



COUNCIL MEETING

16 March 2017

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 February to March 2017.

PROGRESS ON KEY ISSUES

2. PEOPLE

Children and Young People

Ofsted Inspection of Grove House

Grove House Children's Home was inspected by Ofsted on 29 November 2016 and has maintained its Outstanding judgement.

The Children's Home provides short breaks for up to five children with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities. It was found to be outstanding in all categories ie the overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home; how well children and young people are helped and protected; and impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Ofsted noted the Home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good and that the actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Ofsted Inspection of Front Street Community Primary School

Ofsted Inspectors visited this school between 18 - 19 January 2017 and have judged it to be Outstanding in every area, having previously been rated as Good.

A summary of the key findings highlights that the head teacher and other senior leaders provide highly effective leadership and that all staff share a common commitment to improve the school. It was also noted that the governors are ambitious and unrelenting in their pursuit of excellence.

The inspectors observed that pupils participated enthusiastically and were developing as confident, capable learners. They also noted that older pupils provide excellent role models for younger children.

It was highlighted that strong and effective partnerships with the local authority and other schools have helped members of staff to refine and improve their practice.

3. PLACE AND ECONOMY

Housing

Reduction in Numbers on the Housing Register

Between 2010 and 2015, the number of applicants requesting rehousing in Gateshead remained fairly consistent at around 11,000 to 12,000+. However the number of applicants registered for housing started to reduce in 2015/16, and there are now 6597 applicants on the housing register in Gateshead. Across the Tyne and Wear housing register (including those not requesting Gateshead) the numbers have also reduced from 40,946 in April 2015 down to 29,938 in January 2017.

Of the 6,597 current applicants for Gateshead, 1,115 (16.9%) are “demoted” for previous housing debt or for anti-social behaviour. These applicants can still bid for properties, but can only be considered after other bidders who are not demoted.

The number of applicants with a priority need has also reduced from 977 in 2015 down to the current figure of 629 (9.5% of all applicants).

Mid Term Evaluation – Swalwell Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme

The Swalwell Selective Landlord Licensing designation came into force on 8 April 2013, ensuring that every private landlord within the area must possess a Landlord licence to operate in the area for a five year period. The designated area was known to suffer from low housing demand (high no of empty properties, high turnover of tenants, some poor housing and environmental conditions etc.) as well as some issues with anti-social behaviour, where some landlords were failing to undertake necessary action. Landlord licensing allows the Council to ensure that landlords become more accountable for the management of their property and tenants. The Swalwell area is our fourth scheme and covers over 490 properties, with 232 of these being privately rented.

Since its introduction, officers have been working closely with landlords, tenants and partners in the area to both issue licences where appropriate, and secure improvements to the area.

Recent consultation with stakeholders has been undertaken to evaluate the success of the scheme to date and to obtain views on how to improve the scheme over the next 2 years. Overall feedback is positive.

- All rented properties in the area have now been inspected to ensure they meet the basic minimum standard. The number of properties achieving the property accreditation standard (a standard higher than the legal minimum) has increased from 3.8% (8) to 67% (142).
- 4 campaigns have been undertaken in relation to external property conditions and overgrown gardens, resulting in improvements to the visual appearance of the streets
- Three landlords are currently being prosecuted for failing to apply for a licence or breaching the conditions of their licence – one property was uncovered to be a brothel and the intervention from the team stopped this activity.
- Over 90% of tenants have been reference checked prior to being offered a tenancy

- The number of poor housing condition and ASB complaints received by the team has reduced
- 90% of residents had experienced no further problems with ASB or had had any issues quickly resolved during the licensing scheme.
- The number of empty properties has reduced.

Ongoing areas of concern relate to refuse/overgrown gardens and prevention/resolution of anti-social behaviour which the team will aim to focus on in the last 14 months of the scheme. Further consultation will be undertaken to evaluate the scheme near its expiry.

Economy

Benefit Cap Project

The benefit cap is one part of the Governments welfare reform act of 2012. It is a set limit on the amount of welfare benefits a claiming household can get. The benefit cap only affects claimants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and where applicable, the cap reduces entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit in line with the cap amount. This came into effect in 2013.

