

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel Minutes Tuesday 10th January 2023

Present:

Cllr Yusra Hussain
Cllr Matthew McGloughlin
Cllr Tyler Hawkins
Cllr John Taylor
Cllr Martyn Bolt

Attendees:

Councillor Elizabeth Smaje, Chair of Scrutiny
Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Member for Regeneration
Will Acornley – Head of Operational Services, Environment and Climate Change
Graham West, Service Director, Highways and Streetscene
Maryke Woods – Group Leader – Greenspace Operational Delivery
Joe Robertson – Woodland Development Manager, Environment and Climate Change
Gillian Wallace, Head of Employment and Skills, Skills and Regeneration
Edward Highfield, Service Director – Skills and Regeneration.

Apologies:

Councillor Aafaq Butt
Chris Friend (Co-optee)
Jane Emery (Co-optee)

1. Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Councillor Aafaq Butt, Chris Friend (Co-optee) and Jane Emery (Co-optee).

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

RESOLVED: Councillor Aafaq Butt's attendance be added to the minutes.

3. Interests

No Interests were declared.

4. Admission of the Public

All items were considered in the public session.

5. Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6. Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public.

7. Grounds Maintenance Current Position

The Panel considered the report, Grounds Maintenance Current Position presented by Maryke Woods, Group Leader, Greenspace Operational Delivery, who provided an update in relations to the Grounds Maintenance Services current position, and advised the Panel that:

- The service provided grounds maintenance to all parks and recreational grounds and maintained most greenspaces within Kirklees, as well as contract services to a range of clients.
- The team was small with 70 full time employees and was supported by seasonal staff in the Summer.
- The service offered a range of roles and an apprenticeship scheme, with 3 apprentices in training.
- The service cut approximately 4.8km² of grass, 35km of hedges, managed and maintained sports pitches, maintained 1,100 house gardens on behalf of homes and neighbourhoods, maintained over 5,000 locations across Kirklees and 70,000m² of shrubbery.
- The service offered a range of benefits which included:
 - Working with people / local groups to provide people with practical work experiences to help them back into employment.
 - 6 green flag awards for primary parks and country parks.
 - Free and open accessible green spaces people could enjoy which supported mental-health and wellbeing.
 - Working closely with partners to support biodiversity and the climate change agenda.
- Some of the challenges the service faced were in relation to:
 - Recruitment.
 - Budgets (no central budget to support parks / open spaces) the service was income generated through SLA's and client exposure.
 - Machinery, budgets were stretched and there were delays purchasing new fleets and machinery.
 - The gap between expected services and what resources allowed, which was approximately 33 full time employees between March and October.
 - Service standards, which were categorised into Gold, Silver, Bronze or Natural.
- New areas to maintain were added regularly, without the revenue or machinery to maintain them, which led to subcontracting the work.
- The section 106 revenue from planning was decreasing, due to developers choosing to use other management companies.
- The focus was to look at what services could be provided within the resources available, which included combining the silver and bronze categories and keeping the Gold and Natural as they were.
- A communications plan would be developed to share information with the public, and the key messages, which were:
 - Take littler home,
 - Clear up after dogs
 - The reasons as to why areas were maintained a certain way.
 - Service Standards, so people know what to expect.
- Future ambitions were:

- To improve network mapping and link in with other initiatives to increase biodiversity and habitat creation.
- To invest in more efficient machinery to carry out a wider variety of maintenance tasks.
- Improve the back-office systems, to be able to make better decision in the future.
- Enable and empower communities in sports groups, to take ownership of their spaces and access funding.
- Re-align service standards and budgets using data and knowledge.

The Panel acknowledged the 50+ years' service of two Council employees and recommended that their work be recognised and celebrated.

The Panel highlighted the challenges in relation to recruitment and suggested that alternative provisions and the Sunshine Sunflower Foundation be explored, for young people who needed practical learning opportunities which could provide them with a career pathway into the Council to support the recruitment challenge. The Panel also recommended that collaboration with the Councils Community Plus Service around this issue should be taken forward.

