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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 10th October 2019

Present: Councillor Harpreet Uppal (Chair)
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Richard Murgatroyd
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Yusra Hussain

Co-optees Andrew Bird
Chris Friend
Eilidh Ogden

In attendance: Councillor Naheed Mather – Cabinet Member, Greener Kirklees
Councillor Cathy Scott – Cabinet Member, Housing and Democracy
Councillor Rob Walker – Cabinet Member, Culture and Environment
Wendy Blakeley – Head of Public Protection
Rob Dalby – Greenspace Operational Manager
Helen Geldart – Head of Housing Services
Donna Harkins – Rough Sleeper Team Manager
Karen Oates – Commissioning Manager (Access to Housing)
Naz Parkar – Service Director for Housing
Moira Scarff – Parks Development Officer
Martin Wood – Operational Manager, Economy and Infrastructure

Observers: Heather Peacock
Richard Stow

Apologies: Councillor Richard Eastwood

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 19 September 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

2 Admission of the Public

That all items be considered in public session.

3 Deputations/Petitions

A deputation was received from Kirklees Climate Emergency – Trees, Moorland and Rewilding Sub Group, with Save Greenhead Trees which welcomed the production of a Council Trees Policy but stressed the importance of dates and targets for further tree planting. The Council was asked for a commitment to urban planting and protection of existing trees.

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The Panel agreed to bring forward the item in relation to the Trees and Woodland Policy on the agenda and the Cabinet Member for Culture and Environment provided a response.

4 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

5 Air Quality Action Plan

A report was submitted which provided an update in relation to the development of the Council's Five Year Air Quality Action Plan.

Wendy Blakeley, Head of Public Protection and Martin Wood, Operational Manager; Economy and Infrastructure presented the draft action plan to the Panel. They explained that the Council was required, by the Government, to submit an annual report on air quality and this had to comply with a prescribed format. The action plan was a living document and had resulted from a collaborative process engaging with many partners, including local Councillors, throughout. The plan, containing over 100 actions, would be taken forward through close working alongside Councillors and the public; it covered the whole district not just those areas identified as being of concern. There was a strong link with work on the climate emergency and the team were working very closely with colleagues in that area.

Martin gave an overview covering; the definition of air quality; the primary causes and sources of pollution; how it is measured/monitored; the Council's approach; current actions; and examples of the positive outcomes that could be achieved.

Martin and Wendy responded to questions and comments as follows:

- A mobile air quality monitor was to be acquired, which would collect data on a second by second basis. This would mean that evidence could be collated to illustrate the impact of issues, such as idling vehicles outside schools, at different times of the day. The potential solutions to this matter would differ from school to school and they would be considered on an individual basis.
- In relation to concern about the resources necessary to achieve all the ambitions within the plan, it was explained that there had been an increase in the number of officers dedicated to air quality but stressed that the implementation of many of the actions were not the responsibility of this team but cut across the whole authority and its partners. The air quality team would take a lead and aim to ensure that these issues remained high up the agenda.
- In terms of the planning system, it was believed that there had been a fundamental shift in the right direction and having the action plan/strategy would help ensure that decisions were made differently in the future.
- A comment by one of the co-opted members in relation to a prohibition on solid fuel stoves and the issue of fuel poverty was taken on board.
- The approach in terms of taxis and licensed vehicles combined the use of both regulation and persuasion; this was being considered in conjunction with the other West Yorkshire authorities.

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- Kirklees would not meet the Government's criteria for the introduction of a full charging clean air zone. Consideration could be given to the implementation of a voluntary clean air zone however there were a number of associated pros and cons.
- The action plan contained a commitment to increase the level of monitoring and to communicate more widely about the areas where air quality was good as well as where it was an issue.

Members raised issues in respect of:

- Integration with the Council's other strategies, such as the economic strategy and planning policy.
- The mechanisms that would be used to achieve the ambitions in the plan, such as better quality and cleaner buses.
- Enforcement in relation to idling vehicles.
- The use of natural measures to help air quality.
- The integration/expansion of the necessary infrastructure and bus services, including as part of new developments, to facilitate walking, safe cycling and use of public transport.
- Provision of electric bikes for Council use.

