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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 10th January 2020

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Will Simpson
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Graham Turner

Co-optees: Philip Chaloner

In attendance: Councillor Graham Turner, Portfolio Holder - Corporate
David Bundy, Strategy and Policy Team Manager
Eamonn Croston, Service Director - Finance
Philip Deighton, Head of Commercial Services
Chris Duffill, Head of Service - Business and Skills
Jonathan Nunn, Strategy Policy Officer
Naz Parkar, Service Director for Growth and Housing
Sean Westerby, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager
Sue Weston, Strategic Partnership Lead - Business

Apologies: Councillor Mahmood Akhtar
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor John Lawson

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Councillors Mahmood Akhtar, James Homewood and John Lawson.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th November 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were received.

7 Approach to Commercialisation

Phil Deighton, the Head of Commercial Services, provided an update on the progress in relation to the development of an approach, or core set of principle, in respect of commercialisation including information on the commercial approaches adopted by other local authorities.

The Panel was asked for comments and to give consideration to any specific areas that it would wish add to its Work Programme.

In introducing the report Phil explained that the approach had to align with, and support, the Council's values and priorities and the four commercial objectives for Kirklees which were:

- Understand our costs to price products effectively and competitively, to increase income levels and sustain the delivery of priority Council outcomes.
- Exploit our assets and opportunities by disposing of, acquiring new, or develop existing assets to deliver financial returns.
- Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of income collection
- Embed the concept of commercialism in all services.

An initial high level Action Plan for 2019/20 and 2020/21 had been produced. This would run alongside the range of other commercial activity already being undertaken, such as treasury management and work in respect of the Local Authority Property Fund.

Phil and Eamonn Croston, Service Director – Finance responded to questions from Panel Members as follows:

- Capturing new and innovative commercial ideas would be a continuous process; this line was included within the Action Plan to raise awareness and ensure that ideas were picked up at an early stage.
- All alternatives, including the potential to promote the Council's back office processes to other organisations, would be looked at; there was a need to carefully consider the collection of income and the efficiency of the process and to ensure that it would not lead to bad debt.
- As part of the budget process every service would have an income target which would be monitored, although this may be a bottom line figure.
- Information in relation to income from the Council's commercial properties could be provided to the Panel at any point in time on request. There were approximately 300 commercial assets and the sustainability and suitability of these properties was being assessed.
- The Treasury Management and Investment Strategy included an enhanced section which captured high level information on commercial investments and this information was within the public domain.
- In terms of a systematic approach to bringing forward opportunities, this linked in to the 'efficient and effective' outcome of the Corporate Plan, which included consideration of best value and value for money. Ideas were being promoted, as part of the capital planning process, particularly in respect of self-funding schemes that could create income opportunities and the aim was to embed best practice in relation to effective and efficient practices. This was an issue that officers needed to consider and how it might be codified in a more systematic way.

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Councillor Graham Turner, the Corporate Portfolio Holder said that the Council's commercial properties had a high occupancy rate and charges would be reviewed as part of the budget process. However, it was important to be mindful of not passing on higher costs to organisations that added value to the Council if they would struggle to afford them.

He said that the commercial approach was a relatively recent concept for Kirklees. The approach would aim to take opportunities to generate additional income but the issues of adding value for the Council and benefits for the local economy were also important considerations. The potential to generate additional income from Dewsbury and Huddersfield Town Halls was already being explored.

RESOLVED -

(1) That Phil Deighton be thanked for attending the meeting and presenting the report to update the Panel in relation to the Council's approach to commercialisation.

(2) That a further report be submitted to the Panel in early 2020/21; to include consideration of how the Council might implement a more systematic approach to bringing forward potential opportunities.

8 Inclusion and Diversity - Update

The Panel was given an update on progress in respect of the Year 2 Action Plan as part of the Council's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2017/21. The Council's draft Annual Report for 2018/19 was also presented.

In introducing the reports, David Bundy, Strategy and Policy Team Manager, highlighted the Council's achievements and future areas of focus in respect of:

- A committed and diverse workforce.
- Positive and inclusive approach.
- An organisation intolerant of bullying, harassment and discrimination where poor behaviour is challenged and tackled.
- A partnership approach to support resettlement and integration.