The Panel acknowledged the merge of silver and bronze service standards but queried the reduction in cutting at recreational grounds and of grass verges, suggesting sensitive consideration be given to football grounds, footpaths etc and to ensure road safety.

Graham West, Service Director, Highways and Streetscene responded to the panels questions and advised that, in relation to the Sunshine Sunflower Charity, the service was already engaged with the charity and would seek feedback.

In relation to football / recreation grounds the service were working with football clubs to look at increasing standards in house, but that there were also more opportunities for volunteers to support. Work was also being undertaken with Natural Kirklees who were keen to supplement support and add to the services that could be provided in the future.

Graham West responded to a question in relation to seasonal staff and the impact the recruitment freeze within Kirklees could have. Graham shared that consideration could still be given to recruitment, which would be assessed by the Strategic Director and a Peoples Panel. Graham further advised that vacancies for seasonal work were becoming more difficult to recruit to, which was likely due to the cost-of-living challenges.

Maryke Woods further responded to a question from the Panel in relation to the work being done to support biodiversity and rewilding. Maryke advised that mapping through net gain work and woodland creations supported this, and that part of the future plan was to make sure rewilding was done in the right places and where most benefit would be gained, looking holistically to make the right choices in the right places.

Regarding the proposed merge of the silver and bronze service standards, Councillor Elizabeth Smaje highlighted that people expected services standards to be followed, and asked how those standards would be met and what were the engagement plans.

Graham West responded in relation to service standards and advised that staff were committed to providing the best service, but the challenges were clear. The Council was reviewing the funding available to different service areas and once complete, if there were any amendments to the service standards, engagement would take place. Graham highlighted that the key messages were important and would benefit all in terms of getting others to help and the service being able to undertake its core services.

Maryke Woods, further added in relation to service standards that it was an interim position based on the resources that were available and trying to maintain spaces as best as possible. Once the proposals were developed, engagement would take place and the plan would be presented to Scrutiny.

Councillor Smaje also highlighted that support for different groups was not available across all of Kirklees and asked what was going to be done to address this. Maryke Woods responded to advise that the team would support any local group where possible but there had been gaps in terms of recruitment and the service were running at 20% vacancy level, which added enormous pressure.

Councillor Smaje highlighted The Playing Pitch Strategy 2015, which identified how many pitches / recreation grounds were needed but noted it had not been updated. In response, Graham West advised the service were keen to understand the strategy, what was needed, and the level of service required.

Councillor Smaje noted concerns that the service had reduced the amount of cutting in recreational grounds and had planted trees, which may reduce the size of play areas. Councillor Smaje also wanted to understand how bookings would work for recreational grounds going forwards.

Maryke Woods advised in terms of rewilding that there would be no changes in relation to maintenance, other than to reduce some cutting within a three-weekly cycle. Joe Robertson, Woodland Manager added that consultation was taking place with local Ward Councillors and communities to address any issues regarding the designs. Consultation had also taken place with development colleagues in parks who considered the Playing Pitch Strategy and designs were to be amended as needed. It was further advised that the Council had committed to the White Rose Forest and to increase its canopy cover to 19%, which meant some land was lost to tree cover.

Joe Robertson further provided reassurance that play space was not going to be removed but there would be a change in the type of play interaction the children would have in those areas. For example, woodland aspects had been added to make area more engaging for children and communities which provided a range of benefits.

Will Acornley, Head of Operational Services responded to a question from the Panel in relation to section 106 and the net value, and advised that, in the past a calculation over a ten-year period was carried out in relation to how much it cost to maintain a

site, which was then provided in a lump sum and broken down annually. Once the ten-year period had ended, maintenance costs transferred across to the Council's own revenue budget. It was further advised that there was around 2 to 3 years of funding left before the revenue pressure fully emerged into the authority.

Will Acornley responded to a question from the Panel in relation to greenway maintenance and shared that the team were working with other services in relation to funding, including combined authority funding. Will advised that Sus Trans had provided an initial funding offer, but this was unaffordable, however talks were still ongoing.

