

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 10th September 2020

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Mahmood Akhtar
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor John Lawson
Councillor Will Simpson
Councillor John Taylor

Co-optees Philip Chaloner

In attendance: Cllr Graham Turner, Cabinet Member
Deborah Lucas, Head of People Services
Pat Lewis, Organisational Development Service Manager
Lisa Melia, HD-One Transactional Service Manager
Andy Simcox, Service Director, Strategy, and Innovation
Michelle Moss, Acting HR Manager
Eamonn Croston, Service Director, Finance and Accountan
Jayne Healey, Employee Healthcare Manager
Lucy Wearmouth, Public Health Manager
Jonathan Nunn, Strategy Policy Officer
Chris Duffill, Head of Service, Business and Skills

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6 August 2020 were approved as a correct record.

2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

4 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

5 Questions by members of the public (Written Questions)

Due to current Covid-19 restrictions, Elected Members and members of the public may submit written questions to members of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel.

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Any questions should be emailed to jenny.bryce-chan@kirklees.gov.uk no later than 5pm on Tuesday 8 September 2020.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 51(10) each person may submit a maximum of 4 written questions.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11(5), the period allowed for the asking and answering of public questions will not exceed 15 minutes.

Members of the Panel will provide an oral response to any questions received, or if they are not able to do so, a written response will be provided.

RESOLVED

No written questions were received.

6 Council Plan

A request was made to defer this agenda item.

RESOLVED

That this item be deferred.

7 The People Strategy

Deborah Lucas, Head of People Services provided the Panel with an update on the People Strategy, advising that the appended report builds on three previous reports presented to the Panel in February 2020 and gives an update on the wellbeing, development, and attraction themes of the People Strategy. The report outlines the progress to date on the delivery of the People Strategy (2017 – 2020) and the approach to the refresh. In addition, it sets out the ongoing commitment to staff and provides an update in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and the recovery framework.

At a previous meeting, the Panel was invited to provide comment and suggestions and some of the key points that the Panel wanted to see incorporated in the refreshed strategy included a flexible approach to staff benefits, developing a better induction process, better tracking of internal promotions through the recruitment system and raising awareness of credit unions. The Panel was advised that in response, all the key points suggested by the Panel had either been or will be picked up as part of the refresh.

The Panel was informed that due to the lockdown, the planned engagement sessions with key stakeholders as part of the refresh had to be rethought through and in place of face to face sessions it was decided to draw upon the intelligence and learning coming out of the lockdown experience. The crisis has highlighted how flexible staff have been to change and has given a real insight into how much talent there is in the workforce.

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The refresh work is shaping into a programme of work spanning three core areas and there are several projects that sit beneath each of these areas including:

- **Culture change** – one of the programmes being developed is the visual refresh of the People’s Strategy to bring it to life making it visual and impactful rather than being a wordy document
- **The Employee Portal** – it is recognised that it can be difficult to provide timely and effective engagement with frontline workers and the crisis has brought this to the fore. An urgent solution is needed not just to ensure that staff receive timely messages but also to ensure they can access all the support they need at work
- **Wellbeing** – a lot of work is being undertaken in this area looking at the short, medium, and long term. In the short term, looking at how staff are rewarded and motivated, particularly in this crisis. One example is sending out thank you packs to frontline workers as a gesture to recognise all their hard work during the pandemic. The feedback from staff has been positive and they welcome the recognition
- **Workforce planning** – this is possibly the biggest area of work and the new recruitment system, previously reported to the Panel has been successfully implemented, and almost, 100% of recruitment now takes place virtually. The feedback from managers and candidates has been positive. The system offers powerful intelligence to track candidates, which will help to identify at what stage a person might fall out of the process. This is particularly important to identify underrepresented groups in the workforce and will enable resources to be effectively targeted.

The Panel was informed that one important development that will be implemented shortly will be full blind recruitment. This means that recruiters will not be able to identify candidates by characteristics such as gender, age and disability and recruiting managers will only be able to see candidate number and not the full name. As well as trying to attract people from underrepresented groups to the workforce, it is also recognised that focus needs to be given to developing these groups of staff to enable them to grow and develop and move up the organisation.