He also reported on a number of key additional activities and initiatives that had taken place throughout the year, which had helped to achieve progress in relation to inclusion and diversity.

In September 2019, the Council had achieved a Bronze Award under the Inclusive Employers' National Inclusion Standard. This had been assessed by an independent panel and had been Kirklees first submission. The feedback report provided the Council with a useful baseline performance assessment on its areas of strength and those areas where it needed to focus on improvement. This would be used to shape the Year 3 Action Plan.

Members commented that:

- The report and the progress being made was welcomed.

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- Notwithstanding that they were not a prescribed group, not enough data was captured in respect of working carers. There had been an increase in numbers and the Council needed to consider how it could support them.
- It was considered that the information, training and support to address harassment, bullying and discrimination in the workplace should also make reference to, and be made available to, Councillors.
- It would be helpful if the officers compiling data in relation to wellbeing were able to integrate this work with workforce profile data to identify any gaps in support for any particular group.

In response to questions, David explained that:

- There was an active wellbeing network which organised events and provided support and guidance. He stressed that the culture of the organisation needed to ensure that people felt able to 'declare' issues such as a need for mental health support. He undertook to take this back for consideration by the wellbeing network.
- There was still some work to do to correct the disparity between the representation of each of the group within the Council's workforce and volunteers with that within the local population as a whole. It was recognised that a more diverse and inclusive workforce could assist organisations in delivering innovation and improving service delivery.
- The Member Officer Protocol had been highlighted to Councillors and officers and had been part of the work of the Democracy Commission; but perhaps still needed to become embedded.

It was suggested that key elements could be incorporated into a poster to act as a reminder of conduct and behaviour and that information about the protocol might be included within the New Councillor Induction Programme.

In terms of engagement with Unions, Councillor Turner explained that there was a pro-active approach with regular meetings taking place, information sharing, and dialogue on issues at an early stage.

RESOLVED -

(1) That David Bundy be thanked for the progress report in relation to the Council's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.

(2) That the positive progress being achieved, including the Bronze National Inclusion Standard Award received in September 2019, be welcomed

(3) That consideration be given to the integration of the workforce profile data with the work being done in terms of wellbeing, to assist in identifying any potential gaps in support for any particular group.

9 Preparation to Leave the EU

The Panel received a report which provided an update in relation to the ongoing preparations by Kirklees as the UK got ready to leave the European Union, with a particular focus on the potential economic impacts.

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Councillor Graham Turner, Portfolio Holder for Corporate explained that detailed economic data had been compiled, in-house, in order to allow the Council to understand Kirklees businesses; this included information in respect of the current workforce, levels of exports and imports within each economic sector and the location of head offices.

Jonathan Nunn, Strategy Policy Officer gave a detailed presentation analysing the information that had been gathered.

Members discussed; the percentage of the exports from Kirklees destined for non EU countries affected by current EU block agreements; the countries/block agreements that had transitional arrangements already in place and the impact if any agreements were not replicated by the end of December 2020; the effective date in relation to the introduction of new documentation for exports; and the situation in respect of looked after children from EU origins.

Councillor Turner explained that work would continue throughout the next year, alongside other agencies, to prepare for final withdrawal; with the intention of maximising opportunities and minimising disruption as far as possible. Further progress reports could be submitted to the Panel in due course.

RESOLVED -

(1) That Councillor Graham Turner and officers be thanked for attending the meeting to update the Panel in relation to the Council's preparations for the UK leaving the EU.

(2) That a briefing note be sent to Members of the Panel, as soon as possible after the meeting, to confirm the implementation date in respect of changes to export documentation requirements

(3) That updates continue to be submitted to the Panel, to include information in relation to:

(a) the impact on looked after children from EU origins.

(b) the percentage of the exports from Kirklees destined for non EU countries affected by current EU block agreements and the countries/block agreements that have agreed transitional arrangements in place.

(c) the potential impact on Kirklees businesses in terms of World Trade Organisation (WTO) tariffs on exports in the event of trade deals not being replicated.

10 Work Programme 2019/20

Members noted the full and interesting programme for the remainder of the year.

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme and forthcoming agenda items be noted.