

Contact Officer: Sheila Dykes

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Friday 20th September 2024

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)
Councillor Itrat Ali
Councillor Zarina Amin
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Jo Lawson

13 Membership of Committee

All Members of the Committee were in attendance.

14 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Chair noted that, further to its consideration at the last meeting, the draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2024-27 had been approved by Cabinet on 10th September 2024. The comments made by the Committee, and the amendments made in response, had been detailed in the report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED -

That the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 22nd May and 2nd August 2024 be approved as a correct record.

15 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

16 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

17 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

18 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

19 Leader of Council's, Corporate and Finance & Regeneration Portfolio Holders' Priorities

Councillor Carole Pattison, the Leader of Council and the Portfolio Holders for Finance, Councillor Graham Turner, and Corporate, Councillor Tyler Hawkins, were welcomed to the meeting to talk about their priorities for 2025/26.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 20 September 2024

Councillor Pattison explained that:

- The long-term vision, eight shared outcomes, and four partnership strategies remained the same. The vision was for a district that combined a strong, sustainable economy with a great quality of life leading to thriving communities, growing businesses, high prosperity and low inequality, where people enjoy better health throughout their lives.
- The priorities set out in the 2024/25 Council Plan would continue to be delivered:
 1. Address the financial position in a fair and balanced way.
 2. Strive to transform Council services to become more efficient, effective and modern.
 3. Continue to deliver a greener, healthier Kirklees and address the challenges of climate change.
 4. Continue to invest and regenerate our towns and villages to support our diverse places and communities to flourish.
- Recent positive outcomes included; the 'good' Ofsted grading which showed that children's services had improved; progress in respect of pushing forward growth across Kirklees, including the start of work on the 'Cultural Heart' and the Dewsbury Riverside developments; the ongoing TransPennine Rail Upgrade; and the establishment of cross-party working arrangements, for budget setting in the first instance.
- The new areas of focus across all portfolios for 2024/2025 were:
 - Getting the basics right; a modern organisation that meets residents' expectations.
 - Being a responsible organisation that protects the vulnerable and drives sustainability.
 - Working with partners to empower people to thrive, including through good local health services, education opportunities and housing.
 - Driving local economic growth, particularly through the cultural sector, and making the most of opportunities through the Council's relationship with the Government and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.
 - Working in a more collaborative and inclusive way.
- Specific priorities for 2025/2026 were in development and would be set out in the Council Plan, alongside the budget, in Spring 2025. Work would be undertaken to engage, across the Council and with scrutiny, in developing the detail and the Authority would work with all levels of government (nationally and regionally) to meet any challenges it faced.

Councillor Turner provided an overview of the key priorities across the Finance and Regeneration Portfolio:

- The delivery of a balanced budget for 2025/2026 and the development of a longer-term financial plan. It was noted that the financial position of the Council was still challenging but he was confident that a balanced budget, that met needs, would be achieved.
- One of the drivers for the economic plans was the Local Plan and the development of this had begun. This was a lengthy piece of work, involving significant consultation and there was currently an open invitation to submit sites for consideration.
- Continued rationalisation of the Council's assets, with auctions being scheduled for October and November.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 20 September 2024

- Continued delivery of planned investment into the district including the Levelling Up Fund schemes, the Station to Stadium Investment Zone, the University development, the Dewsbury Blueprint and development of The Arcade.
- Working alongside partners and continuing to lobby the Government to secure a fair funding scheme for the future.

Cllr Hawkins provided an overview of the key priorities across the Corporate Portfolio:

- Support for the most vulnerable in Kirklees; including the delivery of cost of living advice and support and assisting partner organisations to support residents in need.
- Modernising Council Services; by continuing to achieve savings whilst being more efficient and offering better value for money, with particular reference to access to services and post-16 home to school transport.
- Clear and Transparent Communication with Residents; including communicating positive outcomes and maintaining open and honest engagement in an inclusive way.
- Enhancing the Council's Traded Services; such as school catering and markets to future-proof these and ensure their continuation.
- Championing Kirklees Council staff; through working with staff and the trade unions to make Kirklees a good place to work.

