

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Monday, 14 October 2024

PRESENT: Councillor B Clelland (Chair)

Councillor(s): D Burnett, L Brand, S Dickie, S Gallagher,
A Geddes, F Geddes, M McNestry, J Park, B Turnbull,
K Walker, D Welsh and A Wintcher

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): V Anderson, K Dodds, H Kelly, P Maughan
and J Turnbull

CPL16 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a accurate record with no matters arising, subject to the following amendments:

- Members suggested treating commercial waste as the same as residential waste and remove the levi to remove issues for landlords.

CPL17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CPL18 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

A report was presented to the Committee on the progress of the Councils response to the Climate Emergency declaration.

In 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency. As a result, the Council created the Climate Action Plan which sets out how the Council will work towards net zero emissions. The plan was published in 2021 and updated in 2024.

The Council is audited each year by an independent environmental company. The recent audit shows the Council's status has improved from bronze to silver. The audit provides recommendations to the Council on how to continuously improve their environment strategy.

Carbon monitoring aligns with best practice and allows the Council to get ready for new legislative requirements. Smart Carbon has been procured in 2022 as a reporting tool. This tool monitors both direct and indirect emissions which allows the Council to more effectively meet its commitments to reducing carbon and assess whether current interventions are effective or if further interventions are required.

The Council continue to explore and implement projects that will contribute towards

addressing the Climate Energy.

The Council have won the 'Best Carbon reduction' award in 2022 and was highly commended for 'leadership in climate change' at the MJ awards in 2023.

Climate change has been introduced across the Council and now has been incorporated into new starter induction packs. A compulsory e-module on climate change for all staff commenced in September 2023 and more than 50% of employees have now completed this module.

The Northeast Enhanced Partnership (EP) came into effect in April 2023. Funding has been allocated to Gateshead for improvements for the public transport corridor. The £2 single bus fare has continued following extended support by government. In addition, the EP Partners have introduced new cheaper multi-modal day ticketing across the region.

A sustainable food partnership coordination was appointed. Gateshead is now officially a member of the of Sustainable Food Places: joining a network of over 100 around the UK.

The Business Energy Savings Team (BEST 2) project went live in October 2023. The 18-month project will help SME's achieve reductions in energy costs and carbon emissions, thereby increasing business resilience.

A successful bid was made to DEFRA's Woodland creation Accelerator fund to fund the appointment of two woodland creation officer posts. Ten sites have been identified and over 13,000 trees including two tiny forests and eight other sites. This will build on the current 23,000 trees already planted.

The Council is proud that no waste has been routinely sent to landfill sites in the last 10 years. Gateshead will continue to promote the waste hierarchy through innovations such as the campground HWRC site hosted a pop-up re-use shop in 2023.

Work with schools has begun to include a pilot Climate Action Plan at XP Gateshead which has been led by students and includes an energy audit.

The Committee discussed how new builds in Gateshead's are going to incorporate heat pumps in future builds and if the Council have plans to expand heat pumps across the borough. At present, the Planning department work closely with the environment team to ensure that planning applications include the accurate legislation and are beneficial to our economy. New builds going forward are changing with the new Government in position. The Council are conducting studies to see how new builds more energy efficient and identifying the areas in the borough that would benefit from this. Heat pumps are building regulations, and it would depend on viability and feasibility of that property to see what would work.

The heat networks were initially deployed to public places, social housing and freight depo. There are conversations ongoing with the Q.E Hospital to see how the connections would work and what funding would be required. Research is ongoing

to see if a further heat pump can be built, Gateshead have good granite that can be drilled deeper and can produce higher temperatures. However, this depends on key connections, would it be worth it and if the funding allows. There is a drilling test taking place in Blaydon for the Leisure Centre, as funding has been allocated for it.

The data between working from home and employees being in the office had been questioned, is there a clear difference between the two? The committee had been advised that there were no clear differences as the cost averaged out over the year. The Council are currently creating a new travel plan for employees.

