

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

7 September 2015

Present: Councillor S Graham (Chair)
Councillors J Allan, A Austin, B Burdis, S Day, P Earley,
M Hall, D McGarr, A McMullen, J O'Shea and M Rankin

School Governor Representatives
Mrs J Little

Church Representatives
Rev Vine
Mr G O'Hanlon

Others in attendance
Elected Mayor – Norma Redfearn

OV17/09/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Janet Hunter, C Johnson, P McIntyre and Mrs M Ord - School Governor Representatives

OV18/09/15 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

OV19/09/15 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

OV20/09/15 Minutes

Resolved that the minute of the meeting held on 6 July 2015 be confirmed.

OV21/09/15 Mayors Annual Report

The Elected Mayor, Norma Redfearn, attended the meeting to present her annual report that informed the Committee of the progress of the Council and her priorities for the year ahead.

The Elected Mayor stated her commitment had always been to ensure that North Tyneside was a Listening Council and that residents and communities were put first, whilst delivering value for money services that meet local needs.

Through the 'Our North Tyneside Plan' significant progress had been made in delivering a number of projects that had made a real difference to residents.

Listening

It was planned that in the current year to hold 7 'Listens Events' throughout the borough that would involve the Cabinet, Ward Councillors and the Elected Mayor. This would be in

addition to a range of other engagement activities organised to hear from residents first hand about the things that are important to them.

The feedback from the engagement activity had been very positive and provided an opportunity to discuss issues of real importance with residents that included anti-social behaviour, flood prevention, transport improvements and the regeneration plans for the borough.

Joint Plan – Creating a Brighter Future/Council Plan

The aim for the year ahead was to continue to listen and focus on enabling all residents to have a successful, healthy and safe future, no matter where they live in North Tyneside.

The aim was to tackle the differences across the borough in relation to people's health, skills, qualifications and employment.

To enable to deliver this, the Our North Tyneside Plan would be refreshed to build on the work already started through the Creating a Brighter Future Programme. The intention was this would help the delivery of priorities by targeting resources.

The aim of the Creating a Brighter Future Programme was to ensure that children, young people and residents of all ages were:

- ready for school;
- ready for work and life;
- cared for, safeguarded and healthy; and
- North Tyneside is was a great place to live, work and visit.

Ready for School

The first priority, Ready for School, would ensure that by the time a child was aged 4 they should be on a school roll and when they enter reception class they must be ready to learn.

Children with additional needs or disabilities would be supported to reach their best possible outcomes through a person centred approach.

The Mayor stated that students across our borough had achieved the best ever A-Level results for North Tyneside in 2015 and that over 80% of schools were graded outstanding or good by Ofsted.

The Council had completed an extensive consultation on the future of its schools, which began in September 2014, it sought views from more than 93,000 households, as well as from schools and employers.

Feedback revealed that the majority of those who shared their views were in favour of plans to remodel the borough's education system.

The Schools Review had allowed £30m of additional investment that would be spent on a school rebuilding plan, with plans for John Spence High School, Marden High School, Whitehouse Primary School and Longbenton Community College, Backworth Primary and Cullercoats Primary.

It was stated that Longbenton Community College would open to pupils in Autumn 2016 with the other schools following during 2016/17.

A new "single front door" for a referral assessment and planning for children, young people and families in the borough who have any additional needs had been established.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme does well in North Tyneside, with almost all of the borough's High School and Special schools being involved as well as a number of voluntary and community groups.

The Junior Civic Award, aimed at children aged 6 had also been a success with children from St Bernadette's Primary School, Family Partners and the Children's Council all completing their Awards.

Ready for Working Life

An apprenticeship is one option available to young people after they leave school, providing real on the job training with the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised qualification.

The Get Up and Go Apprenticeship Event attracted 270 young people in March 2015 and it was reported 98% of those who attending the event found it very helpful as a way of finding out about apprenticeship opportunities.

Cared for, Safeguarded and Healthy

There are integrated front door and gateway services for both Adult and Children's Services and closer alignment with public health for its delivery.

There would also be support for those people adversely affected by the welfare reform changes, identify the most vulnerable and protecting them from becoming victims of crime and working between health and social care services to aid recovery and provide ongoing support to reduce the need for acute services.

The Council would work with providers to increase the range of social care services that offer real choice, fairly priced and affordable for those who wish to use a personal budget. A new model of service delivery for independent supported living had also been implemented to ensure quality of care for those with a learning disability.

There were plans to create a dementia friendly borough by aiming that all front line staff were dementia friends.