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

- In relation to the main priorities and challenges, the following were identified:
 - Ensuring that the Cultural Heart and capital investment for the whole of Kirklees was secure and delivered.
 - Developing the budget for the next financial year, alongside looking at alternative provision and addressing rising demand in services such as support for homeless people, which was a national challenge. The aim was to provide an excellent service but reduce the cost and be as efficient as possible.
 - Managing changes to services such as access to customer services and home to school transport.
- In respect of how the Council measured if it was meeting residents' expectations this was done in numerous ways; all residents would soon be invited to take part in the latest CLiK (Currently Living in Kirklees) Survey, Council enquires were monitored and there were numerous consultations, all of which measured customer satisfaction and expectations. It was acknowledged that there was a need for a full and honest explanation about what was possible to help manage expectations and aid understanding.
- With regard to the new post-16 home to school transport policy and flexibility within the Council system to be able to accommodate children with special educational needs and whether each case was being considered on an individual basis, assurance was given that there was an appeal process in place if a family wanted to appeal against the decision and make their individual case to the Council. Members should encourage their residents to do so where appropriate. There was a significant financial challenge for the Council and this provision needed to be dealt with in a different way; there were a number of

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 20 September 2024

other local authorities dealing with the same issue. It was considered that further information in relation to the options explored in making the decision would be beneficial.

- If permission was given to raise the level of Council Tax or if the Government provided additional funds, it was questioned what the priorities would be for use of the funds. It was noted that significant savings were needed for next year, but if additional funding was forthcoming to the extent that would allow investment, there would be a desire to ensure that it achieved the best possible impact. Examples were provided of areas where the funds could be spent and make a significant difference to residents' lives, which included, housing, health and wellbeing, early intervention and prevention work, infrastructure, Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) provision, and youth services. An indication of how the hypothetical funding would be used was not possible at this point as the Council's budget was still in development.
- The employee networks and the support they provided to staff were invaluable and the support for these was welcomed.
- In relation to vulnerable residents facing difficulties in accessing the Council's online system and how this would be addressed; proposals were included within the digital inclusion business plan. It was considered that councillors also had a role to play, alongside officers, in supporting and signposting residents when required.
- In terms of managing expectations and getting the basics right, whilst it was considered that residents understood that things such as larger road improvement schemes were unlikely to be possible they did want their bins emptying, fly tipping addressed in a timely way and their local area to look tidy. In respect of health and wellbeing the current lack of a sports centre in Dewsbury was an issue.
- The commitment to work with the trade unions was welcomed. In relation to the Council's Redundancy Policy, it was advised that a meeting had taken place with Unison and this issue would be addressed.
- The cross-party working was welcomed and further detail on the implementation of this approach would be helpful. It was suggested that this collaborative approach could be extended; there were a number of councillors from different parties with expertise in particular fields and this could be utilised. In response, assurance was given that it was intended to extend the approach and it was also stressed that this included wider collaborative working with, for example, different cultural organisations, the voluntary sector and the University. The aim was also to work more with ward members prior to decisions being taken.
- In respect of capital investment, further detail would be welcomed in respect of how the impact of this, throughout Kirklees, would be evaluated and measured, along with further information on the consultation process for the schemes, and the future plans, for Dewsbury.

RESOLVED -

That the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holders for Finance and Regeneration and Corporate be thanked for attending the meeting to set out their priorities for 2024/25 and that the priorities be noted.

20 Council Plan and Performance Update - Quarter 1 Report 2024-2025

Mike Henry, Head of Data and Insight, provided an update in respect of the Council Plan and Performance Update Report for Quarter 1 2024-25 with reference to the report submitted to Cabinet on 13th August 2024:

- This was the first iteration of a new format for the Council Plan and Corporate Performance Report.
- The first section of the report provided details on Council activity and delivery against the four priorities within the Council Plan.
- The second section provided the latest data against the Council's key measures for 2024/2025 and showed a range of improvements and challenges, which were summarised in the form of charts indicating direction of travel.
- It was intended that future reports would include benchmarking data against the key measures, where available, which would assist in contextualizing the demand and performance trends and enable comparison of Kirklees with regional and national rates.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the Head of Data and Insight be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to the Council Plan and Corporate Performance for Quarter 1 2024/2025.