Will Acornley responded to a question from the Panel regarding machinery in terms of efficiencies and linking with council initiatives and advised that the team were looking at electric hand tools, new innovations such as GPS linked lining machines and remote controls, but that the biggest challenges was the change in seasonality and the need for machinery to be able to manage it.

Graham West responded to a question regarding volunteers and people who may support Council services in the future and advised that Natural Kirklees were able to make payments and that the Council funded their public liability. Graham highlighted the need to look at how the council's public liability could be extended for other people. Graham also shared that Service Level Agreements were crucial and it was important that if different models of working were clearly communicated if decided.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report, 'Grounds Maintenance Current Position' and recommended that:

- 1) Thanks be given to Officers serving 50+ years with the Council within the Grounds Maintenance Team and that these officers be recognised and celebrated.
- 2) Consideration be given to alternative provisions to support young people needing a more practical learning experience and providing them with a career pathway, and to support recruitment challenges.
- 3) Feedback be provided around the work and engagement with the Sunshine Sunflower charity in Kirkburton Ward.
- 4) Community Plus and social prescribing services be made aware of opportunities working in partnership with Grounds Maintenance.
- 5) An engagement plan be developed in respect of any changes to service standards proposals and be presented to scrutiny.
- 6) Improved co-ordination of tree planning on recreational grounds and understanding of what is needed in that area.
- 7) Where there are 3rd party arrangements to support grounds maintenance, service agreements, including financial or physical compensation be put in place.
- 8) To be considerate of different community areas to ensure community group are balanced across the board.

8. Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review

The Panel considered the report Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review, presented by Joe Robertson, Woodland Development Manager, who highlighted that:

- There were several pieces of legislations that placed duties on the Council to manage its tree stock.
- The Council owned an estimated 190,000 trees that they were responsible for, and that provided multiple benefits in terms of mental health, biodiversity, pollution absorption etc.
- The Capital Asset Evaluation for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) was used to calculate the monetary value of trees, which totalled around £51m.
- There was no budget for the trees team, and it was completely reliant on income generation.
- There were 15 members of staff, which included:
 - 8 Arborists (the tree surgeons who carried out the physical work to the trees).
 - 4 Inspectors (who carried out safety evaluations).
- There had been an increased in ad-hoc requests for inspections which were being triaged in terms of safety level and danger.
- The challenges in the team were in relation to attracting and retaining staff, which had resulted in more engagement with private contractors for routine works. This was via tender which was significantly slower.
- There was an imbalance of expectation and the actual resources available.
- There was a need to increase repeat inspections due to gaps in not being able to carry out basic safety inspections.
- Ash Dieback would increase the workload significantly and the team were drafting an action plan in relation to this.
- One of the main impacts was on the team's ability to carry out emergency responses as well as its statutory functions.
- Health and Safety England (HSE) statistics identified 6 deaths a year from falling trees or branches, with half of them being in public spaces.
- The risk was broadly acceptable, but the team needed to ensure it could deliver services as reasonably practical to ensure people were not exposed to risks.
- The Policy review was to bring services in line with industry best practise, case law and capacity issues, and would include a New Policy Statement, Risk Framework, Management Standards and Service Standards.
- Service Standards would include targeted timeframes for work to be completed and target times to meet enquiries through a standard proforma.

The Panel shared that the aims listed within the Policy were good but recommended that a target to increase tree numbers and tree cover be added, which was referenced throughout the policy.

In response to a comment raised by the Panel in relation to the accessibility of the proforma and policy document on the website, Joe Robertson advised that, the proforma would be based online with links to the policy document to make it as accessible as possible.

The Panel noted the response and further suggested that the development of the proforma be carried out in consultation with Councillor Enquiries.

The Panel queried whether the HSE deaths were in relation to weather incidents recognising that in most cases they would have been difficult to predict, but equally acknowledged that having the right inspection regime in place was important.

Joe Robertson responded to advise that a lot of the deaths in public spaces had been due to storm damage but were also exacerbated by defects. Joe reiterated the importance of the need to have as safe as reasonably practical measure in place.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to removing deadwood from parks and open spaces, and advised that, the wording in the policy needed to be clear in relation to the focus on biodiversity and that deadwood would only be removed if it was a hazard.

