

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 15 April 2024

PRESENT: Councillor J Eagle (Chair)

Councillor(s): C Buckley, R Beadle, D Burnett, L Caffrey, T Graham, J Green, S Green, M Hall, J Turner, J Wallace and D Weatherley

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Duggan, I Patterson and J Simpson

CR30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4th March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

CR31 INFORMATION GOVERNANCE ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received a report on an overview of Information Governance arrangements within the Council and the work of the Information Governance team in the last 12 months.

In 2021 an internal audit of Information Governance was carried out and it recommended one high priority, five medium priorities and two best practice recommendations. Therefore, resources were realigned to create the Information Governance Team in April 2022.

In 2023, Natalie Baldwin was appointed as Data Protection Officer and Hannah Hales was appointed as the Deputy Data Protection Officer. The Information Governance team now consists of:

- The Council's Data Protection Officer
- The Deputy Data Protection Officer
- a Senior Business Support Officer
- an Information Rights Officer: and
- a Subject Access Request Officer.

The team also have support from the newly created role of Governance Support Officer, and in the process of recruiting an Information Governance and Complaints Assistant. The team is currently managed by the Governance Manager, Tim Briton.

Over the last 12 months an enormous amount of work has been undertaken in addition to daily operational work, this includes;

- Data Breach procedure reviewed, updated and published
- Data Protection Impact Assessment – template document and procedure

reviewed, updated and published, including introducing a new DPIA referencing system and new DPIA forms for specific circumstances such as Teams / Share point requests.

- Continuing the Information Asset Register / Record of Processing Activity project (see below)
- Continuance of the Corporate Data Protection Group (see below)
- Commencement of the Retentions project (see below)
- Completion of the Privacy Notice review project
- Trial of switching-off 'autocomplete' in Outlook.

The audit showed that the high priority recommendation was for 'The Information Asset Register / Record of Processing Activity'. The project is near complete with two services to complete their documentation. An escalation process has been developed and implemented by the team to ensure that the Service Director for those remaining services who have not completed their documentation are now involved.

A further recommendation was for 'Information Rights Work Group to be reconvened'. This has now been complete but has been renamed 'Corporate Data Protection Group' with the first meeting held on the 1st February 2023. Meetings have been taking place annually, however as of 1st February 2024 meetings will be held every six weeks and new terms of reference were agreed.

The final recommendation for 'reviewing the Council's retention period' has been the largest task to complete for the team. This work has led to various other record management related projects, such as the work completed on introducing 'autodelete' within Outlook and work carried out to determine which information is stored in the Council's GOSS and CEM systems. Due to the demand of the work it has delayed the overall project, but the team envisaged this to be complete by the end of September 2024.

Freedom of Information – Summary of Procedures has three stages.

Stage 1 – Provide Information within the statutory timescale.

- There is an electronic tracking system to log requests. This is a full audit trail of how the request has been handled and provides templates response letters, which fulfil the statutory requirements of the Act.

Stage 2 – The Council to conduct an internal review

- The requester writing to request an independent review of the matter within 40 working days.

Stage 3 – Right of Appeal

- The requester has the right to appeal if they are still dissatisfied.

Data since the last Freedom of Information Annual report shows:

- 393 requests so far with 372 dealt with in the statutory timeframe.
- 4 internal reviews – with all decisions being upheld.
- 0 complaints to the ICO

- 55 data breaches so far
- 6 data breaches reported to the ICO (3 no further action and 3 awaiting outcome).

It was noted to the Committee that whilst the numbers maybe alarming by increasing it is due to more awareness of what a data breach is and internal breaches.

As a result of advice from the Information Governance Team and the ICO, the Council trialed switching off 'autocomplete' in Outlook to determine whether this reduced the number of the email related data breaches. The Information Governance Team are currently reviewing the results of the trial.

It had been requested the percentage of Council Employees who have completed their Data Protection training by department for the next report.

It had also been requested if there was an option for officers to monitor the time taken up on vexatious complaints and if there was a idea on how to prevent. It was advised it would be difficult to completely stop vexatious complaints as sometimes we don't know the root cause, however, we can monitor officer time, but this could also change on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee discussed how CCTV is part of Data Protection, and it was requested a report is brought to the Committee to inform them of how we can comply with Data Protection Legislation.

RESOLVED:

- The Committee noted the annual report for information.
- The Committee are satisfied that the Freedom of Information and data breach procedures are operating satisfactorily.

CR32 CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Committee received a report on the progress of the review, management, and optimisation of Corporate Assets.

The Council have been working on bringing together the management of both capital budgets and revenue budgets for property running costs of the operational portfolio. This has led to a £970k savings being made and greater efficiencies within services. In addition the Council have taken the management of Tenanted Non-Residential Portfolio in house to review and maximise the income to the Council.

Operational Portfolio:

Civic Centre – There is a total of 2,250 desks and the aim was reduce desk space by 50% due to hybrid working. To date almost 500 spaces have been released, this includes the relocation of the staff from the Dryden Centre.

There is a lot of interest in public and private sectors leasing out working space within the Civic Centre.

