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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday 8th February 2022

Present: Councillor Harpreet Uppal (Chair)
Councillor Gwen Lowe
Councillor Yusra Hussain
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Robert Iredale

Co-optees: Chris Friend

In attendance: Councillor Peter McBride, Cabinet Member for
Regeneration
Councillor Cathy Scott, Deputy Leader and Cabinet
member for Housing and Democracy
Edward Highfield, Service Director of Skills and
Regeneration, Growth and Regeneration
James Hopton, Intelligence and Insight Lead
Vina Randhawa, Active Citizens and Places Manager
Emily Parry-Harries, Head of Public Health

Apologies: Andrew Bird (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Andrew Bird, Co-optee.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Panel considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 6 January 2022. It was highlighted that a recommendation in relation to improving engagement and consultation with the public had not been recorded under Item 7. It was also emphasised that the Cabinet Member had agreed with Panel members concerns about the approach to consultation and the low response rates and it was requested that this also be recorded in the Minutes.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that the recording of the meeting held on 6 January 2022 would be checked and following any amendments made, the Minutes of the meeting held on the 6 January 2022 would be put before the Panel for approval in the next meeting of the Panel.

3 Interests

Councillor Lowe declared an interest in relation to Item 8, as the Place Partnership Lead for Batley, Birstall and Birkenshaw.

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4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in the public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputation or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public.

7 Kirklees Inclusive Economy Strategy Refresh

The Panel considered a report giving an update on the Kirklees Inclusive Economy Strategy Refresh presented by Edward Highfield, Service Director of Skills and Regeneration, Growth and Regeneration. James Hopton, Intelligence and Insight Lead and Councillor Peter McBride, Cabinet Member for Regeneration were also in attendance.

Edward Highfield gave a presentation which highlighted the key points in respect of:

- Kirklees's economic outlook and the national context, including the impact of the pandemic, increased cost of living, major inflation, inequalities, and Brexit.
- The reasons for the refresh: the 2019-2025 Strategy was within in time, but it was highlighted that the world had changed significantly since its introduction, and it was important for Kirklees to have a strategy that responded to the new local and national context with a strong locally owned set of priorities. The review of the local plan, was also likely to commence in 2022 and would be informed by Kirklees's economic ambitions
- The new opportunities for Kirklees, including devolution to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and in clean economic growth in line with the climate change agenda.
- Articulating clear links between the economy, communities and health and embedding this into the strategy.
- Strengthening the links between inclusion and growth: The Strategy would be renamed as the 'inclusive economic strategy' to emphasise focus on inclusive growth.
- The scope of the refresh: The strategy would set out the ambition for macro-economic growth, incorporating elements from the Local Economic Recovery Plan.
- The plans to leverage partnership arrangements with the Council's key anchor organisations.
- The output: the strategy would focus on a 10-year term but would also include a framework for action over a short term.
- Acknowledgment that the strategy would have multiple audiences that would require tailored outputs.
- The approach/timeline for the development of the strategy, including public and partner engagement, drafting and the formal governance processes with the aim of Cabinet/ Council endorsement in September 2022.

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Cllr Peter McBride added that a refresh of Kirklees's economic strategy in response to the national context (i.e.- the Covid-19 pandemic, major inflation, and Brexit) alongside large-scale investments in Kirklees's town centres, was timely and essential to the evolution of the local economy and communities in Kirklees. He also highlighted that there were new opportunities in the Huddersfield University, and in the health industry both of which played a key role in supporting business, the local economy, and communities.

The Panel acknowledged that there were some challenges because of Brexit but highlighted the importance of identifying and utilising positive opportunities to enhance Kirklees's economy. Concerns were also raised about engagement with private sector partners highlighting that often-private business owners did not have the time to attend meetings for example. It was suggested that work be undertaken to rethink the way engagement with private sector partners was held to ensure fair representation of local growing businesses.

Responding to the Panel's comments on trade, Edward Highfield agreed that it was important to identify and build on the positives within the current economical context and that trade and export would feature predominantly in the final strategy. This could include utilising direct links to the subcontinent and encouraging more people to export. He did add however, that the numbers of businesses in Kirklees that had stopped exporting was a challenge. Edward also agreed that labour shortages, although currently problematic, may be able to provide people with more opportunities to find secure, high paid employment. Meetings with businesses had however highlighted consistent challenges in recruitment. In response to this, supporting people into employment through investment in skills and training would be a key element of the refreshed strategy.

In respect of consultation, the Panel highlighted the need to take a proactive approach to engagement offering several avenues for key stakeholders, including the public, to make their priorities known, and to encourage adequate response rates. Edward Highfield agreed and added that it important not to rely on Council meetings and the usual networks for engagement to ensure a good response rate from a variety of different stakeholders.

Responding to a question about guidance from consultants, Edward Highfield clarified that consultants would not be commissioned to write the strategy. On some elements of the strategy, academics had offered free support on the evidence base, and there was the option to commission some work around specific technical areas but only if required.

