



COUNCIL MEETING

17 December 2015

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 November – December 2015

PROGRESS ON KEY ISSUES

2. PEOPLE

Children and Young People

'We Stand Together'

During Hate Crime Awareness Week (12 - 16 October), GemArts' new anti-hate crime animation and poster campaign, called 'We Stand Together', was launched. 'We Stand Together' was a participatory arts project delivered by GemArts, in partnership with the Council and The Gateshead Housing Company.

As part of the project, GemArts worked with two Gateshead secondary schools, Year 9 pupils from Heworth Grange Comprehensive School, and Year 8 pupils from Joseph Swan Academy. The project enabled young people to engage with, discuss and create artwork focused on raising hate crime awareness and reporting.

Heworth Grange Comprehensive School worked with visual artist Lesley-Anne Rose to create an innovative animation, and Joseph Swan Academy worked with Creative Ginger to design a powerful poster campaign.

Services for Vulnerable Children – Ofsted Inspection

Using their single framework for inspecting local authority services for vulnerable children, Ofsted conducted an inspection of Gateshead's services, between 27 October and 20 November. The inspectors looked at child protection, services for looked after children and care leavers, and local authority fostering and adoption services. Ofsted will publish their findings in January 2016.

Celebrating Achievement Event for Looked After Children

It's now 15 years since the Council introduced the Annual Celebrating Achievement Awards for Gateshead's Looked After Children and Young People. This year, the event took place on 27 October 2015 at the Lancastrian Suite, Dunston.

The event was well attended, with 358 young people nominated to receive awards by social workers, foster carers, teachers and other professionals. Three of the Ofsted inspectors also took the opportunity to attend and were very complimentary of the event.

The nomination categories were:

- Be Healthy
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Wellbeing.

As well as the standard nomination areas listed, young people were also nominated for several special awards including the Lorna Gallagher Award for outstanding achievement in sport or performing arts, The Finton O'Regan Award for most improved attendance since coming into care, and the Virtual School Head Awards linked to educational attainment.

3. PLACE AND ECONOMY

Economy

Within the last report to Council, an update was provided on the consultation exercise being undertaken by JobCentre Plus, on the proposed closure and relocation of Felling Jobcentre.

DWP/Jobcentre Plus notified the Council on 10 September 2015 that it was their proposed intention to close the Felling Jobcentre Plus office, and to relocate its staff and services in entirety to Gateshead Jobcentre. The reason given for this was that it 'provides them with the opportunity to maintain high levels of customer service while ensuring we are getting the best value for money for the taxpayer'. No timetable for this was announced but stakeholders, including Gateshead Council, had been asked to comment. In response, the Council sent a strong reply outlining its concerns with the proposal.

Following the consultation exercise, Jobcentre Plus wrote to the Council on 11 November to confirm that a decision has been made to go ahead with this proposal and that, subject to detailed planning, this will happen by 31 March 2016 at the latest.

The closure of Felling JCP office will reduce the number of Jobcentres serving the Borough to two; namely Gateshead and Blaydon.

Officers will continue to liaise with Jobcentre Plus regarding this issue, and will co-ordinate our engagement to tackle the issues associated with this closure.

Environment and Transport

Pedal Cycle Casualties

The North East Regional Road Safety Resource (based at Gateshead Council) has published a report analysing pedal cyclist casualties on the North East's road network between 2010 and 2014. In Gateshead, there were 218 injuries, equating to 7.5 injuries per million cycle miles, slightly higher than the North East average of 6.6.

The report identifies several important findings, notably that the main accident problems are at junctions as a result of motorists' failure to look properly. There are also clear differences in patterns of injuries between adult and child cyclists.

Quality Contracts

The North East Combined Authority has been developing a proposed Quality Contract scheme for Tyne and Wear. This would suspend the current deregulated bus market and instead define the local bus network through a series of contracts in which service routes, frequencies and fares are all stipulated.

As part of this process, the scheme was referred for consideration by an independent Board, appointed by the Government, which has now published its conclusions. Although not binding, these are a major blow to the proposals in that, of the 5 'public interest' tests considered, the proposals were judged to have met only 2.

The future approach remains uncertain, although in the longer term similar powers proposed as part of the Government's devolution deals may provide the basis to pursue a similar approach. In the short term, a potential threat to some marginal bus services lies in the falling revenue available to Nexus to support these. This was something the Quality Contract approach sought to avoid, by increasing the number of people using buses.

Land of Oak and Iron

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership a £2.2million grant to deliver a programme of activity over 4 years, which will be worth £3.4million when additional resources and in-kind time are included.