It was noted that the action plan contained a wide array of actions and that individual topic areas could be brought back to the Panel for scrutiny in more depth.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the significant work undertaken by officers in developing the action plan.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the Kirklees Five Year Air Quality Action Plan be welcomed and the significant amount of work undertaken by officers in developing this document be acknowledged.

(2) That it be noted that the actions and responsibilities within the action plan lie with the whole of the Council and its partners.

(3) That the following areas of interest be noted as those which the Panel may wish to give more detailed consideration in the future:

- Which measures have proven effective and which provide good value for money.
- Addressing the issue of vehicles with idling engines particularly outside schools.
- How the planning system can be used/will address issues in relation to infrastructure to encourage sustainable transport/active travel.
- Improving infrastructure to encourage travel by public transport/cycling and walking.
- Encouraging/ facilitating better options for travel to school to reduce use of private cars.

6 Trees and Woodland Policy

A report was submitted in relation to a proposed Council Owned Tree and Woodland Management Policy. The report also provided an update on the approach being taken to the White Rose Forest scheme.

In presenting the report, Rob Dalby, the Greenspace Operational Manager highlighted the following points:

- The policy contained 3 principle documents; the overarching policy statement, a guidance document and a risk management framework. The aims of which were the proactive enhancement and effective protection and management of the district's trees and woodland, including risk management and dealing with conflict and complaints.
- Robust engagement would take place in respect of any proposed removal of street trees; the primary reason for removal of which was public safety. If a tree had to be removed it would be replaced wherever possible.
- In terms of woodland management, a number of options were under consideration including; in-house delivery, social enterprise, commercial outsourcing and community transfer.
- Account would be taken of climate change adaptation and threats, such as the existing one to ash trees.
- Further to consideration at the Scrutiny Panel, there would be an internal review of the proposed policy and consultation with stakeholders and partners prior to submission to Cabinet.
- The aims of the White Rose Forest project and Kirklees' approach, working closely with third party landowners and in partnership with other organisations.
- In order to meet the canopy cover target the majority of the trees would need to be planted within the next 10 years.
- Two officers were to be appointed to focus entirely on delivery of White Rose Forest objectives.
- The Strategic Director was currently considering how Council owned land was used.

The Cabinet Members for Culture and Environment, Councillor Rob Walker, and Greener Kirklees, Councillor Naheed Mather, were in attendance and commented that:

- There would be instances where it was necessary to remove trees but there was a strong commitment to replace wherever possible.
- It was important that, if trees were removed to facilitate new development, serious consideration was given to replacement planting. Planning officers were involved with the White Rose Forest group and there was much greater awareness of the opportunities that could be taken to increase planting.
- Consideration was being given to the best use of Council land; this included recognition of the potential benefits of planting in terms of flood management and bio diversity.
- A lot of valuable work was being undertaken by community groups, parish councils and schools.

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- The Leader of Council had expressed a commitment to embed the climate change agenda across the Council. Funding was needed at a national level and a partnership approach would be necessary in order to achieve the Council's ambitions.

In response to points raised;

- Rob Dalby said that the scale of the challenge was recognised but this was considered to be an exciting opportunity to pursue social enterprise and work with a wide range of individuals/ organisations/charities and schools. He undertook to discuss, with planning colleagues, the role of that service both in protecting existing trees and encouraging new planting, and the potential for the creation of supplementary planning advice in relation to woodland and tree management.
- Councillor Walker undertook to look into the potential impact of the Cooper Bridge bypass scheme on existing woodland.

In welcoming the document, questions were raised about the resources needed to achieve the ambitions. Rob explained that the finance to undertake tree planting was generally generated from grant funding; the Council would also be working alongside a number of delivery partners. A significant proportion of the planting would involve third party land and consideration would need to be given to the management and support of delivery for this. There would be decisions to be made about the best use of Council owned land as there would be a number of considerations such as the implications for income generation and carbon offset benefits.

Rob was asked to review the wording of the guidance document in relation to the paragraph on street trees.

Members commented that:

- Consideration should be given to engaging with uniformed groups.
- There was a need to be mindful of the consequences of leaf drop in certain places where it may have a particular impact on vulnerable residents.

Councillor Mather responded to a question about the Town Centre Masterplan, she assured Members that landscaping and planting was part of the overall scheme and all regeneration projects would have a green element.

