

## Kirklees Council

### Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Cllr John Taylor

Panel: Corporate Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update: From 5 July 2022

to 15 August 2022

#### Panel Highlights

(Include examples of pre-decision work, scrutiny getting out and about, etc)

On the 14 June 2022, the Lead Member held an informal meeting with some of the new members of the Panel by way of an initial introduction.

#### Lead member briefings with:

- Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Strategic Director Corporate Strategy, Commissioning and Public Health
- Eamonn Croston, Service Director Finance
- Deborah Lucas, Head of People Services
- Michelle Moss, HR Manager, Workforce Strategy
- Jonathan Nunn, Policy, and Partnership Team Manager
- Chris Duffill, Head of Service, Business & Skills
- Richard Parry, Strategic Director, Adults & Health (with responsibility for Customer Services)
- Jill Greenfield, Service Director, Customer and Communities
- Dave Thompson, Head of Access, Strategy and Delivery

#### Panel meeting – 5 July 2022

Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Strategic Director Corporate Strategy, Commissioning and Public Health, attended the meeting to provide information on the areas of responsibilities that falls within the Strategic Directorate for Corporate Services and the areas of responsibility within the remit of the Corporate Portfolio holder. This information gave the panel a better understanding of its scope and remit and was used to set its work programme priorities for 2022/23.

Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance, and Sarah Brown, Acting Head of Welfare and Exchequer provided an update on the current financial issues impacting on the Council. Cllr Paul Davies was also in attendance and informed the Panel about his priorities and some of the support packages being put in place to support local people and communities. Eamonn suggested that the new members of the panel might benefit from a short session on how council finance works.

#### Panel meeting – 15 August 2022

**Social Value Policy** - Jonathan Nunn & Chris Duffill presented the draft Social Value Policy to the Panel for comment. The panel provided constructive feedback and challenge on aspects of the policy, including projected cost, benchmarking, impact on services, remedial action, whether it is ready to be delivered at scale, whether there are enough enforcement resources, what help will be given to community groups and what has the existing policy achieved. One of the key actions/recommendations that the panel wanted officers to take away and act on following the discussion was the importance of having conversations with key

house builders before the policy is finalised as failing to do so could potentially impact on local house building targets.

**Recruitment and Retention** – Michelle Moss presented information on the current recruitment and retention challenges being faced by the council. Planning was highlighted as being one of the areas where there are recruitment and retention challenges which is further impeded by the length of time it takes to recruit to such areas. The panel discussed skills deficits and whether there are officers in other areas of the council with transferrable skills that could be used to fill some of the skills gaps. The panel welcomed the work undertaken to simplify the application form process and the use of exit interviews to identify the reasons people are leaving. The panel discussed the merits of 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.

**Access Strategy** – Jill Greenfield and Dave Thompson provided an update on the access strategy, highlighting that one of the areas that needed to improve was the telephony system which is to be replaced. There are also recruitment and retention issues within the service. They highlighted that demand during the pandemic had increased significantly and that this had continued during the provision of £150 rebate towards energy bills. It has highlighted that the planned improvements would also include training staff to look beyond initial requests to see if other help is needed & signposting them. They used the example of blue badge requests with staff offering assisted bin support as well.

It was highlighted that they had had over 50% turnover, with staff often moving into different roles within the Council, where the average turnover per year is 10%. This has put additional pressure on the team and Dave Thompson outlined how they were currently recruiting more staff to cope with the anticipated increase demand this year as a result of the cost of living crisis.

The Panel thanked Dave for his update but especially asked that thanks be passed to the teams who have been working hard, given the high staff turnover to keep supporting residents.

**Corporate Plan priorities update** – this was deferred to the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> September where Councillor Davies will be invited to provide an update on his agreed actions listed in the Council Plan.

**Outcomes:**

(Summarise the value scrutiny has added by looking at the issue(s) and any recommendations )

- that officers hold conversations with key house builders before the social value policy is finalised.
- that officers consider reaching out to recently retired former colleagues to determine whether they could be willing to return for a short time to support areas where there are recruitment challenges.
- that finance training be provided to new Scrutiny panel members.

**Monitoring Work**

(If monitoring previous recommendations please identify what difference Scrutiny has made)

**Looking Ahead**

(What are the next issues the Panel plans to look at?)

The Panel will next meet on the 19<sup>th</sup> September and the following items will be on the agenda

- Financial Management/Capital Plan
- Responding to Cost-of-Living Crisis
- Council Risk Register
- Procurement Strategy
- Cabinet Member progress update on agreed actions in the Council Plan

Informal meeting - regarding the Comms Strategy

**General comments (from the Lead Member)**

This has been an interesting introduction to chairing a Scrutiny panel and it is also a panel where, following the withdrawal of Cllr Cooper, only myself and Cllr Lawson have been members of the panel before. We are all jointly finding our feet, including the 3 new co-optees and given that finance and the response to the cost of living crisis fall within the remit of this panel, I anticipate it being a busy period for the panel.