

Contact Officer: Sheila Dykes

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21st December 2021

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Andrew Marchington
Councillor Harpreet Uppal
Councillor Habiban Zaman

In attendance: Councillor Masood Ahmed
Councillor Naheed Mather

41 Membership of Committee

All Members of the Committee were in attendance.

42 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

43 Interests

No interests were declared.

44 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public.

45 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

46 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

47 Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Progress Report and the Armed Forces Bill 2021/22

Vina Randhawa, Democracy Manager presented a report which provided an update on the work of the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board, and an overview of the Armed Forces Bill 2021 and the associated preparatory work being undertaken in conjunction with partners.

Councillor Masood Ahmed, the Council's Armed Forces Champion and Councillor Naheed Mather, the Cabinet Member for Environment and the relevant Portfolio Holder were in attendance.

The Committee also welcomed Jim Dodds and Colin Cranswick, members of the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board.

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Vina explained that the figures set out in the report for Kirklees were based on the 2011 Census and that updated data would be available from Spring 2022.

Councillor Ahmed said that significant work had been undertaken to further develop the work of the partnership, with limited resources, and he thanked Vina and the members of the Board for their work. He highlighted the following positive initiatives; Kirklees was now working towards achieving the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award; the Board's engagement with the West Yorkshire Good Practice Forum; and promotion of the masterclasses run by the Ministry of Defence in respect of Defence Transition Services and the Veteran's Welfare Service. He said that the partnership was strong and productive, with around forty representatives of different services attending meetings, and the Action Plan was nearing completion. Work was ongoing to update the website and there was a wish to develop e-learning packages and perhaps a community directory for Kirklees. The Board would work with partners to try and address recognised gaps in terms of NHS representation.

Jim Dodds and Colin Cranswick echoed Councillor Ahmed's comments and thanked both him and Vina for their contributions. They commented that:

- The Covenant was moving forward but progress was slow, in the main, due to a lack of resources. A Life Forces Guide had been produced in 2014 and distributed to all doctors' surgeries. This needed to be updated but this could not be undertaken without funding. An excellent app had been developed with Huddersfield University, which could act as a gateway to accessing help for veterans, but again resources were needed to progress to production.
- The Chair of the Board needed to have the capacity to engage with partners and promote the Covenant within Kirklees.
- The meetings of the Board were very productive.
- A number of other authorities had appointed a dedicated officer to advise on the implications of the Covenant and associated responsibilities.
- It was considered that the position in Kirklees was excellent overall, but a single point of entry would be beneficial to avoid people being passed around the organisation and having to repeat information.

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

- The Committee expressed support for the principles of the Covenant and confirmed that the need to understand the particular issues affecting members and former members of the armed forces, and to support them, was recognised. Members thanked all those who had contributed to the work of the Board and acknowledged the positive actions and results achieved to date.
- It was considered that the response was affected by the national position in terms of healthcare, education and housing provision.
- Any individual experiencing being passed around the organisation was not acceptable and this should be addressed.
- An important role of the local authority was advocating with other agencies on behalf of residents.

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- The co-production of the Action Plan, alongside serving and former soldiers, and the learning being taken from their lived experience to allow them to influence the development of services was welcomed.
- Councillors Smaje and Zaman undertook to assist in respect of the issue of health representatives on the Board.
- In response to questions about champions within services and connections with Children's Services, it was explained that a representative of Pupil Admissions attended the Board. There was an expectation that attendees from different services would disseminate information and learning from the Board back to their service but perhaps the champion role could be progressed to try and ensure this happened effectively.
- A number of ex-services personnel regularly attended the Board; they had contributed to the detail of the action plan on the basis of their lived experience and their input was very valuable.
- Access to services had been considered at the Corporate Scrutiny Panel, and consideration should be given to how service and ex-service personnel are able to access services in the delivery of the Council's Access Strategy.
- It was noted that the return in respect of the numbers of Council staff who had been part of the armed forces, or had some connection to them, had been quite poor. It was suggested that such people would make ideal champions within services. These points were taken on board and it was suggested that efforts could be made to identify and engage with members of staff with relevant experience and to actively involve them in this work.
- It was noted that resourcing also covered things such as identifying like-minded people who were willing and able to engage, as well as finances.

Resolved –

- 1) That the Armed Forces Board and the officers supporting it be thanked for their work.
- 2) That further information be provided for the Committee in respect of the development of the concept of Armed Forces Champions within services.
- 3) That the Cabinet Member be requested to consider resourcing, particularly in light of the upcoming changes to legislation, to support and build on the work already undertaken in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant.

48 Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge - Progress Report
The Committee gave consideration to a report in relation to Council activity relating to the key recommendations outlined in the 2019 Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Report.