Groundwork North East is the accountable body for the Partnership and will manage the programme of activity. The Council is one of a number of partners taking part in the project, including Durham County Council, Durham Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency.

Project ideas that will directly benefit Gateshead include a new build Heritage Centre at Winlaton Mill, which will provide the base for the project activity and act as an information point for the Land of Oak & Iron. This idea does require more development and a significant amount of additional funding that still needs to be secured.

Given the industrial heritage of the area, restoring remnants of the past is a key theme, with Whinfield Coke Ovens near Highfield and Crowley's low dam at 'Old' Winlaton Mill both included. A Land of Oak & Iron sculpture trail is also proposed within Derwenthaugh Park to attract visitors and interest. There are also a number of projects that will be area wide. These include a small grants scheme aimed at local groups and a community archaeology initiative that will focus on some of the area's old Waggonways.

A guide book will also be produced that will include walks and places to visit. A skills training proposal has been developed for young people and volunteers to help sustain activity beyond the 4 year programme. There will also be opportunities for schools in the area to participate in an education programme including site visits.

4. COMMUNITIES

Culture, Sport and Leisure

Great North Snowdogs

The Council, along with other partners, is working with Wild in Art and St Oswald's Hospice to support and help with the delivery of this public art event to Tyne and Wear in winter 2016. The project was launched regionally on 10 November and aims to feature around 50 individually-designed artworks based on a sculpture of a Snowdog by Raymond Briggs. Each Snowdog will be created by local artists and communities – all designed to reflect and celebrate Tyne and Wear's rich cultural offer.

A trail will be planned across Tyneside to exhibit these sculptures; to encourage people to get active and be 'tourists in their own town' and also invite visitors to explore, discover and celebrate the town. A schools trail comprising of around 100 smaller 'snowpuppies' will run alongside the main trail, animating indoor spaces such as libraries, shopping and art centres. The trail will be accessible by Metro, and each Council is being asked to suggest appropriate locations, assist with networks and identify potential support in kind from internal council services. Further discussions as to what this entails will be reported on in the future.

The trail finale will include a charity auction of the large Snowdog sculptures. The aim of the auction is to raise over £100,000 for St Oswald's Hospice Children's and Family Services. Previous similar trails have drawn between 200,000 and 1.18million visitors into towns and cities in a ten week period.

The cultural impact is expected to place art and culture at the heart of Tyne & Wear's identity and boost the local economy through increased visitor numbers and investment in the cultural community.

Winter Festival 2015 in Gateshead

This year, the Council is offering a range of activities to engage with residents and visitors across Gateshead. Festivities began on 24 November, when a 35 foot blue spruce Christmas tree was installed in Baltic Square. A seasonal programme of street entertainment, in partnership with Trinity Square, has taken place each Friday and Saturday from 27 November at 11am, 12noon and 1pm.

St Mary's Heritage Centre has hosted a number of festive activities, including a Christmas Craft Fair on 28 November and several concerts, including Tyneside Chamber Orchestra. The Snow Ball took place on 12 December, which brought the atmosphere of the Swing era into St Mary's with Lindy Jazz and Charleston.

The Winter installation 'Arctic Animations', supported by Tyneside Cinema, is a pop-up cinema, set in a magical winter wonderland inside St Mary's, featuring 4 animations from above the Arctic Circle and live music interludes. The seven performances start on 22 December until Christmas Eve morning and are aimed at whole family entertainment. The Caedmon Hall held a special Winter Piano Recital on 9 December, under the leadership of Venera Bojkova and showcasing local pianists.

The season would now not be complete without the ever-popular Enchanted Parks, in Saltwell Park from Wednesday 9 December until Sunday 13 December. The event, which is celebrating its 10th birthday in Saltwell Park, will once again breathe myth and

magic into Gateshead's beautiful Victorian park, through a series of art installations including fire, light, projection and sculpture. There will also be an exhibition of photographs from the event over the last 10 years, exhibited in Bewicks' Gallery from 25 November until 8 January 2016.

Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge takes place in libraries every year during the summer holidays. Children read six library books of their choice, collecting stickers and other rewards along the way. 1300 children from across Gateshead took part in this year's challenge and borrowed over 6,000 library books. Research shows that the challenge helps to maintain or improve children's reading levels during the long summer break.

This year, the Library Service recruited 42 young volunteers aged 15 - 19 to support children's activities linked to the reading challenge. Volunteering during the Summer Reading Challenge has given young people the chance to work creatively on a project that encourages younger children's reading while gaining valuable work experience. Their volunteering was recognised and rewarded at a special celebration evening where certificates and prizes were awarded.

5. CONCLUSION

The Council is asked to note this report.