

North East Regional Scrutiny Officers' Network

21 November 2019, County Hall, Durham

Present:

Tom Gorman	Chair - Durham County Council
Caroline Breheny	Middlesbrough Council
Joan Stevens	Hartlepool Borough Council
Angela Armstrong	Hartlepool Borough Council
Karen Christon	Newcastle City Council
Angela Frisby	Gateshead Council
Paul Baldasera	South Tyneside Council
Chris Angus	Northumberland County Council
Stephen Gwilym	Durham County Council
Clare Luery	Durham County Council

Apologies: Alison Pearson (Redcar & Cleveland Council), Liz Kerr (North of Tyne Combined Authority,) Judy Trainor (Stockton on Tees Council), Dave Brown (North Tyneside) and Shirley Wright (Darlington).

1. Notes of NEREO Regional Scrutiny Officers/Health Officer Network meeting 8 July 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 July 2019 were agreed subject to the correct spelling of Paul Baldasera's name.

Tom Gorman advised that four meetings for officers and four for members will be arranged for the coming year. Dates will be circulated in due course.

2. North East Regional Member/Officer meeting proposed agenda

Tom Gorman outlined the proposed agenda for the next member/officer regional meeting which had a housing theme and was provisionally booked for 6 March 2020. Representatives from Liverpool City Council are to be invited to share their experience of operating a Selective Licensing Scheme. Liverpool have had a scheme in place for 5 years covering the whole city and are now in the process of reapplying.

Karen Christon explained that Newcastle City Council had run a pilot scheme covering a limited number of properties which has been slightly extended. Tom Gorman added that Newcastle colleagues involved in SL will be invited to attend the regional member/officer meeting. Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and South Tyneside indicated SL was being developed on focused basis in their areas.

Paul Baldasera commented that South Tyneside had done some work around Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and private sector housing and would

be keen to share knowledge. South Tyneside Council had established Centaurea Homes Ltd to develop housing for sale and were also looking at buying properties for refurbishment which would then be available for rent.

Stephen Gwilym referred to RSL tenants contacting their local councillors with housing queries. This had become a source of frustration for some members as there appeared to be no procedure whereby they could represent tenants in discussions with RSLs. Joan Stevens indicated there were good links between Hartlepool's RSL provider and the local authority although the member process was unknown. Karen Christon commented that the relationship in Newcastle with the housing provider was close. Paul Baldasera added that no contact had taken place with private landlords and tenants during scrutiny work on HMOs. He suggested South Tyneside had a similar position with RSLs to that of Durham.

It was agreed that a regional update on what scrutiny is doing on housing be developed in advance of the March meeting to include:

- Private Landlords – selective licensing
- Homelessness
- Local authority engagement with RSLs
- Models of housing provision

It was suggested that members of the network forward the contact details of the relevant officer within their authority to enable an update to be prepared. (Emails to clare.luery@durham.gov.uk).

The agenda would also feature CfPS who would be invited to update on any national scrutiny developments.

Subjects for future meetings

Tom Gorman suggested Transformation as a topic for a future themed meeting. This could include new ways of delivering services, asset transfers to community interest groups or use of data and digitalisation.

Paul Baldasera advised that South Tyneside had undertaken lots of asset transfers after offering community organisations the opportunity to take on the running of buildings that the council could no longer maintain. This had largely been successful in South Tyneside although in Newcastle there had been complications particularly with the transfer of pools and some library facilities. Newcastle now shared 50 percent of the space within the civic centre with other organisations such as the NHS, the courts service and the insolvency service. Stephen Gwilym stated there were some legacy issues following local government reorganisation in Durham regarding how leisure services were delivered across County Durham, particularly leisure centre provision and management. Following Local Government Review and as part of the Council's service transformation programme, there were several examples where library provision had been amended to be co-located in local authority

buildings, i.e. Crook Library now sited in the Crook CIVIC Premises and Stanley Library located with the Louisa Centre.

