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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 15th August 2022

Present: Councillor John Taylor (Chair)
Councillor Steve Hall
Councillor Tyler Hawkins
Councillor Harry McCarthy
Councillor John Lawson

Co-optees Garry Kitchin
James Ryan

In attendance: Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Strategic Director Corporate Strategy, Commissioning and Public Health
Jonathan Nunn, Policy and Partnership Team Manager
Chris Duffill, Head of Service, Business and Skills
Cllr Elizabeth Smaje, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Michelle Moss, HR Manager, Workforce Strategy
Dave Thompson, Head of Access Strategy and Delivery
Jill Greenfield, Service Director Customer and Communities

Apologies: Kristina Parkes (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Kristina Parkes.

The Panel noted that there had been a change of membership. Cllr Cooper replaced by Cllr Lukic as a panel member.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 5 July 2022, were approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No public questions were asked.

7 Cabinet Member update on priorities from the Council Plan

RESOLVED

That an update on the Cabinet member priorities listed in the Council Plan be deferred to the next meeting of the panel.

8 Social Value Policy

Chris Duffill, Head of Business, Economy and Growth and Jonathan Nunn, Policy and Partnerships Manager, attended the meeting to provide an update on the draft Social Value Policy. In summary, the Panel was advised that social value has become an increasingly important focus for both the public and private sector, in essence, trying to optimise the social, economic, and environmental benefit of every pound invested.

The council's current policy was put in place in 2013, after the Social Value Act 2012 came into force. The legislation set a requirement for public sector bodies to consider social value in some procurement activity. The new policy being developed, acknowledges some important developments that needs to be taken into account.

Firstly, there is a need to consider and embed social value much more widely in relation to the council's activities, embracing all of the commissioning and procurement the council undertakes. It will also be important to consider social value when it comes to making grants to public and private sector organisations for example, regarding asset transfer and some of the wider investments the council makes, in addition to being a consideration when determining planning applications.

Secondly, The need for commissioners to consider social value outcomes and how they might be achieved at a much earlier stage of the project development process

Traditionally, social value considerations come to the fore at the procurement stage of commissioning, and the policy acknowledges the importance of considering social value earlier in the process, ideally at the outset when ideas are being formulated.

The Panel was informed that the policy represents only a part of what is trying to be achieved, and therefore, understanding the council's wider approach and the capacity to deliver social value will be critical if the policy is to have any impact. There are a set of proposals outlined in the appended report, regarding how the policy will be implemented. One part of that process, will be to identify a lead within each service to develop social value knowledge and capacity, to ensure it is embedded throughout the commissioning of services. Another aspect, will be developing a program of training and action learning for the service leads. This is to ensure that knowledge is shared across the council, and this is in addition to developing new guidance, and resources for project managers. More importantly,

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the aim is to increase the visibility of social value commitments in the way contracts are commissioned and managed.

It is also proposed to embed social value into the council's corporate reporting arrangements and KPIs with specific measures which emerge from this process. The process of building internal capacity and then assessing the business case to potentially create some additional dedicated social value capacity is an important part of the process. At this stage, it is putting the new policy in place, putting the implementation mechanisms in place, and then understanding whether there is a case for additional capacity to be built into those services.

The Panel was informed that two important points worth mentioning in addition, is how to measure social value. This is well developed in procurement, both in terms of the indicators that might be used, the measures, and the tools. Nationally, there is the National TOMs Framework, which sets out four areas in which you might look to achieve social value and number of outcomes, which provide a lower-level grouping, and then the measures which are the individual outcomes aimed for.

Against those, they map locally varied proxy values to be able to quantify and compare against potential providers in the procurement space, however work needs to be undertaken to develop how that maps onto the other areas in which the aim is to achieve social value.

The Panel was advised that this is not the procurement strategy. The procurement strategy will be presented to the Panel at its meeting in September. This sets the framework for what social value and outlines the areas where the aim is to achieve social value.

In response to the information presented the Panel made a number of comments and the following questions were asked:

- In respect of remedial action, for example, if faced with non-delivery against the social value stipulated and not getting the value agreed with providers, how successful have some of the measures like clawback and retention been elsewhere?
- There is a positive side to measuring social value, however is there a concept of negative social value that the policy has to consider?
- The policy stipulates that grants of over £50k need a social value statement, how are community groups who may be looking for grants being supported to develop the social value statement that may be needed?
- Cllr Elizabeth Smaje, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, commented that the report states that the policy has been in place since 2013, and talks about the need for training and the need for funding for training and having KPIs. It is not easy to see from the report, what the differences are from the policy from 2013 and the new policy. What impact did the previous policy have, and how has this new policy been enhanced to ensure there is a real step change?

