

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, 22 January 2018**

- PRESENT:** Councillor S Ronchetti (Vice Chair in the Chair)
- Councillor(s): J Wallace, D Bradford, J Green, S Green, M Hall, M Henry, B Oliphant, M Ord and N Weatherley
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor(s): A Douglas, G Haley, M Gannon, L Green
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): John Eagle, L Caffrey, M Charlton, T Graham and K Wood

**CR22 MINUTES**

Matters Arising

At the last Committee it was queried what handover was given to Community Association when they are taking on responsibility from the Council. The application process for a CAT, community associations were provided with relevant copies of Water Hygiene Risk Assessment and Asbestos Survey in addition to the Council's Condition Survey.

More recently the question of fire risk assessment on properties transferred via the CAT process has been raised by Health and Safety and meetings have taken place.

All relevant community groups have subsequently been contacted by letter to highlight the importance of a current fire risk assessment for their premises.

The Council also provide a buy back service for surveys such as Water Hygiene/asbestos in addition to repairs and maintenance.

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**CR23 PROPOSAL TO IMPLEMENT A CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PLEDGE**

A report was presented to Committee to invite comments on the proposal to adopt a Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge and a process for gathering baseline information.

The Corporate Social Responsibility Pledge had been developed based on the 5 Council Pledges:

- Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
- Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
- Support our communities to support themselves and each other
- Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation and growth across the borough
- Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead Council

Whilst it is appreciated that many tenders will have specific requirements that go above and beyond what is included in the document this will be the basic standard that may be applied across all markets and types of suppliers. This approach has a number of benefits:

- The document signals basis standards, values and direction of travel that we would like our supply chain to comply with
- This approach covers all procurement activity regardless of markets and supplier sectors
- The information can be used to inform tender standards for specific tender processes
- Once the council has a baseline of information, if there are areas where the Council considers markets to be weak, we can consider whether to provide either direct support or signpost suppliers to organisations that can help them to improve.
- There may be opportunities to generate income, for example, if suppliers identify areas of weakness where the Council has capacity or expertise, then the Council may consider opportunities to trade with suppliers to help them to upskill, for example, health and safety or resilience planning
- We can also work with suppliers based in Gateshead to help to upskill them or educate them to enable them to compete.

It is expected that the document will be reviewed in 12 months time, once sufficient baseline information is available..

Pledge 1 – “Putting People and Families at the Heart of Everything we Do”, the Committee had no comments.

Pledge 2 – “Tackling Inequality so People have a Fair Chance”, the Committee had no comments.

Pledge 3 – “Supporting our communities to support themselves and each other” – the Committee had no comments.

Pledge 4 – “Investing in our Economy to Provide Sustainable Opportunities for Employment, Innovation and Growth across the Borough”, - It was suggested that something should be included about wealth creation and the opportunity to re-distribute.

Pledge 5 – “Working together to Fight for a Better Future for Gateshead”, it was queried why the Council was in the title, it was noted that this was a typo.

It was queried about using providers who are ethical in terms of paying their corporation tax etc. The Committee were advised that there is already requirements in procurement practice, however, it may be possible to add something in about tax.

The Committee were advised of suggestions made by a Councillor unable to attend today's committee in relation to slightly amended wording regarding payment appropriate to the job, and in Pledge 2 where we talk about targeted recruitment practices, the Council doesn't offer targeted recruitment practices so it has been suggested that this line be taken out.

It was suggested that we also need to concentrate on delivering best value to for the people of Gateshead.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the Committee's comments be noted.  
(ii) That the approach to gathering baseline information be approved.  
(iii) That the content and approach be reported to Cabinet for approval.

## **CR24 ANNUAL REPORT - CORPORATE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS PROCEDURE 2016/17**

A report was presented to Committee on the analysis of complaints and compliments recorded by the Council and the Gateshead Housing Company in the year ended 31 March 2017.

The Council sees comments, complaints and compliments as an important part of being open and honest and using the feedback to improve services.

At the year end 31 March 2017, 307 complaints were recorded and 754 compliments were recorded. 18 complaints were the subject of an independent review by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company undertook 20 reviews.

A number of points can be noted arising from the statistics for 2016/17:

- 307 complaints were recorded in 2016/17 compared with 387 in 2015/16 a decrease of 80.
- 754 compliments were recorded for the year 2016/17 compared to 723 in 2015/16 – an increase of 31.
- The number of complainants requesting a review of their complaint by the Chief Executive decreased by fourteen to 18 in 2016/17. The Managing Director of the Gateshead Housing Company carried out 20 reviews in 2016/17 compared to 14 in 2015/16.
- 73.3% of all complaints were recorded against the category of quality of service.
- The proportion of complaints found to be fully justified decreased from 41% in 2015/16 to 36.9% in 2016/17.
- In addition, the proportion of complaints found to be partially justified increased from 13.6% in 2015/16 to 15.6% in 2016/17.