In response to a question about the timeline for the progression of the Strategy, Edward Highfield explained that the purpose of the update was to provide the Panel with opportunity for early input and confirmed that a further update to scrutiny would be provided in 2022 prior to presentation of the draft refresh strategy to Cabinet.

The Panel asked about how the strategy aimed to improve the interface between educational providers and local businesses, to enable people to gain the skills that local businesses required. Edward Highfield clarified that a key part of the strategy would focus on bringing educational providers and businesses together, rather than

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them being separate entities, to create a more formal, joined up interface. He added that the approach needed to be employer led, and it was important to help businesses to articulate what they needed to ensure that the skills and education system responded. Investment in the labour market, skills and training also needed to be delivered in a way that was accessible to all to be inclusive, and it was equally as important to remove those barriers which prevented people accessing the labour market.

Cllr Peter McBride highlighted that inflation was one of the biggest barriers in enabling the poorest communities to recover from the pandemic, and it was important to address this. The Panel responded to add that there were key opportunities in apprenticeships and added that educational providers needed to be encouraged to realign their offerings to meet the needs of businesses in the growth industries in Kirklees.

The Panel raised the importance of making members of the public aware of the refresh of the economic strategy, highlighting that this may help people to feel more comfortable in their knowledge that the Council was doing something to address the economic challenges. It was suggested that the delivery of the webpage be accelerated to promote the refresh to the public, making the point that not all engagement needs to seek input, but can be equally as effective in enabling stakeholders to gain an understanding on the work that the Council is doing. In response, Edward Highfield reassured the Panel that he had taken on board their comments and suggestions about engagement, understanding the need to implement this earlier in the process to raise public awareness of the refresh.

Responding to a question from the Panel on levelling up, Edward Highfield highlighted that it was important to establish what Kirklees's priorities were so that when calls for proposals came Kirklees were driven by local needs. He explained that there were some key priorities set out in the levelling up white paper aimed at addressing inequalities in areas such as health and education etc... Kirklees would need to demonstrate how the economic strategy was delivering against those priorities to enable access to funding.

The Panel welcomed the focus on inclusivity and reducing inequalities in the refresh of the strategy. Further points were also made by the Panel in relation to the consideration of the West Yorkshire Fair Work Charter and how the Council will demonstrate dedication to being a fair employer when developing the refresh, and in relation to the review of the Local Plan adding that it was important to consider about how scrutiny will be involved.

Edward Highfield thanked Panel members for their comments and expressed confidence that several of the issues raised by the Panel around, apprenticeships, skills, trade, public consultation, and engagement with the private sector would be reflected on and addressed when the draft strategy returned to scrutiny later in 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the update, and it was agreed that:

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1. It was important to identify and respond to the key opportunities and challenges of the current economical context when refreshing the strategy.
2. Opportunities in international trade, particular in direct links to southeast Asia in local communities, should be focused on in the refreshed strategy.
3. It was important to ensure effective engagement with different types of businesses, and to ensure a good balance between engagement with public and private sector partners.
4. Work should be undertaken to improve the interface between educational providers and local businesses.
5. Educational providers should be encouraged to align their offers to provide opportunities to enable people to gain the skills that local businesses required.
6. Effective communications and engagement with residents were essential and should be used to raise awareness of the refresh and to understand local priorities. This should start early in the process and continue throughout.
7. Opportunity to engage with all Councillors should be provided to ensure members have chance to contribute.

8 Place Partnerships Active Travel Progress Report

The Panel considered the Place Partnerships Active Travel Progress Report presented by Vina Randhawa, Active Citizens and Places Manager and Emily Parry-Harries, Head of Public Health. Councillor Cathy Scott, Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Housing and Democracy was also in attendance and introduced the item, highlighting that the Place Partnership approach to working in places was crucial and timely following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vina Randhawa presented an overview of the report and explained that:

- 7 Place Partnerships were established at Annual Council in May 2019, as a part of the Councils approach to Place Based Working.
- The approach involved a number of wards working together (3 or 4 wards per Place Partnership) to respond to strategic issues on a geography greater than a ward.
- A Place Partnership Lead Councillor had been identified for each geography.
- The Place Partnership Leads, working with Councillors and officers, used data, intelligence, and insight to propose interventions that will lead to better outcomes for communities.
- The 7 Place Partnership Leads also met regularly as a group along with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to share progress, discuss common themes and problem solve.
- After identifying their priorities for investment under a pre-established theme, the Place Partnership leads would refer their recommendations to the Cabinet.
- The Leads previously worked on improving mental health and domestic abuse outcomes, and for 2021/22 the theme was Active Travel.
- For the Active Travel theme, officers from a range of different services, such as Public Health, Major Projects and Street Scene had worked together to develop Active Travel Intelligence packs for each Place Partnership Lead.

