

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

Monday, 29 January 2024

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): T Graham, A Geddes, F Geddes, D Burnett,
H Weatherley, H Kelly, J Turnbull, K Dodds, S Dickie,
V Anderson, P Maughan, A Wintcher, S Gallagher, P Burns,
K Walker and L Brand

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor(s): D Robson

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Welsh

CPL94 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Committee held on 4 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

CPL95 COMMUNITY SAFETY BOARD - STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2023/24 (UPDATE)

The Committee received a report providing an overview of key activities that have been coordinated on behalf of the Gateshead Community Safety Board since September 2023 to tackle the strategic priorities outlined within the Partnership Plan 2023/24.

A summary of the strategic themes/priorities agreed by the Community Safety Board for 2023/24 was provided, these were:

- Tackling serious violence
- Thriving communities
- Protecting people from harm
- Strengthening governance and accountability arrangements

From the report, the Committee were also provided with crime and disorder performance data in Gateshead for the period of April 2023 – December 2023. It was noted that recorded crime in Gateshead had increased by 4% which is lower than the 5% increase experienced across Northumbria.

The Committee received additional information and context on activities undertaken to address the strategic themes and priorities. Additional details were also provided on how the priorities are being achieved via strategic means i.e. via the Hate Crime Strategy and also Locality Working.

A comment was made noting the positive impact on crime due to Locality Working within the south of the borough; it was highlighted that Locality Coordinators had

also consulted with ward members on activities and schemes and had set up successful community-based events. The Committee were reminded that Locality Working is to be rolled out across the borough and that a joint approach was being taken between the Council, the voluntary sector, local businesses and other partners.

A query was raised in relation to the impact of Safer Streets Funding and its effect on anti-social behaviour (ASB). Officers advised that a collaborative approach with Northumbria Police and mental health services had been taken on this to address low-level ASB. The Committee acknowledged that ASB was still a prevalent issue for residents in Gateshead and noted that many residents do not report ASB due to fear of the repercussions from perpetrators.

A discussion took place on the Council's approach to preventing radicalisation within the communities of Gateshead. It was noted that the Council provides training to frontline staff involved with vulnerable groups e.g. social workers and that regular contact is maintained with partners, schools and Northumbria Police and that information is shared where necessary. The Committee were also reminded of the Council's approach to 'Prevent' and the channels that cases go through when brought to the attention of staff.

Concern was noted from the Committee on the levels of youth disorder in Dunston; officers advised that a joint bid was being prepared with voluntary and community sector partners to secure funding for 'hardening resources' in this area so that residents can be given items to make them feel safer, this includes outdoor lighting and video-doorbells for their homes.

A further query was raised in relation to the support that is being offered to victims of crime and disorder; officers advised that they would provide a response to this specific query outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to receive six-monthly Community Safety Updates.

CPL96 STREET LIGHTING UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the impact of changes to street lighting in line with light pollution considerations and the potential impact of reduced street lighting on community safety and perceptions of crime and disorder.

From the report, the Committee were advised of the principal objectives of the provision and maintenance of street lighting. This included the provision of safe networks for all users and vulnerable groups and to sustain the night time economy of the borough. It was also highlighted that street lighting can be used to promote safety and security, in both urban and rural areas, and that it can also help increase quality of life by artificially extending the hours in which it is light so that activities can take place.

The Committee were advised that street lighting engineers follow industry guidelines

set out in British Standard (BS) 5489-1:2020 that considers pedestrian and traffic safety when designing Street lighting levels. It was also noted that as part of the Council's 2023 vision, it is planned to make Gateshead carbon neutral by 2025 and that to achieve this a Carbon Management Plan was established.

On the matter of community safety, it was reported that the national evidence base surrounding the impact of reduced street lighting on crime and disorder is not strong with questions concerning potential crime preventive effects of lighting initiatives remain unanswered.

