

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 1 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): S Ronchetti, J Wallace, D Bradford, L Caffrey, D Duggan, P Foy, T Graham, S Green, M Hall, I Patterson, J Simpson and K Wood

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): J McClurey, R Mullen and J Raine

CR38 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

CR39 IMPACT OF COVID 19

The Committee received a report and presentation setting out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on areas relevant to its remit.

The early impact of the pandemic was reported to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2020. This provided an overview and also outlined the impact of the pandemic on performance against the five Thrive pledges.

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact throughout the world. There have been considerable implications for everyone in the UK including Gateshead, where it continues to affect the lives of all who live and work here. It is clear that the impact, particularly the long term issues will be far reaching for many years to come.

The Committee received a presentation which provided a detailed overview of the impact of the pandemic on areas relevant to this committee including:

- Update on the impact and continued response
- Lessons learnt
- How this is changing how we work in the future

Some of the key areas are highlighted below:

- Impact and response to increased demand from local people and businesses for financial support including Council Tax Support, Council Tax Hardship Fund, Winter grants and over 11,000 payments made to businesses
- Customer experience developments to ensure local people can effectively

and efficiently contact Council services - with 156,000 general calls since March

- The Covid - 19 pandemic accelerated the IT adoption and change program as demand for technologies that enable new ways of working has increased significantly. Software such as Microsoft Teams, which has enabled the organisation to communicate and collaborate via video, is completely different to the position a year ago. To meet this demand, the key lesson has been to confirm the plan for new ways of working enabled by technology is the right approach. However, to maximise the opportunities presented by new technology there is a need for further investment
- Supporting employees throughout the pandemic from frontline workers to those working at home, responding to different needs and ensuring safe working environments through risk assessments and activities
- Employees have been able to access counselling, 'wobble room' and guidance on looking after mental health and wellbeing while the Individual Employee Personal Discussion tool has been rolled out to understand the different needs of employees and how they can be supported
- A Health and Wellbeing Survey is currently underway with employees and the findings will be used to inform future developments
- A focus on agile working for the future, when employees can return to the workplace, and having solid foundations in place for different ways of working on a permanent basis
- Support through the hubs which have received over 7,500 requests for assistance including food, utilities and routine shopping
- Working with volunteers and community groups to support vulnerable and isolated people. Over 500 individuals offered to volunteer while a range of initiatives have been undertaken, most recently through the Christmas and winter period providing Christmas Hampers, gifts and a joint Gateshead and Newcastle Spirit of Christmas Campaign
- Supporting the Public Health response to the pandemic with implementation of resilience and business continuity planning
- Learning lessons from resilience work with partners across the Northumbria area and nationwide as well as implementation of more virtual communications and ensuring that continued incident responses adhere to health and safety guidance pertaining to Covid -19
- Financial impact on the Council through increased expenditure as well as lost / reduced income
- Supporting schools through the Services for Schools commercial services with continued engagement with schools and responding to emerging issues

It was queried whether the Council were receiving any support to cover the costs of administration of the grants and support payment schemes. It was noted that we do receive some funding for administration and some additional resources have been brought in. People are working incredibly well across the council.

It was noted that the figures are surprising and it would be good if it was possible to create a dashboard which could be posted on the Councils website, on number of businesses helped, residents helped.

It was noted that all employees should be thanked for the hard work they have done during the course of the pandemic.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Council's response to the Covid Pandemic be noted.

CR40 DELIVERING THRIVE - A NEW PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

A presentation was given to Committee on the new Performance Management and Improvement framework. The new framework has a strong focus on people and on what the Council is doing to address challenges and achieve its Thrive priorities and deliver the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

There is a move away from performance indicators to management action and change. The guiding principles are that this will be shaped and owned by Councillors, to scrutinise performance, see impact of decision making and deploy resources. There will be a strong employee focus so that staff can see how they are contributing to the Council's priorities.

The development of a new approach began by agreeing some underpinning guiding principles which aims to develop a framework that:

- Is shaped around the characteristics needed to enable people to thrive
- Is simple, responsive, timely and meaningful indicators
- Empowers employees to drive improvement
- Incorporates qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Recognises locality-based approaches, population and community level interventions to improve
- Considers partnerships, communities and aligned to key policies and strategies such as the Health and Well-being Strategy, housing and schools
- Is intelligence led, using evidence to learn and improve
- Considers how to incorporate a wider range of data, for example linking to a 'Data hub' approach
- Measures the health of the organisation (balanced scorecard approach)
- Enables members to scrutinise performance and see the impact of decision making

There will be a focus on the most vulnerable residents through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy mechanism. Emerging strategies are around Economic, Housing and Investment with interventions required to fulfil Climate Emergency response and Community Wealth Building. These will be the building blocks for Council priorities.

It was noted that Councillors have been engaged from the beginning and there has

been strong support for an approach framed around the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Analysis has been held at a corporate level to see what policies need to change. This approach will be developed and improved over the year.

An Employee Network was established and there was a lot of enthusiasm which is essential as this will be driven by employees.

The purpose the new Performance Management Framework is to:

- Enable the Council to know whether the it is achieving its priorities. (Thrive Policy)
- Ensure that the Council's resources are being deployed effectively
- Make both short and long term effective decisions
- A whole systems approach – embedded in our partnership working to deliver the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Corporate Performance framework has been structured around the six policy objectives of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy;

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all in accordance with international law on economic and social rights
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

For each of these six objectives key features have been identified.

It is anticipated that the framework will provide; transparency and clarity on delivering priorities, links between performance and resources, ability to scrutinise effectively and enable informed policy decisions to be taken.

The framework will go to Cabinet for approval in April and will be implemented thereafter, it was noted that this will be continually developed.

It was suggested that we use Council employees who live in Gateshead as a test for views.

RESOLVED - That the presentation and the views of the Corporate Resources OSC be noted.

CR41 WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21 AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021-22

The Committee received a report on the work programme for the 2020-21 and the development of the work programme for 2021-22.

As a result of the uncertainties arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic along with the pressures of services as well as having regard to the Council's approach to the development of a new performance management framework, a more flexible approach was adopted for scrutiny during 2020-21.

This approach recognised the demands on services and the Council as a whole but at the same time has ensured that we have been meeting our statutory obligations to provide an effective scrutiny function and scrutiny has concentrated on delivery work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider Council.

The work of the Corporate Resources OSC was refocused on the current Covid-19 related priorities and the impacts of that alongside a couple of other priority issues for the Council/ partners which are already being progress elsewhere to avoid placing any additional burdens on service areas and a reduced programme of meetings was agreed.

At its November 2020 meeting the OSC acknowledged that the ongoing uncertainties relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of clarity on the outlook for local government finance alongside the strong possibility that OSC meetings will continue to need to be held remotely for some time to come, meant that the approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021-22 was likely to have to be similarly flexible.

Initial consultation for 2021-22 with Chair and other elected member and officers on the proposed priority issues which would support the Council's Thrive agenda and add value. Also to be taken into account if the five priority areas outlined in the budget consultation, the development of the Council's new Performance Framework, the Gateshead Strategic Needs Assessment and the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

It is anticipated that further reports over the coming year on the developing Performance Management Framework will be included in the work programme.

The following suggestions have also been made to be considered further:

- The impact of Brexit, in particular on the council and delivery of Council services.
- Major Projects where Council resource is being directed, such as the District Heating Scheme, the Arena development and the re-development of the Old Town Hall.
- A report from HR on the age profile of the workforce by Group and Service area.

RESOLVED – (i) That the work programme for 2020-21 be noted.
(ii) That the proposals for the 2021-22 work programme be noted.

Chair.....