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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26th July 2022

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Marchington
Councillor Jackie Ramsay
Councillor John Taylor

13 Membership of Committee

Apologies were received from Councillor Yusra Hussain.

14 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chair provided updates as follows:

(i) The Inclusive Communities Framework had been adopted at the meeting of Council on 13th July 2022 (Minute 9, 2022/23).

(ii) The Corporate Safeguarding Policy had been approved and adopted by Council at the meeting held on 13th July 2022 (Minute 58, 2021/22).

(iii) The Net Zero Assessment for Kirklees was now available on the Council's website and the Economy and Neighbourhoods Panel would scrutinise the Climate Change Action Plan prior to submission to Cabinet (Minute 29, 2021/22)

15 Interests

No interests were declared.

16 Admission of the Public

All items were heard in public session.

17 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

18 Public Question Time

No questions were asked.

19 Leader of the Council Priorities 2022-23

Councillor Shabir Pandor, the Leader of the Council, was welcomed the meeting to set out his portfolio priorities for 2022-23. He was accompanied by Jacqui Gedman, the Chief Executive.

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Councillor Pandor explained that the Council Plan was now in place and the focus was on delivery of its priorities. He gave a presentation covering the following headings:

Investment: there was a need to invest and strengthen the local economy.

Projects to develop the public realm were moving forward in Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, Cleckheaton, Batley and Holmfirth.

A number of significant transport infrastructure schemes for road, rail and active travel were being progressed, together with £10 million investment into the local road network.

Inclusion: the aim was to support local communities in respect of the cost of living and to tackle inequality, ensuring that everyone benefits from the successes of the Council.

This priority was an integral part of the work of the Council and examples included; the development of employment skills and ensuring opportunities for local people were maximised; the provision of energy saving advice to residents; and development of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

There had been an increase in the number of complex cases and Community Plus continued to provide direct support to some of the district's most vulnerable residents, working alongside the voluntary and community sectors.

The journey towards achieving an outstanding rating in children's and adult services continued.

Work was being undertaken alongside the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure health equality and quality of life for residents as they got older.

Innovation: there was a need to adapt to change, providing services that were responsive to residents and addressed the big issues.

Work was being undertaken to address the climate emergency, for example the Council's fleet was being changed to electric vehicles; there was a tree planting programme, and an environmental strategy was being developed.

Building in social value was an important focus.

Councillors were at the heart of the organisation and the focus on place-based working would continue.

Examples of previous innovative projects were given, including the development of IT to facilitate hybrid meetings and agile working and the provision of led street lighting.

Challenges: in common with most local authorities across the country, these included inflation and its impact on the capital programme, the effect of increases in cost of living, the long-term impact of the pandemic, an increase in humanitarian work, recruitment difficulties, and increased demand and complexity of cases across a number of services.

The Local Government Association was seeking a long-term financial settlement for local authorities.

Questions and comments were invited from Committee Members, with the following issues being covered:

- At West Yorkshire level four bids had been made for levelling up funding. Work was ongoing in relation to employment skills, business, addressing the climate emergency, transport, large infrastructure schemes, a significant education programme; and the submission of a bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

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- The Portfolio Holder for Children was taking the lead in dealing with the increasing number of complex SEND cases and further information could be provided on the approach.
- It was considered that there was a need for a local strategic framework addressing travel and connectivity within the district, including consideration of active travel, to inform plans for future improvements. It was explained that funding in respect of major transport schemes had now shifted to West Yorkshire level. Kirklees had a pre-existing transport vision which tied-in with the Combined Authority strategy; which provided a holistic and strategic view. It had been recognised that there was a need for an improved local plan and a Kirklees Transport Strategy, looking towards 2030-35, was being developed.
- In respect of the £10 million programme of work for smaller town/village centres, and priorities further to the initial focus on Batley, Cleckheaton, Heckmondwike and Holmfirth, it was explained that place-based engagement was being progressed in other areas so that the aspirations of those communities could be integrated into an ongoing programme, with the aim of increasing allocated funding in future years.
- A number of local authorities had proposed opening public buildings as 'warm zones' during the winter and it was recognised that the Authority would need to do whatever it could in terms of measures to address challenges associated with the cost of living. Improvement of the housing stock, including retrofitting of properties to make them more energy efficient was one of the initiatives being taken forward. Response to the impact of the increased cost of living was now being considered as an issue across services, including how Council buildings or places within local areas might be used and/or supported to provide facilities, and this tied in with the place-based approach. The Cabinet also wished to understand the impact of the situation on staff and a series of staff engagement sessions were planned to consult on the operating model of the Council.
- It was noted that the Corporate Scrutiny Panel was looking into the use of community buildings within Kirklees; and that the increase in energy costs would also have an impact on those running and providing activities in community buildings.
- There were challenges associated with recruitment across the board, with particular issues in some technical areas and the risks associated with this were in view. This was a national issue and, to a large extent, was a result of the choices people were making about employment further to the pandemic. There was a programme of work underwritten by the People Strategy and each service had a plan in place to ensure that they had the capacity and capability to deliver. It was noted that the Corporate Scrutiny Panel had included the issue of recruitment and retention on its work programme.
- Examples were given of the initiatives undertaken to recruit, train and retain more social workers, including paths for progression and development and apprenticeship and mentoring programmes.
- In terms of the educational attainment of different demographic groups, it was explained that attainment and access to opportunities across all groups was one of the key priorities for the Children's Scrutiny Panel. It was requested that information be provided to the Committee Members in respect of the aims for educational attainment across the different demographics. It was noted that the Kirklees Futures Strategy Action Plan included a range of measures directed towards supporting educational attainment.

