



# COUNCIL MEETING

24 September 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 July to September 2015.

#### PROGRESS ON KEY ISSUES

#### 2. PEOPLE

##### *Children and Young People*

##### Dryden School – Ofsted Inspection

Dryden School was inspected on 24 - 25 June 2015 by Ofsted, and has now gone from a good to outstanding school. The Inspector commented on the “exceptional leadership” of the Executive Head Teacher, School Head Teacher and the senior leadership team and noted that the ‘highly skilled’ Governing Body meant they had an accurate view of the school’s still improving performance.

It was noted that the students across the school achieve outstandingly well; there was a very strong, caring ethos evident on entering the school that created an oasis where students are enthusiastic about their learning and thrive, particularly in their personal and social development.

Dryden School is a special school for students aged between 11-19 who have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties as their primary area of need.

#### 3. PLACE AND ECONOMY

##### *Economy*

##### Thinking Digital Conference - Gateshead

Now in its eighth year, the ‘Thinking Digital’ Conference is one of Europe’s premier technology conferences. The Conference brings together world class speakers and attracts an international audience who participate in this three day community based event held in Gateshead.

This year’s conference delivered another successful programme of technology, ideas and innovation themed talks by 24 world-class speakers from organisations including Google, Sage UK, Pixar, BBC, IBM, Microsoft, Accenture and Gov.uk. The conference was attended by 694 delegates and was viewed live online by a further 660 people across 46 countries. It is estimated that approximately half of all attendees came from outside the North East.

Headline sponsors included Newcastle University's Digital Institute who sponsored the conference for their fifth year; the conference was also directly supported by Sage UK, DigitalCity, Sunderland City Council, Accenture, Virgin Money, Northstar Ventures, BBC and a range of North East digital and creative agencies. The Council's support was acknowledged by Herb Kim, founder of Thinking Digital Conference.

The Council also hosted a pre-conference Virtual Reality (VR) workshop for 40 attendees on 19 May 2015 at Baltimore House. Baltimore House is home to an emerging cluster of VR companies who are co-located in a facility known as VRTGO Labs. The workshop content featured a mix of presentations from VR industry leaders, highlighting the adoptive uses for the technology, and gave an opportunity for delegates to physically experience the latest VR headsets and technology. In hosting the workshop, Gateshead Council was able to showcase local talent and engage with potential investors and key decision makers.

The success of the Thinking Digital Conference directly supports the Council's activities, to make Gateshead's urban core a premier business and visitor destination and to create an environment that allows businesses to thrive and create jobs. The conference complements and raises the profile of the indigenous digital and tech sector, and provides a platform for the Council and its partners to showcase local talent and engage with potential investors and key decision makers.

The Thinking Digital Conference 2016 will take place on 10 - 11 May 2016.

#### Overseas trade and investment opportunities

Officers have been in dialogue with the Sunne Municipality in the region of Varmland, Sweden to explore reciprocal trade and investment opportunities for our respective business communities, with a focus on the digital and tech sector. Representatives of the Sunne Municipality and Broby Grafiska University attended the Thinking Digital Conference again in 2015, and also participated in a programme coordinated by the Economic and Housing Growth Service to showcase the 'offer' for inward investors and local talent.

Following the visit, Sunne Municipality has confirmed its interest in exploring an arrangement to facilitate trade and investment. Such an arrangement will send a positive message regarding the Council's intent to support inward investment and further add to Gateshead's status as an international business location.

#### ***Environment and Transport***

##### Update on the Land of Oak and Iron

The determination and hard work from the Land of Oak and Iron multi-agency team has resulted in the successful submission of the Round 2 funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The projects in this 4 year programme will work together to protect, conserve and enhance the beautiful landscape and fascinating heritage of this special area, stretching from Consett and following the River Derwent to the Tyne.

The scheme is now being assessed by Heritage Lottery Fund over the rest of the year, with a decision expected in November or December 2015. If approved, it will improve access for visitors and local communities and provide activities to discover, learn about and celebrate the area through education, skills development and volunteering commencing in 2016.

### Progress of A1 Improvement Scheme

The target date for finishing the improvement works to the A1 between Team Valley and Metrocentre is Spring 2016. Once completed, the improvements will help reduce congestion and facilitate opportunities for development and economic growth along this key transport corridor.

The footbridge across the A1 at Chiltern Gardens has been demolished as part of the works. A date for the replacement bridge has yet to be confirmed, but is likely to be early in 2016.

### Hackney and Private Hire Driver Licenses

The Casey report about Rotherham Council's governance, its protection of children and young people, and taxi and private hire licensing has required Licensing Authorities across the country to re-examine whether they are taking sufficient steps to ensure that only fit and proper persons are permitted to hold a driver's licence.

Officers have identified a number of measures that would be of immediate benefit. So that the implementation of these measures was not delayed while an overall review of conditions and policy takes place, the Service Director, Development and Public Protection has made a number of minor amendments to the Council's Policy in respect of the licensing of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers, to clarify the following:

- The prerequisites to making an application (taking the opportunity to clearly set out the approach the Council will take to a person's right to work, right to drive, medical fitness, obtaining a full criminal history and facilitating compulsory child sexual exploitation / safeguarding awareness training)
- The circumstances that may give rise to the disclosure of non-conviction information by the Police (to enable immediate suspension / revocation)
- That licensing related offences and licence holder's conduct (in particular towards Council staff and councillors) are relevant in a consideration of fitness and propriety to hold a licence.