A key group of staff underrepresented at a senior level within the organisation are people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. A great deal of work has been undertaken on this and, to address it, a programme of work on leadership and development targeted at BAME colleagues have been arranged. The ambition is that these targeted programmes will enable BAME colleagues to develop through the organisation into senior roles.

In response to the information presented, the Panel commented that it was pleased that recognition and focus was being given to working carers. Cllr Taylor commented that an area of concern that he had raised in various forums is the lack of measurement or recognition of one group that has the least beneficial outcome and that is young working-class white males. He stated that until intelligence is

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gathered this cohort cannot be effectively measured and therefore it is not possible ensure there is fairness and inclusion for all groups.

The Panel raised concern that some low paid workers do not have broadband or the right equipment to be able to work from home and asked what the council's approach is to digital inclusion. In response, the Panel was informed that the Pulse 3 survey will be around digital inclusion to try and understand how digitally enabled the workforce is and what further needs to be done.

RESOLVED

That Deborah Lucas and her team be thanked for providing an update on the People Strategy

8 Tackling Inequalities

A request was made to defer this agenda item.

RESOLVED

That this item be deferred.

9 Tackling Poverty Action Plan

Lucy Wearmouth, Policy, Intelligence and Public Health Manager, provided the Panel with an update on the tackling poverty action plan. The Panel was informed that the information being presented aimed to outline the approach being taken to tackle poverty on a local level and the pre-Covid and post-Covid response.

The Panel was informed that the language used around poverty and how poverty is framed is important as poverty is more than just not having enough money. It is also about a lack of opportunity and a lack of choice and the impact that can have on a person's dignity is significant. There is a stigma round poverty and people may not want to talk about their situation and may not even recognise that they are living in poverty.

Ms Wearmouth advised the Panel that the preferred definition of poverty is from the Joseph Roundtree foundation as follows: “

Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent or buy essentials for the children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means financial facing marginalisation or even discrimination because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society”.

Poverty has a significant impact on all aspects of peoples lives, for example, poor and unsafe housing, hidden homelessness and sofa surfing and health can be severely impacted by poverty. It is recognised that children who grow up in poverty are less likely to achieve their full potential at school.

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The Panel was presented with information which highlighted the following information and advised that it is pre-Covid.

In Kirklees

- One in 6 residents (16%) live in poverty
- Nearly one in 5 children (18%) live in poverty
- Over one in 8 households (13%) experience fuel poverty
- One in 20 people (5%) are unemployed, this will have changed because of Covid

The Panel was informed that there has been a significant increase in the use of foodbanks. Foodbanks are reporting that while a few years ago foodbanks may have been used as a one-off crisis intervention for people, there are now an increasing number of people who are return users to foodbanks. For some people foodbanks have become less of a crisis response and more a way to cope and survive.

The Panel was further informed that post-Covid, a report from the Social Metrics Commission, suggests that groups who are already overrepresented in terms of living in poverty have been most impacted by Covid. For example, people who are living in deprivation, people who have a disability and black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

The Kirklees approach has been worked on for approximately 18 months, and is framed within people, partners and places. Overview of Kirklees approach:

People – No decision about me, without me

Partners – Partnerships are key – to recognise and build on the work across Kirklees

Places – To recognise and understand the difference place makes to individuals' and communities' risk of and experience of poverty

The next steps are to ensure that the poverty work is integrated with the work on inequalities because poverty is one element of inequalities.

The Panel made comments on the information presented and raised a number of questions including:

- What strategy will be put in place to ensure that volunteers will continue to be in place for example at foodbanks, as many of the volunteers were furloughed workers who will be going back to work
- how housing feeds into the work particularly in respect of low quality privately rented housing

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- With the furlough scheme coming to an end a lot of people might not be going back to work because the work may not be available, does the planning and work being undertaken take account of this

In response the Panel was advised that it is important to continue to harness and build on the excellent volunteer response across Kirklees. Housing is an important part of the broader inequalities work and is an area significantly affected. This has been picked up in terms of the planning and will feature in a refreshed action plan for inequalities and poverty.