(2) That it be noted that the quarterly reports would be submitted to the Committee on a regular basis during 2024/25.

21 Corporate Financial Monitoring - Quarter 1 2024/2025 Report

A presentation was given by Kevin Mulvaney, Service Director, Finance in respect of the Corporate Financial Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 2024/2025, with reference to the report submitted to Cabinet on 13th August 2024. This highlighted:

- The areas of projected overspend in respect of the General Fund, with a breakdown across each directorate and the contingences and reserves.
- The key revenue pressures for each directorate.
- The ongoing work in terms of savings proposals, reviewing the Capital Plan, maximising grant income opportunities and retaining tight control on spending and recruitment.
- The Housing Revenue Account variances and key revenue pressures.
- Capital Monitoring for each directorate and a breakdown of changes to the Capital Budget.
- The headlines in respect of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

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

- In relation to capacity within the organisation to achieve savings and take opportunities to generate new income, it was advised that there were budgets that were used to support services through transformation and there was an assumption, within the Medium Term Financial Plan, that this reserve would be replenished to ensure that there was capacity to continue to deliver service change.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 20 September 2024

- In respect of staffing, there was a tight control on recruitment but posts that were essential for service delivery and income generation were released. It was noted that there were also challenges in recruiting in a number of areas of the organisation.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the Service Director, Finance be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to the Corporate Financial Monitoring for Quarter 1 2024/2025.

(2) That it be noted that financial monitoring reports would be submitted to the Committee on a regular basis throughout 2024/25.

22 Medium Term Financial Strategy

A presentation was given by Kevin Mulvaney, Service Director Finance, in respect of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), with reference to the report submitted to Cabinet on 10th September 2024. This covered:

- The principles of the MTFS.
- The funding assumptions used in developing the strategy.
- Analysis of the anticipated budget gap for 2025-26 and the measures to be taken to address the gap.

In response to a question, it was explained that the Chancellor would present the budget on 30th October 2024 and this would provide an indication, at sector-wide level, which could impact on the figures. A provisional settlement would be provided by the Government in December 2024 and the final settlement in February 2025. It was likely that the Government would also announce other grant funding separately during that timeframe, and this would be kept under review.

RESOLVED -

That the Service Director, Finance be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to Medium Term Financial Strategy.

23 Corporate Risk - Quarter 1 Report 2024-2025

A presentation was given by Alice Carruthers, Senior Finance Officer, in respect of the Quarter 1 2024-2025 Corporate Risk Report, with reference to the report submitted to Cabinet on 13th August 2024. She explained that:

- The report was presented in a new format which aimed to provide a summary of the key risks the organisation was facing whilst also providing sufficient content and detail to give assurance on the mitigations that were in place. This was intended to support a robust and rigorous approach to risk management across the Council.
- The five-by-five grid gave a visual indication of the current and previous quarter score for each risk on the Corporate Risk Register, along with a target score.
- The report also set out the controls that were in operation and the additional actions underway to address the risk.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the Senior Finance Officer be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to the Corporate Risk – Quarter 1 Report 2024-2025.
- (2) That it be noted that reports will be submitted to the Committee on a regular basis, throughout the year, and Lead Members will identify any issues that they consider might require further scrutiny by their respective Panel.

24 Libraries - Revised Delivery Model

A presentation was given by Mags Rogerson, Head of Local Integrated Partnerships, Communities and Asset Services to provide the Committee with information in respect of the revised libraries delivery model and upcoming consultation, with reference to the report submitted to Cabinet on 10th September 2024. This included:

- The work undertaken to develop the draft proposals, the informal consultation and the outcomes.
- The proposed future delivery model, which had been revised further to the feedback from the informal consultation.
- The draft Libraries Strategy and future delivery.
- The planned formal eight-week public consultation process in respect of the future delivery model, and next steps.
- The proposed timetable for ongoing engagement with scrutiny

Councillor Amanda Pinnock, the Cabinet Member for Education and Communities, was also present, she explained that the need for changes to delivery of the libraries service was a national issue, summarised the range of services provided and stressed the importance of the service in Kirklees. She expressed her thanks to the volunteers who helped to maintain the libraries.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the Head of Local Integrated Partnerships be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to the proposed future delivery model for the Libraries Service.
- (2) That the positive engagement with scrutiny on this issue be welcomed.