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- Key ambitions for the next five years included, delivery of the Cultural Heart Project and plans for Dewsbury Town Centre; progress in respect of delivery of the four 'levelling up' bids including the Penistone Line; significant progress on highway improvements through the capital programme; to achieve 'Council of the Year'; to realise an excellent rating for children's services and improvement in educational attainment. It was believed that there was a clear vision and plan, along with a budget that included investment, to move the organisation forward and achieve the ambitions.
- Maintaining dialogue with colleagues at both local and national level helped with environment scanning and identifying potential challenges in the medium and longer term.
- There were significant challenges in respect of the funding for adult social care and the Local Government Association was campaigning on this issue. There was also a funding gap for children's services.
- The SEND transformation plan was very detailed in terms of the steps necessary to transform the system. There had been improvements in terms of transition from children's to adult social care and the transformation plan included a focus on creating independence rather than dependence, with the aim of reducing future demand. The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel had a programme of work which aimed to develop a good understanding of the demand. The SEND transformation action plan would be subject to scrutiny by the Children's Scrutiny Panel and there may be the opportunity for some cross-cutting work to take place in respect of post-16 provision for children with special educational needs. It was important that a whole family approach was taken in providing support.
- The Council had responsibility and a duty of care for its own tenants but also provided support to those with concerns about private landlords. In terms of support to the wider population such as with financial management skills, or assistance into employment, individual cases were dealt with on their merit. £4 million had been set aside for welfare provision and would be directed to those in need regardless of housing tenure.
- The transfer of the housing function back to the Council had provided an opportunity to share the skills of KNH staff and to take account of the good work being undertaken. The approach had shifted towards a focus on the relationship with local residents rather than tenure.
- It was suggested that the Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel might look at the work being undertaken to support tenants.

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Loneliness and Social Isolation in Kirklees Post Pandemic

Carol Gilchrist, Head of Local Integrated Partnerships and Helen Gilchrist, Project Manager presented a report which proposed a scope for scrutiny of the issue of loneliness and isolation in Kirklees to help inform and shape the partnership approach to respond to this issue, in light of the potential impact on the health and wellbeing of local people.

It was explained that the evidence suggested that more people were lonely and isolated following the pandemic and the report set out a range of background information from both a national and local perspective.

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The aim was to address four key strategic goals:

- To make loneliness everyone's business.
- Ensuring collective assets are maximised.
- The adoption of a person-centred approach.
- Understanding people's real-life experiences.

The work would include the opportunity for Members to speak to community groups and individuals about the issue and their experiences.

Questions and comments were invited from Committee Members, with the following issues being covered:

- It was accepted that there were challenges in identifying people who were lonely or isolated and work had been undertaken both prior to and during the pandemic to try and address this issue. There were many groups across the district who could reach out to people as a result of information or referrals received from a number of sources, such as colleagues in health and care services. It was hoped that the scrutiny work might assist in identifying any gaps across the district.
- There was a mechanism in place for social prescribing so that GDPR and the sharing of personal information was not an issue with referrals. The referral of an individual to a community group would be done in-person as they would be accompanied to the first session. It may be, however, that this piece of work would uncover some such issues.
- There was a need to identify the barriers to people overcoming isolation and loneliness. It was hoped that the individuals who were now attending the groups would be able to give the Committee an understanding of their experience and how they were able to overcome the issues and that this would help to inform the future approach.
- There was also a need to understand how people who were not involved with health or other services might be made aware of what was available to them and how they could be assisted to have the confidence to engage.
- The Loneliness Steering Group included representation from the Befriending Partnership. A wide variety of befriending offers had developed during the pandemic but sustainability had been identified as an issue due to the short-term nature of funding. Telephone befriending had been found to work well and it was proposed that a blended approach be taken in the future.
- The Steering Group hoped to undertake further work to encourage joint working and collaboration between different organisations.
- In terms of the learning from users, a range of positive outcomes had been achieved, although some people expressed a preference for face to face interactions.
- In respect of the baseline level of loneliness at this point in time, it was hoped that this work may assist in achieving this understanding; it was a complex issue.
- The numbers of volunteers had reduced following the pandemic and consideration was being given to how this might be addressed.
- The issue of cost for people in accessing places was also a consideration.

Resolved –

That a further report be presented to the Committee at the September meeting, in respect of the role of the Loneliness Steering Group and the ongoing review of how the group will operate in the future.

- 21 Kirklees Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23**
The Lead Members introduced the work programme/agenda plans for the Children's, Corporate and Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panels highlighting their priorities and approach for 2022-23. The plan for the Economy and Neighbourhood Scrutiny Panel had also been submitted for consideration.

Resolved –

That the initial Work Programmes for 2022-23 be agreed.