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- Will this policy be ready for the Cultural Heart and to be done at scale?
- How do the new social value obligations for major developments differ from the existing 106 process?
- What powers will be in place to stop developers pulling out of their social value obligations?
- Major developers will often present the development as a benefit for the community because they are delivering more housing. Is that a social value delivery, and how is it possible to differentiate between just them building houses and them genuinely providing some additional social value?
- A significant number of houses that are built across the district, are built by the major developers, national firms, that use national supply chains and use their own workforce. How do we get social value into those sort of contracts and what discussions have been had with major developers to enable them to move to position to provide social value and not just building the same houses in the same way?
- There are two potential risks of not sitting down with developers and being clear what the ask is. 1) is that they will not deliver it because they have a national model and that is how they operate and, 2) there may be certain builders that do not want to build in Kirklees because of the social value policy. If there has been no conversation with the big builders and those national companies, this exposes a gap in the policy. If the expectation is that they get on board, it is important to talk to them before firming up what the policy is, because this could potentially put the council in a difficult position if the building companies are not willing to compromise. The specific question is, has there been discussions with the big building companies?
- Kirklees has an ambition to build a certain number of houses each year, and if the social value policy is set, albeit for the right reasons, in a way that is seen as being onerous by some of the volume builders, and they choose not to build in Kirklees, it presents a problem in terms of achieving the housing target. This re-emphasises the importance of talking to the builders now, as it would not be prudent to implement a policy without having had those discussions.
- Will there be any additional resources being put in place to pick up issues such as enforcement?
- Has there been any assessment or benchmarking of previous projects that have been undertaken to get a good idea what successful project looks like in terms of social value?

The Panel asked that an action to talk to the big building companies be undertaken before finalising the policy. This is to ensure that the consequence of implementing the policy is fully understood and can be tweaked if necessary.

RESOLVED

That

- a) Chris Duffill and Jonathan Nunn be thanked for presenting the draft Social Value Policy for comment by the Panel
- b) Discussions be held with major house buildings to ensure they fully understand the implications of the Social Value policy

9 Recruitment and Retention

Michelle Moss, HR Manager, attended the meeting to provide an update on the recruitment and retention challenges being faced by the council. The Panel was informed that recruitment and retention is very much at the heart of the people strategy, in particular the outcomes of inclusive employer of choice, and skilled, flexible learning and engaged people. There are pledges around having inclusive, safe, fair, and straightforward recruitment and selection processes and people having a warm welcome when they join Kirklees or when they move within Kirklees and also being comfortable and confident being themselves within Kirklees.

Many organisations both public and private sector, face some labour market challenges, and Kirklees Council is not immune to the challenges of the rest of the economy. The Panel was informed that the labour market challenges are well publicised and the number of vacancies across the country has certainly increased significantly in the last 6 to 8 months and there are approximately 1.3 million vacancies across the country. In addition, the pandemic has created a reduction in the labour market as people have actively left the labour market, leaving a smaller pool of people that are looking for work.

Whilst it might have been expected that there would be an unemployment crisis following the pandemic, there appears to be what has been described as one of the most challenging labour markets in the last 50 years. Some of the industries that face the biggest challenges nationally are hospitality and social care and Kirklees Council operates in those markets and is feeling some of those challenges.

The Panel was informed that in terms of the biggest market challenges, it is important to note some of these would have been exactly the same challenges faced pre-pandemic as post pandemic, however they have just been exacerbated quite significantly.

Some of the most challenging areas are:

- Catering and cleaning
- Adult social care
- Adult social work
- Engineering
- Data and intelligence
- Technical project management
- Regeneration focused roles

Referring to statistical information, the Panel was informed that volumes of recruitment advertising had increased significantly over the pandemic, whereas

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applications had plateaued and reduced in some areas. There was a peak in applications around April 2022, which coincided with the apprenticeship recruitment exercises which attracted high numbers of applications. The statistics also highlights that a significant number of people were appointed, and the numbers of appointment are increasing.

Specific initiatives have been put in place in areas where there are some real challenges, in particular catering and social care. Catering are trialling talent banks in an attempt to attract people just on an initial conversation and then encourage them into completing a fuller application. Trials are being undertaken with indeed, which is a big job site that is easy to apply, and consideration is being given to how to use that site to generate some applications.

Community support officers have been out in communities, in particular attending markets, talking to people about the jobs that are available, and there is some radio advertising for both catering and social care running at the moment. There are recruitment events in social care that has been used for a long time, and place-based engagement will also be undertaken.

There are more general initiatives being worked on, for example, developing better links with the job centre. In addition, a careers site was launched last year, to better showcase jobs and careers that are available. There has also been work with employment and skills colleagues, around events and developing pipelines into the organisation. A social media campaign has been running for a while, focusing on catering and social care, and more recently, focusing on schools and engineering. There are some place-based events set up to take place in the autumn. The pandemic has highlighted that what most people are looking for in employment is flexibility, and that is being promoted where possible.