25 Government Policy / Legislation Horizon Scanning

Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Deputy Chief Executive, introduced the item explaining that Members of the Committee had been sent a briefing note to provide them with an overview of potential legislative and national policy changes, with a focus on those affecting local government and of particular relevance to the Committee's Work Programme.

In response to a question about the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, which would close on 24th September, she undertook to provide further information, in respect of this and the Council's response to the consultation, after the meeting.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the Deputy Chief Executive be thanked for attending the meeting and providing an update in relation to Government policy and legislation.

(2) That it be noted that Lead Members would use the information, which would be provided on an ongoing basis, to identify any areas that may be of interest to their Panels.

26 **Scrutiny of Social Connectivity in Kirklees - Final Report and Action Plan**

Sheila Dykes, Principal Governance Officer, introduced the Committee's 'Final Report - Scrutiny of Social Connectivity in Kirklees' and the accompanying action plan, which had been completed by the Cabinet Member for Education and Communities, in response to the Committee's recommendations.

Councillor Amanda Pinnock, the Cabinet Member for Education and Communities, was in attendance and welcomed the comprehensive report and its recommendations. She noted the risk factors that could impact on social connectivity and stressed the importance of community hubs, the need to ensure spaces were available for people to come together and that provision was in place, from the Council and its partners, to support residents. She accepted the recommendations and undertook to ensure that this work continued. She thanked all those involved in the compilation and production of the report.

Councillor Smaje, the former Chair of the Committee, was also present for the item. She explained that the aim of the Committee's recommendations was to assist in reducing loneliness and isolation in Kirklees and highlighted the following points:

- The benefits of re-framing the discussion from loneliness to social connectivity.
- Wider roll-out of the conversations guidance.
- Addressing this issue needed to be a continuing priority for the Council and its partners, in light of the impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of residents.
- The benefits, including financial, of early intervention and prevention.
- The role of Ward Councillors.
- The necessity of the provision of information about the available support at an early stage if an individual was dealing with a change in their circumstances, such as diagnosis of a health condition.
- The role of schools and colleges and the dissemination of information by trusted sources.
- The importance of befriending services.
- The need for awareness and understanding of the impacts, across the whole of the Council, and for it to be considered as part of decision-making.
- It would be beneficial if the Committee received progress reports in respect of the action on the recommendations, in due course.

She thanked all those who had contributed to this work and the Cabinet Member for her response.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 20 September 2024

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

- With reference to the role of Ward Councillors and ward budgets it was suggested that it would be useful to have some guidance and perhaps specific funding dedicated to this issue. It was acknowledged that Councillors had a wider community leadership role in bringing people together and developing community vibrancy.
- It was very important that younger people who may be at risk of or experiencing a lack of social connectivity were helped as early as possible as that would assist them in developing those skills for later life. It was suggested that children and young people should be involved in the production of guidance or sources of information such as a newsletter.

Councillor Pinnock agreed that early intervention and prevention were key in respect of addressing these issues and that wider awareness was a good starting point. Ward Councillors were well positioned to do this, as well as supporting local groups, signposting people to relevant support and identifying gaps in provision. It was acknowledged that the issue of specific funding for this issue should be considered and noted that there was also a need to work collaboratively with partners, such as the NHS and schools, to ensure duplication was avoided and people could access the best provision.

RESOLVED -

(1) That all those involved in compiling and contributing to the report be thanked and the positive response to the Committee recommendations, as set out in the action plan, be welcomed

(2) That it be recommended that further consideration be given to the issue of specific budget provision to enhance the social connectivity work already taking place and encourage collaborative working.

27 Work Programme

The latest version of the Committee's Work Programme for 2024-2025 was submitted and noted.