In terms of digital transformation, it was recognised that most councils provide residents with an online account to access services and update information. Joan Stevenson advised that Hartlepool are in the early days of creating a data hub to help inform the JSNA and service delivery. Tom Gorman commented on the use of data in social care and data visualisation for business intelligence.

There was limited use of shared services to deliver services across the region. Hartlepool had a shared community safety team and Gateshead a joint commissioning post shared between health and the council.

3. Combined Authorities

The Combined Authorities in the region and their approach to engaging with constituent authority's scrutiny functions raised some issues. It was recognised that this was despite the new scrutiny guidance which referenced combined authorities specifically.

NECA had undergone a period of change with several different people responsible for circulating papers etc. This had led to a lack of clarity of who received what and when and officers had felt frustrated when they were given access to the public reports only and were unable to brief their members on the private items too. A policy and scrutiny officer had recently been appointed by NECA and it was hoped matters would start to improve.

Difficulties were also reported around the relationship with the Tees Valley Combined Authority as some officers from constituent authorities had been refused access to meetings. Caroline Breheny added that there had been a call-in from the joint committee. It was unclear how the matter was resolved as the committee considering the call-in was inquorate.

There had been difficulties with the quorum of NECA meetings for a long time and recent meetings which had been inquorate had been reported in the press. It was felt that rather than a tactical decision not to attend this was due to the quorum being set quite high and also issues around including/not including independent members. It was felt that Tees Valley CA also suffered from a lack of interest and engagement by members.

4. Any Other Business

Paul Baldasera suggested the wide range of work taking place around the climate emergency could be discussed at a future meeting. Councils were only responsible for a very small percentage of carbon emissions and therefore had to work collaboratively to influence other organisations.

Karen Christon suggested it might be worthwhile to look at the Newcastle Waste Commission and what the outcomes are two years after its publication.

5. Work programmes

Durham County Council

Safer Communities OSC - Road Safety review underway

Environment OSC – Allotments review almost complete, Street lighting review to follow

Joint Children & Young People and Safer Communities OSCs - Residential Children's Homes review completed

Children & Young People's OSC – Elective Home Education review underway

Economy OSC – Retail support review completed. No review underway currently

Health OSC – GP access review to be completed. Health consultations have been paused due to purdah. Another joint OSC is being established with Darlington following advice to the CCG from NHS England over communities to be consulted on changes to services at Bishop Auckland Hospital. It was noted that there had been several judicial reviews elsewhere in the country due to alleged flawed consultation processes.

Stephen Gwilym explained that there would be a further purdah prior to the PCVC elections in May.

Gateshead

Suicide – the review had received a powerful contribution from someone with lived experience of suicide.

Continuing health funding – issues referred by Health Watch

Local GP mergers

Sepsis case study

South Tyneside

HMO report completed

Developing South Shields as a Seaside Town

Skills provision

Poverty in South Tyneside – the review to bring in aspects of poverty around feelings of powerlessness and stress

Sunderland

Oral health – representatives of the UK Freedom for Fluoride Alliance had given evidence to the review via a 62 page report and attendance at a meeting.

Budget

City Plan

Children's services

Middlesbrough

Poverty – impact on children’s education

Adults – increasing participation of activity for over 50s

Community cohesion

Opioid dependency – the number of deaths has increased recently

CQC inspection of critical care was rated inadequate

Breast radiology

Northumberland

Climate action plan

LED street lighting project

Review of hospital changes

Northgate

Minimum pricing of alcohol

Hartlepool

Anti-social behaviour focus for the year – the impact, service improvements, community triggers, tackling ASB, identification of social groups such as asylum seekers and young people who experience ASB. Expert evidence and research on ASB had been provided by Nottingham Trent University.

Newcastle

Clean air zone and charging

BME access to health services – GPs, asylum seekers, mental health services

Accommodation for asylums seekers likely to be added in the new year

Culture vision and culture impact

Health – integration, changes, dementia services and an ongoing mental health theme.

Unknown diseases

6. Date and Time of Next Meeting

To be arranged