Graham West, Service Director, Highways and Streetscene responded to a question in relation to the impact the Council's recruitment freeze would have on planned recruitment and advised that each case would be considered individually.

Joe Robertson further added that there were recruitment issues prior to the Council's recruitment freeze, especially in relation to attracting skilled staff.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to the outsourcing and procurement of services, and advised that, this has been carried out in batches to determine what work could be contracted and what work needed to be carried out more urgently by the team.

Graham West further advised that there were a variety of different frameworks and several contracts in place, but if there was a need to extend the offer, the team would work with other authorities to help speed work up.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to public engagement and reassurance and advised that the focus was getting the policy in place and on the website but that the website needed some development work.

Joe Robertson responded to a question regarding trees blocking natural light and shared that because trees were a naturally entity that grew incrementally, the legislation surrounding the right to light act did not apply to trees, but that the policy did allow for discretion to alleviate issues where funding was available.

The Panel highlighted the Tree Risk Framework, in relation to 'no routine inspections on all young tree generally below 5 meters' and queried whether this included newly planted woodlands.

Joe Robertson responded to advise that the trees would be inspected but that trees that size were not generally seen as a risk and that it was added into the policy to ensure the team did not overcommit their resources.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to legislation and the protection from imported trees and disease. Joe advised that this was covered by national biosecurity and that the team would not import any products. Joe also advised that the team had a partnership agreement with Leeds City Council in terms of sourcing whips (young tree stock).

Joe Robertson responded to a question regarding biodegradable guards and shared that biodegradable plastic guards were being used with a view to use NEXT GEN in the future, which were wool and resin based, and that any plastic or biodegradable plastic guards would be removed and recycled.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to creating a tree nursery within Kirklees, and shared that, tree nurseries were commercially difficult in terms of capital costs to set up and the time needed to grow the first produce. Joe added that although there was a shortage of new trees nationally, by the time the nursery was up and running, other areas would also be up to capacity which would be a commercial risk to the Council.

Joe Robertson responded to a question regarding the Waste Strategy and composting and advised the team had worked with a national company called Jenkinson's to transfer the Timber from Arboriculture into biomass, and that the team would continue to look at how it could better use wood waste going forward.

Joe Robertson responded to a question in relation to filling or replacing trees that had been removed. Joe advised it was difficult to set specific numbers and that work was being undertaken with planning in relation to canopy cover increase, which would also be considered when filling or replacing trees, as well as the diversity of trees.

Graham West shared that the policy was safety critical based on the level of funding and resource available. The amount of work would grow and put further pressure on the inspection regime to ensure people were safe across Kirklees.

Graham advised that Ash Dieback would require a funding stream and additional resources, noting that some Local Authorities had had to put in a dedicated team and resources to undertake inspections and where necessary remove trees that had disease.

Graham West responded to a question in relation to the triage system and identifying severity and advised that the policy would include clear standards and how they were triaged to meet safety critical requirements.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report, 'Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review' and recommended that:

- 1) To add to the policy the aim to increase tree numbers and tree cover.
- 2) For officers to speak to Councillor enquiries regarding the development of the proforma.

- 3) The wording around removing deadwood in the policy be revised to reflect that deadwood would only to be removed when deemed hazardous.
- 4) The wording on point 8.3 be revised to better reflect the procedure in relation to the right to light and the discretion around alleviating problems where funding was available.
- 5) It was important to ensure the diversity of trees when growing and forming woodlands.
- 6) The wording in the policy be amended to make clear that the procurement of trees was sourced locally through Leeds City Council.
- 7) More information relating to Ash dieback be presented to the Panel at a future meeting in terms of funding and resources.
- 8) The Policy be presented back to scrutiny prior to Cabinet.

9. Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships

The Panel considered the report 'Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships' which was introduced by Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Member for Regeneration who advised that it was a long-term policy that focused on trying to increase the numbers of people in work and upskilling Kirklees residents.