November 2016 saw the benefit cap further reduced from its original 2013 amount, with new rates set at £384.62 per week for couples and lone parents with children, and £257.69 per week for single adults, reductions of £115.38 and £92.31 respectively. Gateshead has no single claimants affected by benefit cap.

In Gateshead there are currently 190 households subject to the benefit cap. The average weekly loss of income for those households is £55 per week, although some households have lost as much as £100 per week.

The Council has successfully brought in £14,691 of external funding from Jobcentre Plus which will allow Council officers to actively engage all capped households. This will make households aware of the cap, explain what it is and how it affects them and look at ways to maximise their income or move into employment to lift them out of the cap.

4. COMMUNITIES

Communities and Volunteering

Move to Improve

“Move to Improve” (MTI) is an initiative developed around 18 months ago that aims to empower residents over the age of 55 to be more physically and socially active.

Based on the idea of centring support for older people in sheltered schemes and care homes, a local community partnership approach was established between the Council and The Gateshead Housing Company.

“Move to Improve Week” will take place from 20-26 March 2017 across all sheltered schemes operated by The Gateshead Housing Company, to promote the initiative and encourage more residents and other partnership services to engage in the initiative with a focus on continued community led sustainability.

Activities offered during the week will include: The week will offer wider activities including:

- Digital awareness sessions
- CPR training
- History themed projects
- Stranger danger/scam awareness
- Health visits from Diabetes UK /Cancer research UK nurses

The initiative has already achieved the following outcomes:

- Better relationships between care homes and the wider community;
- Better opportunities to use affordable transport links with Transport North East;
- Development of a community allotment based at Sandown Gardens /creation of a fully accessible site and development of a “Friends of” group to manage it;
- Friends of Oxford Terrace Surgery linking with the Care Homes through Veterans Day and also assisting with a knitting group at Rosewood.

Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre

During 2015, Gateshead Indoor Bowling Club volunteers worked closely with Council officers to develop a robust business plan and gain Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. This was in preparation for the committee to consider their approach to gain a lease agreement for the Indoor Bowling Centre. On the 1 October 2015, the Council agreed a ‘Tenancy at Will’ arrangement with the club and then a 35 year lease agreement was signed in April 2016.

Following a recent visit and review at the Club with officers, the club indicated that they have met and also exceeded numerous milestones set out in their business and financial plan. The Club was successful in gaining funding of £75,000 from Sport England and £9835 from the Capacity Building Fund. This has enabled them to fund a new heating and boiler system, refurbishment of the café and kitchen area (work commences at the end of February), boiler for the cafeteria, bowling green carpet hoover, cash register, lockers and new carpets.

The Club has stabilised membership with 420 members, both men and women of all ages and a growing youth section which now meets on Sunday mornings.

The Club have developed their own website demonstrating their progress. Club volunteers have produced a video ‘One year on’ that showcases their achievements and enthusiasm for the Club.

Culture, Sport and Leisure

Active Lives

Sport England’s new strategy ‘Towards an Active Nation’ brought the opportunity to review how physical activity and sport is measured and to develop a new mechanism for this. The new Active Lives survey will replace the previous Active People survey.

The first headline report for the new survey was published at the end of January 2017 using data collected between November 2015 and November 2016. This includes data at a local level on:

- Levels of activity ('active' doing at least 150 minutes; 'fairly active' – doing 30-149 minutes a week; 'inactive' – doing less than 30 minutes a week)
- Taking part in sport and physical activity (at least twice in the last month)

Gateshead had a total of 501 respondents to the Active Lives survey, indicating that 22.3% of Gateshead respondents are identified as 'inactive' compared to 22% nationally, and 24.2% regionally.

15% of Gateshead respondents are 'fairly active' compared to 12.5% regionally, 12.6% nationally.

62.7% of Gateshead respondents are 'active' compared to 63.8% regionally, and 65.4% nationally.

Harry Potter Night at Crawcrook Library

On 2 February in libraries, bookshops, schools and universities around the world, Potter fans celebrated Harry Potter Book Night with activities and wizarding facts. Gateshead libraries hosted four Harry Potter events giving children and young people the chance to test their wizarding skills and get creative with costumes. Each event used a special kit sent out by the publisher, filled with magical activities and ideas connected to the book characters. More than 200 Gateshead children joined in the fun and borrowed Harry Potter books to read and re-read these amazing stories.

5. CONCLUSION

The Council is asked to note this report.