

20 February 2018

Councillor Martin Gannon  
Leader of Gateshead Council

Dear Councillor Gannon

**Re: Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives**

Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (Newcastle CVS) is the local support and development (infrastructure) organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Gateshead. As well as developing and supporting voluntary and community organisations to be more sustainable and resilient, we organise networks and events and represent the voluntary and community sector in strategic discussions. We carry out research and produce policy studies. We have over 750 member and associate organisations that are local voluntary and community organisations, CICs and social enterprises and operate in Newcastle and Gateshead.

As part of our contribution to this consultation, we promoted the information in our bulletin, e-inform, and organised a meeting for voluntary sector leaders in Gateshead. You kindly came along to that meeting and this letter is the response based on the conversations and our experience of working in Gateshead for nearly two years.

Voluntary and community organisations have noted some key changes in the last ten years and most would agree with the analysis of a changing context and environment. The three biggest issues reported by our members are poverty/austerity, the retraction of the public sector, and mental health issues. These are all inter-connected and there is increasing complexity of needs.

We would agree that the only way forward is developing a new approach. I have attended a number of Gateshead meetings and events in the last year, when there have been more and different conversations and the recognition of the need to do things differently. However I appreciate this transformation, which involves cultural change is never easy, and many people, regardless of what they say, are often frightened and resistant.

Clearly the Peer Challenge highlighted a number of positive areas, not least the relationships with other agencies. However, we are all under different financial and political pressures, and there can be a tendency to retreat internally and focus on your own organisation. There is a strong commitment to working in partnership and sense of place in Gateshead, but this needs to be capitalised. From the outside looking in, there are a number of initiatives happening, but they don't always seem joined up or connected.

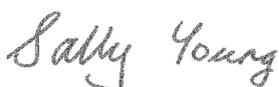
Even with the massive reduction in Government funding, Gateshead Council is still seen as the driving force in Gateshead. Organisations want both leadership and partnership. It suits none of us to have more divided and unequal communities. The recent Annual Report of the Director of Public Health clearly illustrates what this means for local people.

Following the discussion with you last month, these are the points I was asked to reflect back:

- Voluntary organisations working in Gateshead completely agreed with your vision of strong, resilient and supportive communities. It is in no-one's interests to have divided communities. By communities we mean both communities of place and interest.
- Reducing demand through early intervention is crucial, and this could involve a range of agencies; however they must work together not just pass people around the system. Housing is clearly a crucial component of this approach; but not everyone lives in a Gateshead Housing Company property and this needs to be recognised.
- How committed is the Council to 'holding its nerve', and investing in prevention and early intervention? It is hard with tight budgets, not to focus on immediate problems.
- How will the Council bridge the gap between developing and building up prevention services and delivering to the immediate needs. This might require double-funding.
- What is the appetite for risk in the Council? Some targets have not been hit for the last two years. How will the Council manage this major shift in behaviour?
- Is the community spirit really there across everyone? Life is very different for many people and there is retreat into individual households; there is not the understanding of a collective and community-focused approach from all residents. You spoke about the pulled bin issue and how some neighbours won't do it as they don't see helping others as their task. We need to create an environment for co-operation.
- The over-reliance on (good) public services, has, in some cases created over-dependence. There is an expectation that 'the Council will provide'.
- There was interest in place-based social action; people are more likely to help when they can see the direct improvement in their environment.
- The voluntary and community sector can lever in additional and external resources in some instances – Foundation Trusts, grant aid, Big Lottery, EU money etc. We have staff, volunteers, trustees, buildings and other capacity. However we are independent organisations who want to work in partnership throughout the lives of initiatives, and not brought in at the end.
- There needs to be a review of some internal processes, including procurement, which seem over-bureaucratic and in some instances unnecessary. We are meeting to discuss this and put forward some ideas to the Council, including more the proactive use of Social Value. We believe this will help create better outcomes. This is important and relevant as a significant amount of Council spend is on commissioning.

It is in all our interests to have a thriving Gateshead and the voluntary and community sector would want to actively engage from the start of this process as a partner.

Yours sincerely



**Sally Young**  
**Chief Executive**