Involvement of the wider community was discussed as an important aspect of achieving the White Rose Forest plans and Rob said that any offers of assistance would be welcomed.

In reply to a further comment, Rob said that, where possible, sustainable screens/tree guards would be used when planting.

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The representative of Kirklees Climate Emergency – Trees, Moorland and Rewilding Sub Group stated that dropped leaves should be considered a resource as they could be harvested and used as bio-gas feedstock. There were also opportunities that could be taken to recycle plastic waste into tree guards and posts. He stressed that there was a need for the planting work to be undertaken in a time period of no more than five years.

RESOLVED –

(1) That Rob Dalby be thanked for his report and that the development of the Council Owned Tree and Woodland Management Policy and the commitment to the White Rose Forest initiative be welcomed.

(2) That the intention to engage with officers in the planning department in relation to consideration of the treatment of trees and woodland management within the planning process be noted.

(3) That it be recommended that the Greenspace Service should engage with uniformed groups in relation to tree planting volunteering opportunities and that the engagement being undertaken with schools be endorsed

(4) That the policy be brought back to the Panel for consideration should significant amendment be made further to the consultation process.

(5) That it be acknowledged that there will be a need for involvement from partners and the wider community to achieve the objectives of the tree and woodland management plan and that more will need to be done to support and encourage community involvement.

7 Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23 - Update

The report provided an update on the approach being taken with key partners to develop and implement an action plan to support the achievement of the outcomes set out in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23.

Helen Geldart, Head of Housing Services introduced the report. Naz Parkar, Service Director for Housing, Economy and Infrastructure; Karen Oates, Commissioning Manager (Access to Housing); and Donna Harkins, the Rough Sleeper Team Manager were also present to answer questions.

Helen explained that the action plan was being developed, alongside partners, further to the adoption of the strategy in July 2019. She said that recent work had resulted in the award of funding of almost £250,000 to assist in tackling rough sleeping and a new team was now in place which took a holistic and proactive approach to work with people living on the street to understand the issues and build relationships. The team was working closely with partners.

Helen noted that:

- Funding of £120,000 had been awarded by MHCLG from the Private Rented Sector Access Fund.

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- A good practice guide to street outreach work that had been developed by Homeless Link was appended to the report.
- The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was in place and would be activated when necessary.

Members welcomed the report, the holistic approach that was being taken and the positive outcomes being achieved despite the challenges.

The Cabinet Member expressed her thanks to officers for the significant amount of work that had been undertaken and the improvements being achieved. She thanked the Scrutiny Panel for its contribution to shaping the policy.

In response to questions it was explained that:

- Anyone attending Huddersfield Mission under the SWEP procedures would be encouraged to discuss their next steps the following day and this would include arrangements for transport if they had come from a different part of the district.
- SWEP provision had been sufficient but if there was ever a situation where a space was not available access to bed and breakfast accommodation would be ensured.
- The three consecutive night trigger was a national guideline but the Kirklees approach was flexible both in terms of timing and weather conditions. Information was sent to all elected members and partners, including the police and emergency duty services, once SWEP was in place and it was publicised on social media.
- MHCLG had some funding available associated with cold weather provision and the focus of this particular funding would also help strengthen health, social care and housing relationships.
- Possible models for temporary provision in North Kirklees were being explored, alongside a partner agency, as well as the provision of additional temporary Council units. Safeguarding was an important consideration in determining the appropriate solution.
- Local authorities had been asked to bid for funding to work specifically with veterans and this was being taken up at regional level.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the holistic approach and positive outcomes being achieved in relation to the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping in Kirklees be welcomed and that officers be thanked for their hard work on this issue.

(2) That it be acknowledged that the anticipated apparent increase in numbers of rough sleepers is partly the result of more effective capture of data and proactive work with partners.

(3) That the work being undertaken alongside other agencies to identify people at risk of homelessness at an early stage be welcomed.

(4) That it be recommended that specific reference be made to ex-military personnel as a vulnerable group and that the funding obtained at regional level to focus on work with veterans be noted.

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(5) That it be noted that the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) had been in place with effect from 1 October and that the issue of temporary accommodation provision in North Kirklees still needs to be considered in the Council's approach.

8 Work Programme 2019/20

The Panel reviewed its work programme for 2019/20.

RESOLVED –

That the Panel's Work Programme and forthcoming items/activities be noted.