Andy Simcox, Service Director for Strategy and Innovation and Michelle Hope, Programme Manager, Policy, Partnerships and Corporate Planning introduced the report which set out the progress in respect of each of the recommendations and, where appropriate, the adjustment of actions in the context of the pandemic and recovery.

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

- Recommendation 6 had referred to a sharper delineation of the roles of Cabinet Members and senior officers; whilst the report addressed officers' actions it did

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not give a Cabinet response. It was suggested that this could be discussed with the Leader of Council when he next attended the Committee.

- In response to a comment in respect of appetite for risk and taking opportunities being considered on a systemic basis; this was acknowledged and it was suggested that opportunities should be catalogued and consideration given to how this informed the Council's ambition and decision-making. This was an issue that could be appropriate for consideration by the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee, and this would be discussed with the Service Directors for Legal, Commissioning and Governance, and Finance.
- Comments in the report in respect of the appetite for a review of the electoral cycle were queried, as a number of Members had supported this, and this was taken on board.
- In relation to Recommendation 1, the improvements achieved in terms of communications were recognised and welcomed. The development of a long-term sustainable relationships with residents was very important, both on the ground as well as through digital communications. There was a need to improve in terms of the promotion of good stories.
- In respect of the proposals for flexibility of staff roles, it was important that front-line staff were also included. This had been acknowledged as an important issue (that had arisen from the 'listening circles') and work was to be undertaken to understand the different types of frontline staff and what flexibility would mean to them, and to consider improvement of their working conditions.
- The Place Standard engagement work was good but it was considered that there was still some confusion for residents and Councillors about place-based working and how all the different elements fitted together.
- There was a need to engage with Councillors more effectively, it was important that, as place-based working progressed, corporate communications should work with Ward Councillors in respect of the activity going on in their areas.
- The Communications Strategy was being refreshed and input from scrutiny at an early stage would be welcomed, alongside engagement with other stakeholders, partners and communities with the aim of establishing how to achieve further reach within communities. The comments about place-based working and working with Ward Councillors would also be considered within this work.
- More councillor involvement was needed in the setting up of hubs and setting priorities for local areas.
- It was considered that the recommendation in respect of strengthening the corporate centre linked in with place-based working; an example was given of a ward meeting held in respect of highways issues which had been very productive; this kind of initiative required support from the corporate centre.
- The IT systems in respect of missed bins were now fully aligned and this indicated a good direction of travel.
- The Corporate Parenting Board was considered to be a good example of improved decision-making and the extension of this approach would be welcomed.
- It would be interesting to see if the decision to bring the management and maintenance of the Council's housing back in-house was working effectively in the long-term and if the opportunities around place-based working were being maximised to deliver the expected outcomes. It was suggested that the Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel could pick up this issue.

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- In respect of strengthening the corporate centre it was explained that resources had been put into a number of services, and this would also be considered within the current budget process, in order to develop capacity to deliver the ambitions of the Council Plan.
- It was suggested that a report should be brought to scrutiny in respect of progress on the Technology Strategy.
- There was a need to promote achievements and fully engage all Councillors.
- In terms of the Place Standard engagement it was important that this included wider communities and minority communities and did not focus on 'the usual suspects'.
- To strengthen capacity consideration should be given to using peer support from Councillors and communities, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing and being an inclusive employer.
- The benefits of working with the community alongside community leaders had been demonstrated during the response to the pandemic and there was significant learning to be taken from this process
- It was important that the reasoning behind Recommendation 8, in respect of the establishment of a single Clinical Commissioning Group, did not get lost in the discussions about the future of health and social care.

Resolved -

- 1) That it be agreed that future reporting against the 2019 Peer Challenge will be incorporated within the reporting against the 2021/23 Council Plan, with an annual progress report being brought to this Committee for information and that different elements will be taken forward, as appropriate, by relevant Panels with the Chair of Scrutiny maintaining an overview.
- 2) That officers take account of the comments made by the Committee in moving forward with the work to respond to the key recommendations raised by 2019 Peer Challenge.

49 Work Programme 2021-22

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme for 2021-22.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 3rd February 2022 and the following items were scheduled for consideration:

- (i) Leader's Priorities Update.
- (ii) Corporate Safeguarding Policy Refresh.

50 Any Other Business

The Chair reported that she had been consulted in respect of an urgent decision, made by Cabinet on 14th December 2021, in respect of supporting the recruitment, retention and valuing the contribution of social care staff in Kirklees this winter. She had agreed to the decision being exempt from call-in as the implementation of the funding was urgent but had requested that a report be presented to the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel in respect of the design of an appropriate approach to utilising short-term funding to support the adult social care sector over the winter.