Gillian Wallace, Head of Employment and Skills, presented an overview of the work taking place in relation to employment and skills, and advised that the report focused heavily of adult provision. Gillian shared that:

- Many of the challenges were not recent but an accumulation of a lack of investment and activity in the past.
- There were two work strands identified that would help tackle the challenges:
 - The future workforce – working with school-aged children and people in education.
 - Upskilling and re-skilling adults already in employment.
- The challenges identified were:
 - Too many jobs in Kirklees paid below the National Living Wage.
 - The local adult population had lower skills levels than the national average.
 - Low skill levels impacted on productivity and in turn wage levels.
- The Solutions were:
 - Significant investment in skills at all levels and all ages.
 - Collaboration across the public, private and third sectors.
 - National, regional, and local policy responsibility, and funding streams.
- The Kirklees Employment and Skills Plan was developed in response to the challenges and to make sense of what Kirklees wanted to prioritise and achieve.
- The Plan needed to define what the Kirklees Ask was, what it's position was going to be and how it could maximise on the opportunities that had become available to address the challenges.
- The Plan had been developed over the past year and was in the early delivery stage.
- The plan did not exist in isolation, it was in line with the Kirklees Economic Strategy and Education Strategy (Kirklees Futures).

- The plan was developed on data, employer input, and stake holders input to identify the 4 priorities, which were:
 - Empowering Young People.
 - Digital Inclusion.
 - Supporting Communities to Learn and Progress.
 - Skills for the Future.
- There were measures in the plan to show impact and to help minimise the gap between Kirklees and the National picture.
- There were a range of Partners involved in the Employment and Skill Partnership.
- The Employment and Skills Programme included programmes for individuals, programmes for businesses, and pipeline programmes.
- Statistics in Kirklees regarding apprenticeship were not great due to the reforms in 2019 and the pandemic.
- Apprenticeships were key and a unique project to support individuals and help businesses.
- There had been some improvement in apprenticeships, but Kirklees were not where they hope to be.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding the plans to improve and expand provision in North Kirklees. It was advised that Kirklees College had a presence in North Kirklees and that there was a range of independent training providers, who worked remotely and utilised voluntary sector provision. Gillian agreed that there needed to be a breadth of provision across Kirklees.

The Panel suggested it would be useful to engage with Local MP's to support this work as they had access to levelling up funds and to ministers. The Panel also highlighted that the data in the plan showed Kirklees performance was better in some areas when compared to the National / West Yorkshire average. The Panel acknowledged the low pay levels and agreed the Council should be aspiring to improve the level of pay.

Gillian Wallace noted the Panel's suggestion that the measures in the plan needed to be more quantifiable, and advised that this was the intention, and that the plan was a starting point that could be built upon. In response to a question in relation to the Employment and Skill Commission Gillian further advised it had been superseded by the Partnership.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding the apprenticeship for all programme not hitting ESF targets and advised that it was a pilot programme and traditional results were made to fit. Results were based around achieving a unit, which put Kirklees behind the curve in terms of the delay in being able to collect the evidence and prove it within the rules of the funding agreement.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding the levy transfer and the take up from local businesses and shared that the Council were working with 10 business across Kirklees, and it was the Local Authorities levy that was funding their apprenticeships. Gillian further advised that there had been a 300% increase in enquiries into the levy transfer pot and feedback from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) was that they had seen a huge up take since the Kirklees

apprenticeship for all programme, and that the number of enquiries has enabled them to do a lot of matching.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding the apprenticeship grant and business take up and advised that there were 180 enquiries in the system with the expectation that at least 80% would pay out and claim the full grant, and there was capacity for more. The grant was running as a pilot project and an evaluation would be carried out to identify if the wage subsidy added value and made a difference.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding pre-16 education, and advised that, it had progressed in recent years due to OFSTED recognising the importance of career development. Schools were now being measured against Gatsby benchmarks. C&K Careers were also working with schools and sixth forms to support them to achieve the Gatsby benchmarks, and to engage with local businesses.