The Committee further discussed if the tree planting program is monitored to ensure there is a high success rate. The Committee were assured that monitoring of the trees is within the contracts and the officers are to ensure the trees are successful.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Committee noted the progress made in response to the Climate Emergency.

CPL19 UPDATE ON POTHOLES

A report was presented to the Committee to provide an update on the potholes around Gateshead and the impact it has on the Council.

Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to maintain the highway via the Highways Act. Gateshead Council maintain 902km of carriageway within the adopted highway this is made up of; 78km of A roads, 46km of B & C roads and 682km of unclassified roads. The National Highway maintain major strategic routes across the country, in Gateshead this relates to the A1 Western Bypass only.

A pothole is a break or depression in a bituminous running surface. The minimum size we consider as a defect for repair is 150mm diameter at a depth of 40mm.

There are many factors that affect the conditions of the roads i.e., weather conditions, wear and tear by vehicles, utility company excavations and the construction of the road.

Highway safety inspections are carried out considering local asset bases and factors affecting the network, but also inspection frequencies based upon knowledge that have been developed by experience. The team works on planned safety inspections and reactive safety inspections.

Response times are:

- Priority Report (R0) – 2 hours: make safe or temporary/permanent repair,
- R1 – 24 hours: make safe or temporary/permanent repair,
- R2 – 14 days: temporary/permanent repair,
- R3 – Low risk defect to review after 12 months.

The current position in Gateshead shows 'A class roads' require 1% of repairs, 'B &

C roads' require 2% of repairs and 'Unclassified roads' require 21% of repairs, this is found to be on par with neighbouring local authorities.

The Council have invested in newer innovative methods such as micro-surfacing, thin surfacing, jet patching and strategic patching as well as the traditional resurfacing methods.

Over the years the number of repairs has increased, this is a reflection on the increased population and the high usage of the roads network and more recently the severe weather faced over the winter months.

Insurance claims remain low, below are the total amount paid out each year since 2018.

- 2018 – 34 cases of 92 paid out a total of £39,484
- 2019 – 6 cases of 66 paid out a total of £30,832
- 2020 – 2 cases of 32 Paid out a total of £5,331
- 2021 – 15 cases of 70 paid out a total of £4,919
- 2022 – 12 cases of 42 paid out a total of £4,349
- 2023 – 16 cases of 76 paid out a total of £8,715

The Council have invested considerable funds to its highway to maintain its current condition and we continue to do this.

In discussing potholes, several queries were raised. When utility companies dig up the roads, what conditions are in place if the job is not up to standards? A permit is required to dig up the roads and the street works team monitor the quality of the repairs, if the reinstalment of the road is not finished correctly then the utility company are in risk of being fined.

The quality of the paths across Gateshead is part of the adopted highways, the Council have a program to upgrade the paths when required. Currently the Council are working on a program to update the paths after receiving funding, but it has proven difficult to cover all the repairs with the awarded money. An approach was adopted if the path is outside a hospital, school or shop that it will be prioritised in the program. With slab pavements the weeds come through, whilst the Council are introducing a new spraying program a better cleaning regime is needed.

The Council have a system in place to track where potholes are reported, each area also has a highway inspector that goes out and inspects the roads. Other systems acquired are to track the gullies and drains that get clogged up on a regular basis, this allows us to check the gullies and drains if a storm is approaching and it is a regular maintenance area. By starting this, it reduces the chance of flooding and eventually it should reduce the damage to the roads causing less potholes.

The budget is questioned on is it adequate, or has monies been appropriately budgeted. It was noted that the budget is not great, but this is like every other service within the local authority. However, we are currently reporting less orders than last year therefore, we have been able to support the backlog of 22/23.

Recommendation:

- i. That the committee reviewed the report on potholes and noted if sustainable materials can be used and enforced by the Council, and for officers to bring back a cost comparison of street cleaning from what it was to what it is now.

CPL20 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed the completion of the 24/25 work programme.

It was noted that the Councillors have requested a report on Voluntary Organisations, parking and roads and pavement maintenance.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Committee note the report

Chair.....