

Contact Officer: Carol Tague

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 12th December 2018

Present: Councillor Rob Walker (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Judith Hughes
Councillor Richard Murgatroyd
Councillor Harpreet Uppal

Co-optees Mark Mercer
Andrew Bird

Apologies: Councillor Martyn Bolt

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 October, 31 October and 7 November 2018 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising:-

- Councillors Armer and Hughes were due to attend a further meeting with Housing officers regarding the Open Age Policy and Local Letting Framework on 17 January 2019.
- A follow up question raised in relation to the minutes of the meeting on 31 October 2018, would be submitted in writing to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Democracy for response.
- Further to the meeting on 7 November 2018, a visit to Barnsley and Dewsbury markets had been arranged. It was intended that a separate visit to Dewsbury would be arranged to look at town centre development.

The Chair reported that he would liaise with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Member for Economy, to consider how best to take forward work in relation to the Town Centre Strategy.

2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be considered in public session.

4 Rough Sleeping Update: Winter 2018/19

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the Rough Sleeping situation including changes to the Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and application proposals for Rough Sleeping Strategy funding.

Councillor Cathy Scott, Cabinet Member for Housing and Democracy, Helen Geldart, Head of Housing Services and Stephen Cale, Operations Manager, Housing Solutions Service were in attendance.

In introducing the item, Councillor Scott referred to the work carried out by officers and the partnership working being undertaken to tackle homelessness.

Officers present referred to the report and highlighted:-

- improvements made to the SWEP provision for winter 2018/19;
- current rough sleeper numbers and intelligence; and
- funding applications for Rough Sleeping Strategy funding.

The key areas of the Panel's discussion and responses to questions are summarised below:-

- The Homelessness Reduction Act, introduced in April 2018, had placed new duties on authorities around the prevention and relief of homelessness, for a much wider group of people for certain priority groups of homeless individuals. Whilst the Council did not have to provide accommodation for the wider group, they did have to work with individuals through the development of a personal housing plan. As part of this, the local authority worked with individuals to examine the circumstances of their potential homelessness for a period of at least 56 days in order to support them into appropriate accommodation.
- There had been an increase in people seeking support who had lost their private sector rented tenancy through difficulties in paying rents. This was currently a main cause of homelessness in Kirklees. The Council worked with individuals, services and landlords to ensure that people had access to the benefits that they were entitled to, received appropriate advice and were supported to remain in the property where it was safe to do so.

In addition to this, an increasing number of younger people were experiencing difficulties in accessing private sector rented accommodation and work was ongoing with partners to provide practical assistance.

- Of the 13 individuals verified as sleeping out in November 2018, 12 were male and 1 female, 12 were over 25 years of age and all were UK nationals. It was noted that partnership discussions indicated that the number of women was increasing and this would be a focus of funding, given that they tended to be within the hidden homelessness.
- The Head of Housing Services would confirm whether the SWEET and SWANS projects were still active further to the meeting.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 12 December 2018

- Whilst Government guidelines in relation to temperatures had been adopted, there was flexibility in activating the SWEF and the Council was not rigid on the application of zero degrees or below.
- During SWEF a bed was always provided for those in need. It was clarified that an emergency bed was a camp bed within a communal room at the single homelessness hostel at Clare House. A breakfast was also being provided this year.

With regards to individuals who may have issues sharing accommodation, it was noted that the SWEF was an additional safety net and the Council and partners worked with individuals on an ongoing basis to find appropriate solutions.

It was suggested that the Panel may wish to visit the facilities at Clare House.

- The importance of raising public awareness of the work being undertaken was acknowledged and it was noted that a range of activities, such as providing updates to councillors and social media were being utilised.
- The role of partnership groups and the work undertaken by them in providing a joined up approach was noted and welcomed, as was the work of staff in engaging with individuals.
- It was clarified that the rough sleeping cold weather fund was based on last year's rough sleeper figures and up to £10k was available. Payment was received by claiming back expenditure on an ongoing basis.
- It was acknowledged that resources and capacity were issues across a number of sectors, but it was noted that everyone working in those areas were doing the best that they could to support individuals.

