

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 11 October 2021

PRESENT: Councillor John Eagle (Chair)
Councillor(s): D Burnett, J Wallace, R Beadle, L Caffrey, P Foy, T Graham, S Green, M Hall, R Mullen, I Patterson, J Simpson and J Turner

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Bradford, B Clelland, D Duggan, S Ronchetti and K Wood

CR48 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

CR49 BUDGET SAVINGS DELIVERY 2021

The Committee received a report providing an update on the achievement of in year budget savings for 2021/22.

The Committee were advised that there will be further reports to the Committee to update on the financial position within the Council. It is important that activity in these areas are closely monitored both to minimise the mitigations required but also to achieve clarity and assurance that by March 2022 all savings values agreed by Cabinet and Council are achieved and do not contribute to the financial gap in future years.

The Council has achieved £170m of savings and has a proven track record of achieving the savings needed to balance the budget, there are not many other councils in the region who are delivering within budget.

Because of the impact of Covid the consultation that would usually take place as has taken place in previous years hasn't happened. Monitoring of the budget position and progress against proposed savings is taking place and quarterly monitoring is taken to Cabinet.

Further planned activities are as follows;

- Adult Social Care Review of Care Packages (ASC2) Temporary investment has been approved to create additional capacity to carry out outcome-based reviews which should result in package cost savings. Recruitment to the posts is now complete with outcome-based reviews to commence imminently. Other specific reviews are already underway by the ACT team.

- As part of the Public Health and Wellbeing review, commence a public consultation on Libraries in 2021 to allow potential remodelling of building use, subject to approval of Cabinet Report 19 October. There will be a 12-week consultation period (from 20 Oct to mid Jan).
- Redesign of Day Services (ASC7) A further report will come back to Cabinet in October to gain approval for the restructure of disability day service staffing structure. Engagement will take place with employees and trade unions.
- Review of in-
- House Supported Living Schemes (ASC8) A report will be presented to Cabinet in November outlining the proposal and rationale, seeking approval to commence with next steps of consultation with staff who would be affected and commence the procurement process linking with tenants and family carers to ensure they are instrumental to the procurement process.
- Integrated Impact Assessments to be reviewed and updated for budget savings proposals and submitted with relevant Cabinet reports (PHW3, ASC7, ASC8)
- An additional Integrated Impact Assessment to be developed for Libraries proposals (submitted with October Cabinet report)

It was noted that there is a council wide focus on the issues and make sure of a joined up approach. It was also noted that our communication with residents, service users, stakeholders and partners needs to be better. It was suggested that if we are going to have a central library the civic centre should be considered. We need to have conversations with the NHS with regards to social care, if our social care sector is buoyant then that helps the NHS in terms of freeing up beds.

RESOLVED - (i) that the comments of the Committee be noted.
(ii) that the future planned activity as outlined be noted.

CR50 IMPACT OF COVID 19

The Committee received a report and presentation to provide an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on areas related to its remit.

Whilst we are currently still in the responding phase we are also looking at the recovery phase. All services are undertaking Business Impact Assessments to identify risk with weekly reports on pressures and a Winter review will also take place and provide assurance that all critical activities will continue to be delivered in a prioritised way.

Volunteering numbers have increased, the demand for IT and new technology has increased and accelerating the Council's IT plans. Resilience planning has changed following lessons learned to minimise risks to response during an incident.

Demand from local people for financial support continues to be a priority. The council has been proactive with contact to residents and businesses to provide advice and support. The Council don't know the unknown potential impact of the

end of the furlough scheme and changes to universal credit. We are working with Citizen's Advice Gateshead to support residents.

We have spoken to 11000 residents who are classed as being extremely clinically vulnerable and delivered 18000 emergency food parcels. Thousands of volunteers have been connected to help. The Council has co-ordinated the issuing of vouchers for children on free school meals over school holidays. 12 vaccination pop ups have been arranged in areas of Gateshead with a low vaccine take up.

A Household support fund has been announced with funding up to 31 March 2022 to provide support for people most in need this winter. 50% of the funds are to be focussed on families with children.

Support is continued to be provided to businesses and those who are self-employed. Advice has been provided on business compliance and safe trading. A support hub with dedicated web pages, online resource and a newsletter.

The Council are continuing to provide support for employees with a focus on managing and maintaining mental wellbeing. Officers are continuing to respond to new and evolving health and safety requirements through continual review of risk assessments. The Council is looking at the rollout of a hybrid working offer for office based staff and developing a protocol for this offer.

Face to face training has been re-instated where necessary and appropriate with Covid safe measures in place. HR are working collaboratively with IT colleagues to make sure IT needs are met.

In summary we are still learning and responding but we have seen some positive relationships built and will continue working together with others and developing ways of working to make best use of and target resources to deliver Council priorities.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

CR51 IMPACT OF BREXIT

The Committee received a report on the impact of Brexit on areas relevant to its remit.

The UK withdrew from the EU on 31 January 2020, following which there was a 12 month transition period to agree a trade deal which did go down to the wire.

At the time of the withdrawal from the EU the UK along with the rest of the world was hit with the global pandemic. It is therefore difficult to identify the specific root cause of the impacts of Brexit given they could be also as a result of the pandemic.

The Council did prepare for exit without a deal with a Business Impact Risk Assessment with rag rated risks. Now some of the issues seem to be emerging.

Businesses are seeing insurance premiums increase due to Covid, there are reduced social care staff as many have returned to their countries. Data stored outside the UK will no longer be protected.

Currently HGV drivers are not on the list identified by the government as a shortage. Also Gateshead and the North East region don't have the same reliance on foreign workers so has not experienced the same impact. However, Gateshead is now experiencing a shortfall in the Social Care sector in both adults and childrens services due to a severe shortage across a range of external service provision.

The greatest impact is on the workforce is on those who support people in their own homes which is resulting in more people using more costly services such as remaining in hospital or going into short term care provision.

There has been minimal impact on the Council's own workforce as we have not traditionally employed large numbers of EU Nationals. As a future precaution the Council have applied to the Home Office to seek approval for the Council to be a sponsor of foreign nationals should we ever be faced with having to try to recruit to areas where it is not possible to recruit from the UK.

It was queried what effect price rises will have on our budget. It was noted that this has been picked up in the medium term financial strategy to pick up increases in costs, and it should also be noted that it is not just the revenue budget it is the capital budget as well where there will be an impact.

It was noted that a members seminar has been requested and will be arranged to provide information to all members.

RESOLVED – (i) that the information within the report be noted.
(ii) That a members seminar be arranged.
(iii) That an annual members seminar be added on the impacts of Brexit

CR52 UPDATE ON POSITION WITH REGARDS TO FUEL

The Committee were advised that a request was made for the Committee to be updated on the position with regards to fuel shortages.

The Committee were advised that fuel is available in the system the problem was in getting it to the pumps. As far as the Council is concerned we have our own pumps and have a contractor who didn't have any issues in delivering to the Council.

The main cause of the issue was people panic buying and filling tanks at the same time.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

CR53 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

Committee received a report on the work programme for the remainder of the

2021/22 municipal year.

The Committee were requested to support the addition of two additional items on the Corporate Procurement Strategy and Gateshead's Approach to Social Value be added to the work programme for its next meeting.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee noted the provisional programme.
 - (ii) That the Committee noted that further reports on the work programme will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair.....