- Most importantly, the Council's managers used the information gained through the monitoring of complaints to improve the provision of services.
- The computerised recording system made it easier to track and respond to complaints. However, this system now requires an upgrade that reflects the new structure of the Council and provides improved statistical interrogation and analysis.
- There has been a decrease in the number of complaints recorded by the Council during 2016/17. Additionally, there has been an increase in performance of the percentage of complaints resolved within target timescales for the both the Council and the Gateshead Housing Company from 82.7% in 2015/16 to 85.2% in 2016/17.

During 2016/17 the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) investigated 17 complaints. Of these 7 were closed following a detailed response from the Council, 2 were not upheld and 8 were upheld partially or fully.

In 2016/17 of the 307 Step 2 complaints 38 progressed to Step 3 and 23 to the Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.

The Committee was informed that it is recognised that the system requires an upgrade and work is currently being undertaken with the implementation of the Council's new digital platform to include a new system for managing complaints. It is hoped that the new system will improve how complaints are managed and analysed and have an ability to identify themes.

It was queried whether the new system will be able to identify those who make multiple complaints. The committee was advised that whilst the Council do have persistent complainers, each complaint could be about different service areas and issues and therefore may still be counted as separate complaints even if they are from the same person.

It was queried whether the information is also taken to the Housing Company. The Committee were informed that the complaints information relating to the Housing Company goes to the Housing Company Board meeting.

RESOLVED - That the report on complaints and compliments be endorsed.

## **CR25 VOLUNTEERING IN GATESHEAD - A NEW APPROACH**

The Committee received a report and a presentation on a project being undertaken in partnership with Open Lab (Newcastle University) and PaCT Lab (Northumbria University).

Gateshead Council's Volunteers Plan has been in existence since 2013 and in that time the numbers of residents participating in volunteering has steadily increased.

The system for the management of volunteering projects has remained unchanged and now requires updating. Initial research into volunteering was conducted by Northumbria University on behalf of the Council which concluded in September 2017 that the system for administering volunteering was too bureaucratic and a "digital platform will have profound benefits for the organisation".

The Gateshead Volunteering Project 2018 is a one year collaboration between Gateshead Council, Open Lab and PaCT Lab.

The Project Aims to:

- Understand the experiences and processes of being and supporting a volunteer in Gateshead;
- Design new activities and digital tools to better support volunteering;
- Build, deploy and evaluate working versions of digital tools;
- Do all of the above in collaboration with volunteers and volunteer coordinators, and other relevant stakeholders within and external to Gateshead Council.

The participants include, volunteers, the Council, the Voluntary and Community Sector, and other stakeholders include, the Community Centre Network, Emergency Resilience Planning, environment and friends of groups, school volunteers and governors, volunteer operated library services, community links, community safety, children's centres, The Gateshead Housing Company and Northumbria Police.

The project structure is designed over four phases - Discover, Design, Develop and Deliver. The team will be running some focus groups and workshops and will be speaking to those who volunteer currently.

It is hoped that by April a design brief will be in place and by June a potential working version of something.

The OSC were asked to consider the following questions.

- Have we got the aims of the project right?
- What would make the biggest difference to volunteering in Gateshead?
- What else may help?
- Who else should we involve?
- What else should we consider?
- Where else should we investigate?
- Your experiences of volunteering, 'helping out'?

It was suggested that we learn from our partners and from what other organisations, for example Beamish do in terms of recruitment of volunteers.

It was noted that a lot of people may not be on a digital/social media platform – this is something to think about when developing a system.

It was suggested that both a bottom up and a top down approach is something which may be needed.

It was suggested, that perhaps what is needed is to speak to people who aren't currently volunteering. It was noted that this might be difficult.

It was suggested that removing barriers is a big thing to encourage volunteers as people are put off by the legislation involved, for example, DBS checks, grant applications, health and safety regulations. It was also suggested that barriers for

some people who are not using social media.

It was suggested that the project team speak to those involved in the Our Gateshead website. It was noted that a meeting is already in place.

It was suggested that volunteering could also be used as a means of people gaining competencies and skills which may lead them into paid employment.

It was also noted that there is an issue where some groups have been set up for a particular reason and start to flounder due to lack of funding but also because they may not be needed for the same project as they were set up for but they could be re-constituted to help in some other area or on some other project.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted in taking the project forward.

**CR26 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

The work programme was submitted to Committee to note or if Committee had any additional items they would like to have brought to a future meeting.

RESOLVED - That the work programme be noted.

**Chair.....**