RESOLVED

That Lucy Wearmouth be thanked for providing an update on the Tackling Poverty Action Plan

10 Leaving the EU

Chris Duffill, Head of Service, Business and Skills provided the Panel with an update on the ongoing Kirklees preparations on specific issues relating to economic impact and the provision of EUSS (EU Settlement Scheme) application support to vulnerable groups. The update report also aimed to address the outstanding issues highlighted by the Panel at the meeting held on the 28 February 2020.

The Panel was informed that in terms of national context leaving the EU is becoming much more central to the current debate. There are a number of outstanding issues being focused on at the moment in terms of the free trade agreement with the EU relating to state aid, fishing, and the implementation of the withdrawal agreement.

Locally, the Council's Tactical Group, comprising Council officers and partners, still meets on a regular basis to review and understand the implications for both business and Kirklees residents; and there continues to be ongoing engagement with key partners.

At the last Corporate Scrutiny Panel meeting there was a specific ask to address the following areas:

- That an update be provided to members of the Panel, further to the meeting, in respect of the progress of the applications for settled status by the five looked after children who are also EU citizens

In response the Panel was advised that officers in Children and Young People's Service report that social workers have been working very closely with solicitors from the Law Centre and with the EU Project Officer from the Strategy and Policy Team in relation to progressing all five cases.

The outcome on four applications is currently awaited. The previous timescale was eight weeks; however, this could be longer due to the COVID-19 situation. Further

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legal documents have been requested for one of the young people which our legal services are updating and following this the application for settlement will be resubmitted, with an expected eight week turn round timescale.

- An update on the analysis of the Kirklees level export destinations with the current position on free trade agreements

The Panel was informed that there are a set of national and regional statistics which are based on the actual movement of goods through the existing import and export arrangements. The Panel was directed to the appended report which gives details of the regional statistics. In summary the breakdown at a regional level:

- 51.7% of imports are from the EU or EU countries and the balance from non-EU countries
- A higher proportion of exports 57% of exports from regional businesses are to the EU
- An assessment of local business confidence

The Panel was informed that regarding business confidence, a survey of local businesses was undertaken as part of the Council's response to the pandemic. In total 761 businesses responded of which there 68 were in the manufacturing sector. The survey highlighted that businesses are under significant financial pressure because of the pandemic. In summary:

- Approximately 62% stated that they were concerned/extremely concerned about financial resources over the next 6 months (June – November 2020)
- 16% were somewhat unconcerned or not at all concerned (concern was lower (56%) for businesses in the manufacturing sector)
- Supply chain disruption over the next six months was an area of lower concern with only 37% of businesses concerned/extremely concerned and 39% somewhat/completely unconcerned

The Panel was informed that a further business survey is planned for October 2020 and at this point the furlough scheme will be winding down therefore it is important to get a clearer understanding of potential impact of redundancies. It will also provide an opportunity to revisit issues around leaving the EU particularly as the position on the free trade with the EU should have progressed.

- An update on the wider economic and social impacts of transition including those issues that extend beyond the Council's remit:

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The Panel was informed that the most significant risk for adult social care is the impact on the social care workforce as the latest Skills for Care data for Kirklees shows 2% of the adult social care workforce are EU citizens. However, a survey of commissioned care providers from ADASS shows the impact on some care providers showed this was around 5–10% in some cases. There is information to suggest that due to COVID-19, people are applying for care posts having been furloughed or made redundant from retail and service sectors.

- An update on the wider economic and social impacts of transition including those issues that extend beyond the Council's remit:

The Panel was advised that the government has recognised the need for people to gain pre-settled or settled status under the EUSS, which in Kirklees equates to an estimated 13,000 people. As of the end of June, applications have been received from approximately 9,400 of the 13,000 Kirklees residents who are eligible for settled status. The council is working with a number of organisations, partners and businesses to promote that the importance of resolving the issue and making information as widely available as possible.

RESOLVED

That Chris Duffill be thanked for providing an update on leaving the EU and providing a respond to the issues raised by the Panel at a previous panel meeting.