Information in relation to the dimming of street lights was provided from the report, the Committee also noted that between January and March 2023 a Community Safety Survey was launched which asked residents to pinpoint areas in Gateshead where they felt unsafe and the potential reasons why. It was reported that of the 472 responses received 38% of people cited poorly lit areas as a potential reason for feeling unsafe/avoiding an area.

The Committee noted its concern on the dimming of street lights and the implications on residents who feel unsafe as a result. Committee members acknowledged the Council's aims with regards to being carbon neutral but felt that the dimming of street lights was not the answer. Officers noted that they had received some queries from residents direct in relation to the dimming of street lights; it was explained that in many cases residents have perceived that the street lights near their home have been dimmed when they have not.

The Committee agreed to informally refer the issue of street lights and community safety back to Cabinet for further consideration in future based on the discussion and views shared at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.

CPL97 UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S ALLOTMENT SERVICE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work of the Council's Allotments Officer and the allotments service.

From the report, the Committee were advised of the following:

- There are 594 people on the waiting list (this includes 215 applications received since October 2022)
- Between October 2022 and October 2023, 120 waiting list applicants have been allocated a plot
- Where possible, some larger plots have been split into more manageable sizes to help reduce the waiting list and increase revenue
- Those on the waiting list are contacted regularly
- There are currently no lettable vacant plots available that are suitable for

cultivation

An overview of the updated tenancy agreement was provided to the Committee. It was highlighted that most allotment holders manage their plot in line with the Council's expectations and their tenancy agreement. It was also noted that the updated tenancy agreement is to be issued to new allotment holders only to ensure gradual improvement in plots but that the improvements will also be encouraged amongst existing plot holders. The Committee further noted that the updated tenancy agreement has been approved by the Allotment Association.

The Committee were also provided with updates on the new tenancy agreement in relation to vehicles and tires, beekeeping, bonfires/fires and cultivation. Further updates were also reported on ongoing issues being addressed by the Council's allotments officer, this included the management of overgrown plots and sites with horses. It was highlighted that within Gateshead there are 2 sites with horses (Leam Lane Stock and the Hurrocks).

A query was raised in relation to the sub-letting of plots; officers were advised that were the allotments officer is made aware of sub-letting this would be investigated and that regular appointments would be made with the tenant to ensure that the plot is being used by them as per their tenancy agreement.

The Committee also questioned the reasons as to why an allotment plot may be unlettable; officers explained that this was largely due to the ground conditions at the plot and the condition of surrounding infrastructure and vegetation.

The Committee thanked the Council's allotments officer for their hard work and praised the service for the improvements that have been made to the allotments service to date.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the progress reported.

CPL98 BUILDING SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the current building safety and compliance position with the Council's housing stock.

From the report, the Committee noted the following:

- All Gateshead Council high-rise blocks have been registered with the Building Safety Regulator
- Gateshead Council have taken part in a pilot scheme with the Health and Safety Executive looking at the content and layout of the Safety Case Report
- The Building Safety Regulator is to assess all high-rise buildings in the UK over a 5 year period from April 2024
- Significant works have taken place to meet the requirements of current legislation and regulation; including an ongoing fire risk assessment programme
- An annual flat front door inspection programme is in place and is on target
- A quarterly inspection programme of fire doors is in place and is on target

- The high-rise fire detection system, within dwellings, complies with regulation
- New compliance software is in the process of implementation with a target date of 2024

The Committee also noted updates in relation to compliance from the report; it was highlighted that of the six key compliance areas there are no areas of high risk.

The Committee queried what the worst-case scenario would be should the building regulator find a high-rise that was not compliant with regulations. Officers advised that residents of that block would need to be decanted from the building into another suitable accommodation but that this outcome is not expected within Gateshead based on the current state of play.

The Committee were advised that update reports are provided on building safety and compliance progress via Portfolio.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the report.

CPL99 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report which provided details on development of the work programme for OSC's and the provisional work programme for Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities OSC for the municipal year 2023/24.

The Committee were also advised verbally that the consultation on items for the 2024/25 Work Programme would be starting soon.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the Work Programme.

Chair.....