arrangements for a new operating contract, continued capital investment and potential extensions.

Fixed Penalty Notices for Street Works

The Council has a key role in the co-ordination of street works within Gateshead, helping to minimise disturbance and delay to the public from utility works, and ensuring that proper reinstatement is carried out once any work is completed.

To date, the Council has sought to encourage greater compliance with statutory requirements through negotiation, avoiding the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices for any contraventions. However, while there have been improvements in performance, problems in certain areas remain stubbornly high.

In the light of this, utility companies have now been informed that the Council intends to start issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for non-compliance with the regulations.

4. COMMUNITIES

Culture, Sport and Leisure

Relocation of Chopwell Library

Chopwell Library relocated to premises previously occupied by Chopwell Children's Centre on Monday 11 April. The accommodation located within Chopwell Primary School has been opened up to provide an integrated space for both the Library and the Children's Centre activities. The Library will be open to the public but will also be very accessible for school use.

5. CONCLUSION

The Council is asked to note this report.