Work is being undertaken with an organisation called 'Timewise', and the council recently received accreditation and will be working with them in the future to try and embed flexibility, and options for flexibility, further across the organisation. Work is also being carried out with recruiting managers to try and keep shortlisting criteria to an absolute minimum to get them through the door and then give them more detail during the selection process. There are also system developments in terms of making the recruitment system as straightforward as possible.

In terms of support into employment, there are activity being undertaken, specifically to help people into the labour market, and there is a successful initiative called Project Search to support young people with learning disabilities to get experience in work. There were 72 placements offered as a result of the government funded work placement for 16–24-year-olds who were on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

In the much longer term, work is being undertaken on workforce planning and embedding workforce planning approaches across the Council. Workforce planning is essentially having the right people, with the right skills, values, and behaviours in the right job at the right time.

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The Panel was informed that it is also important to focus on retention of the existing workforce, while also trying to attract new people into the organisation. There are a number of initiatives being worked on to support retention.

- A welcome event for people who have joined the council in the last two years, over 100 attended and there are another 200 booked or are on the waiting list for future welcome events
- Frontline worker engagement sessions
- ET listening sessions throughout the summer
- Developing stay interviews
- Revitalising exit interviews
- Embedding flexibility where possible
- Focus on wellbeing

In response to the information presented the Panel made a number of comments and the following questions were asked:

- In the areas where there are immediate skills shortage, for instance in planning, where it is difficult to get trained planners, what is being done to within the Council to identify skills that may be transferable?
- Would there be any merit in reaching out to retired former colleagues to determine whether they would be willing to return for a short time to fill some of the deficit?

RESOLVED

That Michelle Moss be thanked for providing an update on the current recruitment and retention challenges being faced by the council.

10 Access Strategy Update

Jill Greenfield, Service Director, Customer and Communities and Dave Thompson, Head of Access Strategy & Delivery, provided the Panel with an update on the Access Strategy developments and an update on recent performance.

In summary, the Panel was informed that the information being presented is to provide an update on the work being undertaken as part of the access strategy, and its implementation, based on four key principles. The update is on getting the basics right, and as part of that, there will be an update on the impacts on performance, post COVID, and some of the other impacts, and the planning being put in place to mitigate against some of those impacts.

The principle of getting the basics right, has been the focus for a period of time, and one of the key areas, is developing the specification for procuring the new telephony system, and that includes a new switchboard which is expected to go live during 23/24. The current system is over 12 years old, and a like for like system is in place for the short term while the specification for the new system is being developed. There are many opportunities and vastly improved products out there, and the intention is to take advantage of that moving forward. The telephony system is not only used by the council, there are partner organisations who use the system and are also involved in developing the specification.

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The second area is, that the feedback not only from the staff within Kirklees Direct and the customer service centres is that they have to contact different people to deal with their calls. The aim is to review processes in co-production with citizens, their carers in some instances, and those people who use the services and the customer service staff who have the knowledge to be involved in that process. This will provide a great opportunity to improve outcomes for people.

Three areas have been identified where citizens and customer service staff have said they currently have the most problems:-

- Blue Badge process
- Request for housing repairs
- Waste collections and contacts

During the autumn, the aim is to start work in some areas as a first phase of developing new approaches to processes that will be person-centred.

In practice, it will mean that if someone makes contact to apply for a Blue Badge, staff will explore how else the council might be able to support them.

Telephony performance – recovery from Covid has been difficult for citizens and for service delivery. This is the same for many councils and contact centres, however there are a number of areas that are specific to Kirklees:

- The cost-of-living crisis - between, April and June, the service was inundated with requests for help from people who have never claimed benefits before, and whose needs are getting more complex. The £150 energy payments resulted in many citizens requiring advice and guidance which also adversely impacted the services performance.
- Recruitment and retention - there has been an unprecedented turnover in the last 12 months, particularly in Kirklees Direct (KD) which lost over 50% of the staff who answer calls. KD is positively renowned as a route into other careers in the council, however the average turnover per year is nearer 10%

The Panel was informed that actions are being taken to lessen the impact including:

- Staff support and training – fast tracking training and wrap around support for the newly appointed staff
- Ongoing recruitment – will increase resources further and improve call answer rates
- Future planning - working as a management team to plan resources and delivery in response to known and anticipated pressure which may result in increased calls to the council

In response to the information presented, the Panel made a number of comments, and the following questions were asked:

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- With the 50% of staff who remained, were they thanked for their hard work, given that they would have been under extreme pressure to keep the work going and for the loyalty they had shown
- How could digital channels help alleviate some of the pressures in the call centres, there is a potential that more could be done, for example a banner on the home page to direct people or through social media channels?

RESOLVED

That Jill Greenfield and Dave Thompson be thanked for providing an update on the Access Strategy developments and update on recent performance.

11 Future Priorities and Work Programme RESOLVED

That the Forward Plan of Key Decisions and the Panel work programme be noted.