RESOLVED:-

1. The Panel thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Democracy, the Head of Housing Services and the Operations Manager, Housing Solutions Service for attending the meeting; and
2. Acknowledged the work being undertaken by the Council and partners to tackle homelessness.

5 Draft Greenspace Strategy

The Panel received a report which set out the proposed approach to the draft Greenspace Strategy,

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 12 December 2018

Councillor Naheed Mather, Cabinet Member for Communities and Environment, Rob Dalby, Greenspace Operational Manager and Tim Duke, Chair of Natural Kirklees, were in attendance.

In introducing the item, Councillor Mather referred to the work that had been undertaken with regards to the Greenspace Strategy and informed the Panel that the Strategy would sit over a significant number of appendices which were the detailed operational plans for delivery.

Rob Dalby, Greenspace Operational Manager, stated that the Greenspace Strategy was a principle driver for the Local Plan and linked with the Council's priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan.

It was intended that the Service would move towards a more locally focused knowledge based system in order to deliver the right outcomes for a given space. Supporting and empowering the workforce was a key part of this, as was listening to the views and feelings of people in the locality.

Mr Duke, Chair of Natural Kirklees, explained that the organisation acted as an umbrella organisation for friends of groups and greenspace management groups within Kirklees and worked closely with the Council as part of this role. It was noted that there were approximately 108 member groups and the wealth of knowledge and experience therein was highlighted.

The organisation's website www.naturalkirklees.org was a resource and source of information for volunteer groups, members of the public and visitors to the area

Councillor Mather welcomed the work of volunteers and Natural Kirklees and thanked those involved, as well as the staff within the Service, for their efforts.

The key areas of the Panel's discussion and responses to questions are summarised below:-

- Difficulties in engaging communities was acknowledged as was the fact that not everyone had the time or capacity to volunteer. It was recognised that whilst some areas would be able to do more for themselves, others would require more support. The intention was to ensure that there was an equality of landscape.

Where people did wish to volunteer, Volunteer Co-ordinators were in place to provide support.

- It was important to work with communities and do things with them rather than to them.
- The concept of a destination play area was a principle park where the entire space was viewed as the destination. It was intended to develop playable routes, particularly in deprived areas, to ensure that the journey to the destination was enjoyable and enriching.

One of the strands within the Playable Spaces Strategy due to be considered by

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 12 December 2018

Cabinet in February 2019, was the introduction of playmakers to ensure that people were aware of what was accessible and available to them.

- In developing the Playable Spaces Strategy, a large engagement exercise had been undertaken and the importance of natural play and a through age range of play facilities was identified.
- With regards to Section 106 agreements, it was important that work was undertaken with ward councillors and the wider local community at the planning stage and that where play spaces were linked to a site, these were delivered as promised.
- The Panel noted and welcomed the wide range of work and potential activities in relation to bio-diversity, species habitat management, carbon management practices and tree planting that were outlined.
- With regards to workforce development, the Panel were informed that an engagement process was currently being undertaken and a number of work threads such as education and peer to peer sharing were ongoing.

With regards to soft skills, it was noted that a group of volunteer co-ordinators managed the interface with volunteers and dealt with any issues as they arose. Detailed site based management plans also removed the potential for friction.

The current strengths of the workforce in working with volunteers was highlighted and this was echoed by Mr Kirk who stated that volunteers would give freely of their time whilst they enjoyed what they were doing. Natural Kirklees worked closely with the Council's Volunteer Co-ordinators, who in turn worked well with volunteers and had the skills required to keep people engaged.

Mr Kirk also referred to the transparency and lack of red tape between the Council and the groups on the ground.

- It was suggested that representatives from Natural Kirklees have the opportunity to meet informally with elected Members prior to a Council meeting in order to build relationships between local groups and ward members.
- It was important to work with partners and communities to ensure that people engaged with the environment and that greenspaces were welcoming, available and accessible to all.

In concluding the item, the Chair thanked Mr Kirk for his contribution to the discussion.

RESOLVED:-

The Panel noted the information presented and thanked the Cabinet Member for Communities and Environment, the Greenspace Operational Manager and the Chair of Natural Kirklees for attending the meeting.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 12 December 2018

6 Work Programme 2018/19

The work programme for 2018/19 was agreed.

7 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place at 1400 am on Thursday 17 January 2019, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Huddersfield.