Support would be provided to residents to live healthier and longer by continuing with the development of sports, cultural and customer facilities to promote better health, well being and to reduce social exclusion.

The delivery of a programme of road safety education and support for active travel would continue.

A campaign had been launched to clamp down on inconsiderate parking around schools, that would enable young people to walk and cycle in safety.

The Council plans to step up enforcement with its camera car, fitted with Automatic Number Plate recognition technology, to detect offences outside schools and publishing the numbers of penalties issued adjacent to schools.

Great place to Live

Consultation on the Local Plan Consultation Draft 2015 closed on the 27th March 2015. The plan allows the planning to protect the unique character and attractiveness of the borough as well as provide the land that is required to provide the jobs and homes to meet residents needs.

The publication of the Local Plan and formal pre-submission engagement will take place by November 2015 allowing for a submission to the Secretary of State in May 2016.

During September-October 2016 there would be an Examination in Public allowing for the overall adoption of the agreed plan by March 2017.

In demonstration of the future needs of the borough, the Mayor stated she was able to report that the North Tyneside Living project, was on site at 13 of the schemes and work was continuing to progress with 101 new homes with the refurbishment of a further 218 homes due to be delivered in year.

The Mayor provided the details of a number of schemes currently in progress with expected dates of completion.

The Council remained committed to the ambitious target agreed by Cabinet in October 2013 to see the delivery of 3,000 new affordable homes by 2024.

In 2015/16 it was anticipated the delivery of 281 new affordable homes on a combination of developments undertaken by the Housing Revenue Account, volume builders and Registered Providers. This would include 104 new council homes in addition to the new homes being delivered under the North Tyneside Living project.

Work was also progressing to deliver new affordable homes through the Council's Trading Company with the establishment of a subsidiary company.

A successful biodiversity project could be seen through the colourful wildflower displays across North Tyneside and the response from the public had been positive.

The Mayor reported that a further £8million had been secured for the regeneration of the former Swans site in Wallsend, through the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and the government's Growth Deal.

The extra funding would be used to fill in a redundant wet berth and create more space for investors. Over £100million was being spent on redeveloping the 13-hectare site.

The Wallsend Parks scheme forms a key part of the Council's regeneration of Wallsend town centre with dedicated teams who transformed the Wallsend Parks and updating the visitor experience.

Northumberland Park reopened after a £2.2m National Lottery investment.

The Mayor stated a masterplan involving more than £36 million of new investment at the coast was in place for Whitley Bay Seafront Regeneration.

The Whitley Bay Seafront Master Plan sets out the Council's ambitious plans to reinvigorate the area between St Mary's Lighthouse and Cullercoats Bay. The proposals

were a mix of Council and private sector developments and involve more than £36 million of new investment at the coast.

The plans included a £1million visitor centre development at St Mary's Headland, proposals to improve the Watts Slope area of Whitley Bay, plans for the future of the Spanish City Dome, significant promenade improvements, attractive landscaping and more.

The Mayor stated that there was commitment to Whitley Bay and the Whitley Bay Seafront Master Plan had been displayed at Whitley Bay Customer First Centre for a number of weeks offering an excellent opportunity for people to offer their views about our plans and comment on the proposals for the seafront.

It was stated that there was a trial of a land train along a section of the coastline due to the generosity of 3 local businesses and following very good feedback from residents there would be plans to look at ways in which this could be a more permanent summer feature in the future.

A Great Place to Work

North Tyneside's major business parks Cobalt and Quorum had experienced increased growth, creating 1,800 new jobs and reinforcing the continued demand for out of town office space.

Cobalt Business Park was the largest office development in the UK with over 2 million sq ft of space. Six major occupiers, including G4S, Accenture and IBM, had also taken second buildings or additional floors.

- Cobalt was now 83% occupied, and increasing with almost 13,000 employees
- Quorum was 60% occupied and increasing with over 5,000 employees
- In total, 3,176 jobs had been created in North Tyneside over the last two years

In the last two years the Business Factory had assisted 834 businesses to start-up and provided comprehensive enterprise support to 1,846 residents. The Business Factory continues to provide free, comprehensive enterprise support for pre-start and new businesses based in North Tyneside.

Over the last two years the Business and Enterprise Team had brokered over £4m of grant funding for local businesses, with an example of Fuda Hobart Rose one local business that would be creating 100 new jobs over the next three years after being awarded £285,000 from the 'Let's Grow Fund' with the support of North Tyneside Council.