For 23/24 the running costs are £1.2m, this is offset by external income of £580k. Additional income can be generated by leasing out the space to third parties, but this will be determined based on space required. It has been identified that each floor of a pavilion has the potential to generate £350k-300k. Negotiations are ongoing, however, an increased income of £350k has been targeted for 25/26.

Depos – The main depots are Park Road, Shearlegs Road, Cowen Road, Penshaw and Colgate. There are smaller ancillary depots primarily used for grounds maintenance vehicle storage, welfare facilities and salt storage.

There is a proposal to relocate non-operational staff from depots to the Civic Centre to consolidate transport, grounds and winter maintenance, highways, fleet and waste operations onto the Shearlegs Road, vehicle storage and management being contained on the Park Road. Scheme designs are being developed which will also enable the release of Penshaw Depot, Colegate depot and Follingsby site.

Improved efficiencies of frontline service delivery is the main driver for the project and the mitigation of the increasing risks to those services operating out of the existing sites. Whilst there is no target savings for this project until the business case is complete, we are aiming for £200-300k per annum savings based on the closure of Park Road and Penshaw running costs/rental.

Other Operational Assets

The Dryden Centre was vacated in December 2023. Cabinet will consider a surplus declaration and proposal on its future use. This will deliver a further £100k of savings in 2024/25 predicated on retaining the income across the estate.

At an operational level, colocation of services has commenced throughout the borough with a range of services now operating from the Family Hubs, Birtley Library, Leam Lane, Wrekenton Hub and Blaydon Library. These include the locality teams, housing, Police, Citizens Advice, Mental Health Social Prescribers and a range of VCS partners.

The Council are ensure letting arrangements are consistent and are maximising the rental income.

To date £1.2 m of external income (including HRA) is received in letting of operational space. There is significant interest from public and voluntary sector partners in occupying space within our outlying assets and a conservative target of an additional £50k in income has been targets to offset general fund costs in running our assets.

Gateshead outperforms other Councils with our Community Asset Transfers however there is a need to review the effectiveness of the existing CATs and whether they are delivering on outcomes originally agreed.

The Service will evolve the 'One Front Door' for use of council assets, additional resource (currently within the budget) will provide a more timely and co-ordinated response for internal/external enquiries for use of council assets.

Current Position – Non-Operational Portfolio

Tenanted Non-Residential Portfolio:

Currently there are 55 main sites that cover 1,937 individual assets. There is a gross income target of approx. -£3.8m. The net surplus target for 23/24 is -£1.2m.

The Council is reviewing all non-operational assets to review low yields/rate of return. The primary aim will be to reach the income target and setting an initial target of a prudent net £50k per annum increase in income.

Surplus Estate/Development:

The surplus estate is any site that is not used by the Council to provide services (operational) or is not being held as part of the TNRP to primarily generate an income.

The Council has the following buildings which have been declared surplus to requirements (together with the relevant service who responsible for their future use:

- Former Hallgarth Depot (Residential Growth)
- Former Brandling Hall Community Centre (Major Projects/JV)
- Former Whickham Front Street Primary (Residential Growth)
- Former Prince Consort Road Offices (Property & Assets)
- Dryden Centre (Property & Assets)
- Former Felling Park Depot (Residential Growth)
- Former Tynedale PIC (Residential Growth)
- Birtley Leisure Centre (Public Health)
- Gateshead Leisure Centre (Public Health)

The Council is currently reviewing how it manages surplus, regeneration, and development sites. A reassessment of these sites will determine further opportunities for disposal to raise capital receipts.

It was raised to the Committee that public sectors are utilising other buildings within the Gateshead Region and are we as a Council looking at this to potentially utilise other buildings to be more cost effective. It was advised that whilst yes, we are aware of other partnerships we find the Civic Centre is in a very good location with lots of interest from both public and private sector organisations. Concerns were raised if the Council were focussing on public sector, however, the Council have been in discussions with private sector, but the logistics of opening hours have proven difficult.

Community asset transfers had been noted on how they take an extremely long time and could possibly prevent anti-social behaviour. Whilst this had been acknowledged, new employees have been recruited and the team will be reorganised to be more effective and to utilise resources.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the information be noted.

CR33 WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25

The Committee were presented with a report for the 2024-25 work programme .

Elected Members and relevant officers were invited to submit suggestions for inclusion in the work programme between 20th February 2024 and 5th March 2024

In accordance with the Council’s Constitution, the Corporate Resources OSC perform the overview and scrutiny role in relation to the following functions:

- the management of the Council’s financial, human and physical resources
- support for the democratic process
- the involvement of the people and communities of Gateshead in the work of the Council
- capacity building in communities, volunteering and resilience
- social inclusion, equalities and diversity
- the Council’s arrangements for securing efficiency and value for money; and the
- development and operation of the Council’s procurement strategy

A list of suggestions received relevant to the remit of Corporate Resources OSC was listed in Appendix 1.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Committee commented and noted the 2024-25 work program.

CR34 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed the completion of the 23/24 work programme.

It was noted that the report on Capturing wider regeneration benefits of Gateshead Quays would present at the Corporate Advisory Group on the 13th June 2024.

The Chair would like to thank the Committee for all their hard work during the year.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Committee note the report

Chair.....