In order to provide licensed drivers with a greater awareness of child sexual awareness and be part of the community's response in tackling it, Gateshead's Local Safeguarding Children Board and Northumbria Police are providing a series of short awareness sessions.

There are approximately 700 private hire and hackney carriage drivers licensed with the Council. An initial series of nine sessions have been planned and discussions are taking place with Council officers, with a view to incorporating the requirement for CSE awareness training into relevant transport contracts.

### Gateshead Road Safety Statistics

In 2014, there were a total of 699 casualties on Gateshead's roads. This is an increase of 7% from 2013. However, the numbers of people killed or seriously injured, at 57, fell by 7%. 4 people were killed on the roads in 2014, a decrease from 8 the previous year.

The overall increase in casualties in 2014 reflects regional and national trends. However, total numbers remain significantly below those seen 5-10 years ago, with a decrease of 26% from the average between 2005 and 2009.

### Update on District Energy Scheme

Construction of the District Energy Scheme continues with completion scheduled for August 2016. Balfour Beatty has now completed grouting of historic mine voids prior to the installation of the piled foundations. Community engagement activities with Gateshead College are underway to design the site hoarding and time lapsed photography of the build. Clancy Docwra has successfully undertaken the first highway works for the buried heat and power apparatus for the scheme. Completed ahead of schedule during the school summer holidays utilising night works, the first A167 works were delivered without complaint or delay to the traffic network. Further works in the Highway are scheduled for late September, to secure the required incoming electric and gas supplies to the energy centre on Quarryfield Road.

Following Cabinet approval, an extension to the initial scheme to facilitate a power connection to Gateshead International Stadium is being progressed. Feasibility studies are also underway to investigate the business case for connecting parts of the Trinity Square development and Gateshead Leisure Centre. Discussions are also underway with the developers of a proposed Anaerobic Digestion plant which, if successful, would increase the capacity of network and amount of low carbon electricity produced.

## **4. COMMUNITIES**

### ***Communities and Volunteering***

#### **Chase Park**

In December 2013, Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Council £66,000 to develop a second round bid to access further funding to redevelop and restore Chase Park, Whickham. The bid was successful and the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Council £922,900 project delivery grant for the delivery of the project.

The Council is working closely with the Friends of Chase Park, who have an increasingly important role in the delivery of activity and volunteering, to help the future sustainability of the park. The proposals contained within the bid included restoration works on the listed windmill, entrance gates and stone walls, the path system and the former Whickham House Garden. Improvements will also be made to the toddler play area, a multi-use games area will be installed, and new facilities will include community garden, trim trail, and skateboard area.

The delivery stage of the project is expected to cost £985,900, which includes £40,000 in respect of project management overview and technical support provided by the Council. Work is expected to start on site next year, to be completed by Autumn.

#### **Holiday Hunger Programme**

Working with key partners, the Council has delivered Gateshead's 'Fill the Holiday Gap' programme. It offered daily hot meals during the school holidays to children who normally receive free school meals in some of the borough's most deprived communities.

Over fifty weekly events were held, with the help of volunteers, benefitting over 1500 children and 500 parents. In addition to providing a nutritious hot meal, each event included wellbeing demos and advice on healthy eating, exercise options and a range of social and educational taster activities.

The summer programme culminated with a Celebration Event on 21 August at Gateshead Leisure Centre with over 400 parents and children attending, 260 of whom enjoyed a hot meal with invited guests. Local MPs from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for School Food also attended. The Group has recently recommended that local authorities should support and resource programmes like Gateshead's as part of the duty to act on Child Poverty, using existing funding mechanisms more creatively.

The "Fill the Holiday Gap" Steering Group will meet in late September 2015 to evaluate the Gateshead programme and help shape any future programme. The Council's leadership team will consider a strategic approach based on evaluation from this pilot programme.

### ***Culture, Sport and Leisure***

#### **Heritage Open Days**

These took place on 10-13 September with 17 events held in Gateshead, and 190 across the Tyne and Wear region.

The Council reluctantly withdrew from the Tyne and Wear Heritage Open Days event in 2014 due to reduced capacity.

This year, to assist the voluntary and community organisations, the Council has been able to contribute to the Tyne and Wear brochure of events, to help promote events in Gateshead to a wider audience and raise awareness of those groups who continue to take part in the event.

#### **British Transplant Games**

More than 850 transplant athletes from across the UK and overseas competed at The British Transplant Games NewcastleGateshead 2015 from 30 July - 2 August. These were officially the best Games ever, attracting 2,500 spectators.

Competitors took part in a range of events including track and field, archery and five-a-side football at Gateshead International Stadium; swimming at Sunderland's Aquatic Centre; golf at Close House and cycling at Leazes Park.

1200 athletes, supporters and members of the public took to NewcastleGateshead's iconic quayside for the Speedflex Donor Run. The mass participation event helps to raise funds for the Games and is organised by athletes in commemoration of their donors who have given the gift of life, as well as members of the public and Games supporters.

Sunday saw the biggest turnout, with 3000 athletes and supporters at Gateshead International Stadium for an adrenalin-fuelled day of track and field events and a surprise visit from TV presenter Jeremy Kyle who started the Tug-of-War and helped spur the athletes on.

The inspirational Games, which are now in their 38<sup>th</sup> year, take place annually to raise awareness of the desperate need for organ donors.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The Council is asked to note this report.