A Great Place to Visit

The Mouth of the Tyne Festival was a success while the Spanish City Plaza and Dome had lots of amazing things to do.

In relation to the Combined Authority/Devolution Deal and by working closely with the LEP. It was hoped that a Devolution Deal for the North East, North East International would allow the Council to lead on key decisions making that would not only boost the local economy but help improve the lives of people living, working and visiting the area. Helping to create jobs, build on innovation and identify the north east for its strong manufacturing ability.

Budget

Following the Governments Budget in the summer the Council it was estimated that between £53million and £56million extra savings were needed. The Council's longer term finances would also be affected by other government measures, such as rent reductions that would remove over £400million from the Housing Revenue Account over the next 30 years. The Mayor stated that the Council still plans to build more homes.

Since the Coalition Government's four-year Spending Review of 2010, and as a result of the one year Spending Review for 2015/16, the Council has had to make a significant level of efficiencies every year.

Welfare related changes would not only impact on the state benefit itself, but also impact on the Council Tax Support Scheme and other policies, including discretionary housing payments.

Many residents may lose entitlement to benefits and using 2014-2015 trends of claimants the Council supports, over 3,000 were expected to be impacted by changes in employment allowance, tax credits, housing benefit and universal credit.

The Mayor stated that Council was financially well managed and had a planned approach to enable it to 'Create a Brighter Future' for residents and the borough.

The Mayor stated the Council had already delivered significant changes to protect services, which included reduced management costs, greater partnership working to pool resources and achieve efficiencies and attracting external funding.

However, more really tough choices and difficult decisions would be needed in the forthcoming budget setting process.

The Mayor stated that that it has been another extremely productive and busy year, one which has seen many things moved forward. She was also confident that despite the many difficult decisions needed, the Council would continue to work hard on the issues that matter most to residents.

Agreed that the Mayors Annual Address be noted

OV22/09/15 Accommodation review

The Committee received an update presentation to the position of the Council's Accommodation Review.

It heard that the Agile Working and Office Accommodation Project was a commitment by Capita to deliver property savings for the Council. The initial phase 1 of the project implemented Agile Working in Quadrant East & West buildings known as the hub.

Phase 2 of the project started in July 2014 when the Strategic Property Group (SPG) chaired by the Elected Mayor extended the scope to 148 properties that concentrated on the remaining operational spoke buildings. Of these building 86 had been identified as assets that would be considered to be either retained/disposed or remodelled by the Council.

It was asked when looking to dispose of buildings, how the Council ensured the best price value was received. In response it was stated that the majority of buildings were disposed through a competitive tender process to ensure best value. However, there were occasions when local agents could be used.

Members highlighted the importance to keep Ward Members updated to the position of the changes of use/disposing of Council buildings in Wards.

Agreed that the Accommodation Review update be noted.

OV23/09/15 Whistle blowing/Gift and Hospitality Review

The Committee received a report that detailed the Council's arrangements in place to manage whistle blowing and guidance on how its employees should disclose gifts and hospitality.

The Committee heard that the Whistle Blowing procedure had been reviewed in August 2015 to reflect government guidance and ACAS Code of Practice.

The procedure was attached to the report and set out how important it was that employees report any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing and concerns, about the behaviour of others or Council practice if it was in the public interest.

The procedure covered areas on how and the method to raise a concern, how an investigation would be undertaken, how the employee would be kept informed and the timeframe for a response once any investigation was complete.

It was indicated that no detriment would be suffered by an employee through raising a concern and that the procedure identified a number of external agencies that an employee could report issues if they believe they had.

A Member asked to what obligation an employee had to report wrongdoing. Carol Murphy – Human Resources stated that there were some occupations within the Council that were required to report wrongdoing, however, for the majority of employee's there was no obligation to do so. It was highlighted that the system in place was in place to encourage employees to report concerns.

It was questioned how staff were alerted to the procedure and what requirement was in place to ensure employees understood it. It was highlighted that the policy was communicated to all staff through various means such as briefings and staff publications.

It was suggested that mandatory policies and procedures could be linked to the employee Individual Performance Review (IPR), where their understanding could be accepted and discussed with Managers.

With regards to Gifts and Hospitality, the Committee was informed that advice and guidance on how to handle offers was set out in the Council's Code of Conduct for Employees.

It was a manager's responsibility to record offers made to their staff on Council's systems.

Appended to the report was information on gifts and hospitality offers made to staff in previous years, with the vast majority of them being for items with a value of less than £10.

Agreed that the update to the Council's arrangements on Whistle Blowing and Gifts and Hospitality be noted;