The Panel noted the responses to questions and highlighted that there had been some resistance to work with Kirklees College and suggested it was important to improve relations.

Gillian Wallace responded and advised that apprenticeships were a commercial market and employers had a choice who they used as their apprenticeship provider. Gillian further added that colleges were engaging well with businesses, were working with Careers Advisors and were open to conversations and adjusting their curriculum to meet business needs. However, there were other independent training providers who were more specialist and should be encouraged, as some industries in Kirklees needed a niche provider.

The Panel noted that there were some employers who wanted training courses to take place out of works time and recommended that it was not the model the Council adopted.

Gillian Wallace responded and advised that there was a need for apprenticeship to be flexible and a variety of programmes available to meet the individuals needs and business's needs, and that the Council worked closely with People Service's to provide a framework of providers to support that.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question from the Panel regarding the niche market and the skills set needed. Gillian shared that there was a Local Skills Improvement Plan in place which was led by the Chamber of Commerce and conversations were taking place with business regarding the skills set they needed. Gillian shared that it was important to ask the right questions to determine what the need was now, and then in the future, to identify the gaps and develop the provision.

Gillian further advised that the West Yorkshire devolution deal had provided increased freedom in relation to the adult education budget. The Council were working closely with the WYCA and where there was a business need, funding could be considered to procure extra training.

The Panel highlighted that the Chamber of Commerce was not a representative of businesses, and that engagement with Industry bodies was more effective in terms of identifying the skills set needed.

Gillian Wallace responded and advised that the Chamber of Commerce had a limited membership, and although they were leading, it was about engaging with a much wider base, and ensuring the voice of Kirklees businesses was heard and represented.

Gillian Wallace responded to a question in relation to job security and providing reassurance and advised that transferable skills were key and ensuring apprenticeship frameworks reflected that.

Gillian Wallace acknowledged and agreed there was a big piece of work to be done around myth busting, not just for people going into apprenticeship but also the surrounding network. Gillian shared the benefit of having C and K careers to offer advice and the need to amplify success stories. Gillian shared the use of the top 100 careers initiatives to showcase some of the fantastic businesses and opportunities available within Kirklees, which would be built on each year.

Gillian responded to a question regarding apprenticeship vacancies and advised that apprenticeships had to be linked to a job role and the employer deciding what they needed.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report 'Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships' and recommended that:

- 1) Work to continue to ensure a breadth of provision across Kirklees to meet the needs of individual learners and businesses.
- 2) Local MPs be briefed in relation to the policy and local business and educational needs.
- 3) A joint discussion with the Children's Scrutiny Panel be considered.
- 4) Measures to be quantifiable, setting out the current position, and benchmarks be added to the plan to show progress.
- 5) A further update be given to scrutiny around targets, about how these will be achieved and measuring success when appropriate
- 6) Reference be made to the Employment and Skills Partnerships to replace Employment and Skills Commission.
- 7) Actual figures be provided in relation to the increase in Levy fund enquiries.
- 8) Engagement should be held with a wider group of businesses, not just the Chamber of Commerce to seek the views of those who do not regularly have time to attend meetings to ensure their representation.
- 9) To ensure that success stories are amplified.

10. Work Programme 2022/23

Councillor Hawkins queried the Bereavement Services Offer item and why it had been removed from the work plan for the February meeting.

Jodie Harris, Governance Officer advised that the item had been deferred due to changes to the strategy and that it would be added to the work plan for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Councillor Hawkins queried the Homes and Neighbourhood item and asked what it was in relation to. It was agreed that:

RESOLVED:

- 1) The bereavement service office be considered in the next municipal year 2023/24.
- 2) An email be sent to the Panel clarifying the Homes and Neighbourhood item scheduled for the February meeting.
- 3) A joint discussion with the Children's Scrutiny Panel be considered in relation to the education landscape.
- 4) An update on the White Rose Forest be given to the Panel in the next municipal year.
- 5) Information relating to Ash Dieback be presented to the Panel at a future meeting in terms of funding streams and resources.