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- The information packs included health indicators, examples of best practice, summaries of planned schemes, place standard information, school travel data etc.
- The packs were circulated to the Place Partnership Leads who were briefed on the content and key indicators in their profile.
- This was followed by a meeting for all ward Councillors, via their Place Partnerships, to consider the profiles and to start to identify priorities and plan for engagement with the community and external stakeholders.
- Officers had also started to scope options around these priorities which were due to be discussed at the next Place Partnership meeting in February where the next steps would be discussed and agreed by Members.
- Evaluation was planned and built into all proposals recommended to Cabinet.
- Where issues were beyond the scope of the Place Partnerships the Leads were keen to ensure that they were elevated and reported to Council.
- A communication plan was being developed to help raise awareness and promote the work of Place Partnerships.

In the discussion to follow, the Panel raised concerns about the timings of ward councillor engagement meetings, highlighting that meetings should be arranged with consideration of other commitments members may have and ensuring that they do not miss their opportunity for engagement. Cllr Cathy Scott agreed to raise the issue with the Place Partnership Leads, highlighting that all members should be given opportunity to have their say.

In response to a question from the Panel about consultation and communication with the public, Vina Randhawa reassured the Panel that engagement was a key part of the process. It was also explained that during the next meeting of the Place Partnerships Leads, members would collectively agree the themes to explore further, and at this point public engagement exercise would be planned and supported by officers. Different ideas for ways to engage and communicate with the public had already been suggested such as drop ins and walks.

The Panel highlighted that in order to improve active travel in Kirklees, it was important to connect active travel routes across wards to create a coherent network which allowed people to move around the district without using roads. In response, Vina Randhawa agreed that this was a common challenge and advised that the Place Partnership Leads were keen where possible to elevate strategic priorities to the Council. Emily Parry-Harries, Head of Public Health added that it was important to identify the appropriate level to hold such conversations in order to achieve the best outcomes.

Further questions were asked by the Panel around the development and monitoring of active travel plans for schools highlighting that this was a common theme. In relation to , PROW improvements, the Panel highlighted that it was important not to mistake routine maintenance, such as clearing overgrown bushes, for improvement. It was important to put in place the same amount of priority and care into the maintenance and improvement of PROW as the roads.

The Panel also raised concerned about plans to enhance Canal towpath for the purposes of Active Travel, explaining that these were built for narrow boaters not for

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active travel and as they were not wide enough, would result in a conflict between users. The Panel further advised that it was important to make sure a proper legal agreement was established in relation to enhancing the canal towpaths that sets out clear outcomes and expectations. Concerns were also raised about a wooden barrier on a greenway in Batley, as the same style of wooden barrier had been condemned in Bradley Greenway in 2007.

The Panel further raised the importance of encouraging safe walking and cycling behaviours, suggesting high-vis jackets, flashing tags on school bags and 20mph zones around all schools were suggested as possible measures. The importance of education about active travel and safe active travel in schools was also highlighted.

Vina Randhawa responded to agree with the importance of encouraging safe active travel and advised that behaviour change and safety in relation to Active Travel was being explored as a part of the overall programme. Information surrounding behaviour change and best practice examples were included in the intelligence pack provided to the Place Partnership Leads, and Vina further invited Panel members to share any other examples of safe active travel measures that they may be aware of.

The Panel raised concerns that there were some challenges in grouping some ward areas together as some geographies differed considerably in size and would require different solutions and the some grouping of wards didn't reflect the resident's sense of place. It was however acknowledged that such challenges may arise wherever a boundary is drawn. Emily Parry Harries responded to agree with the challenges of grouping the wards and highlighted the importance of having conversations at a local level to make sure communities feel that they and their priorities are being recognised.

The Panel also expressed their gratitude to Active Citizens and Places Officers supporting the work of the Place Partnerships. Emily Parry Harries welcomed Panel Members positive comments and agreed to give this feedback to the officers involved.

RESOLVED:

That the panel noted the update and thanked officers and Cabinet Members involved in the process. It was also agreed that:

1. It was important that engagement with members took place and Councillor Cathy Scott would raise the issue of making sure that all members have opportunity to attend engagement meetings with the Place Partnership Leads.
2. Members should also be proactive in responding to engagements and that written communication should be sent to all councillors to raise awareness.
3. It was important for a consistent approach to be taken across the district, by learning from good practice and sharing this across all the Place Partnerships.
4. Engagement and consultation with the public was important to understand priorities.

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5. Encouraging safe active travel was important through behaviour change, by providing protective equipment/clothing and education in schools.
6. In respect of any geographical challenges, it was important to make sure that wards individual priorities were being listened through place-based conversations.
7. There were larger strategic issues identified (such as creating a connected active travel network across Kirklees and maintaining funding for projects longer term) and it was important that these issues be elevated to the appropriate level to achieve the best outcomes.
8. Clear agreements were required, which set out expected outcomes, when working with partners and providing funding.

9 Work Programme 2021-22

The Panel considered the work programme for 2021/22 municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year be noted.