

Kirklees Council

Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Cllr Yusra Hussain

Panel: Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update: From December 2022 to February 2023

Panel Highlights

Lead Member briefings:

- 6th December 2022 - Head of Post 16- Progression and Partnerships in respect of the report 'Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships'
- 7th December 2022 - Service Director for Highways and Streetscene, Woodland Development Manager and Group Leader - Greenspace Operational Delivery, in respect of Grounds Maintenance and the Tree Policy review
- 14th February 2023, Planning Policy and Strategy Group Leader in respect of the outcomes of the public consultation on the Affordable Housing and Housing Mix SPD and pre-decision scrutiny ahead of adoption of the SPD by Cabinet.
- 14th February 2023, Service Director - Homes and Neighbourhoods, in respect of the Future of Housing Homes and Neighbourhoods Update
- 14th February 2023, Service Director - Highways and Streetscene, Project Support Officer, in respect of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's) Review Update.

Overview of Panel Activity and meetings

At the last meeting of the Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel held on 10th January 2023, the Panel considered the following updates:

- Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships
- Grounds Maintenance Current Position
- Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review

Key Highlights and Outcomes

Grounds Maintenance Current Position

The Panel considered the report, Grounds Maintenance Current Position. It was noted 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. It was highlighted that the service included 2 employees who had 50+years' service with the Council and the Panel acknowledged this and recommended that their work be recognised and celebrated.

The Panel further noted that the Grounds Maintenance service also 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.

The Panel also received the details of the key challenges in relation to Recruitment, Budgets, machinery, and the gap between expected and resourced service standards.

Outcomes:

During the discussion to follow the Panel 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 groups are balanced across the board.

Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review

The Panel considered the report Trees Team Capacity and Tree Policy Review. The report set out the current position of the Council's Trees Team (forestry), in terms of its capacity challenges, and provided an overview of the ongoing Tree Policy Review, including the new draft policy document emerging from this review process.

The Panel were informed 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 Trees Team was made up of 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).

Key challenges included attracting and retaining staff, which had resulted in more engagement with private contractors for routine works as well as an imbalance of expectation and the actual resources available. There had been an increased in ad-hoc requests for inspections and a need to increase repeat inspections due to gaps in not being able to carry out basic safety inspections.

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.

Ash Dieback was also a key issue as this would increase the workload significantly and the team were drafting an action plan in relation to this.

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 (to include targeted timeframes for work to be completed and target times to meet enquiries through a standard proforma).

Outcomes:

The Panel 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 relation to funding streams and resources.
- 8) The Policy be presented back to scrutiny prior to Cabinet.

Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships

The Panel considered the report 'Overview of Post 16 Skills, Training and Apprenticeships' with a particular focus on at how this influences economic development.

As part of the update the Panel were provided with an overview of the work taking place in relation to employment and skills (including the Employment and Skills Plan) and the key challenges. It was noted 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).
- 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.

In the discussion to follow the Panel investigated a number of key areas including:

- How the Employment and Skills Plan aimed to address the alignment of local education provision and business need.
- Ensuring that quantifiable measures (showing both the current position and the targets) were included in the plan to demonstrate progress.
- Increasing adult work training, particularly in relation to enterprise and management skills to improve economic productivity.
- How are the Council working with employers to provide more work-based training, and more inclusive training opportunities
- The various packages in relation to apprenticeships and how to work with employers to increase stability.
- How Kirklees's voice and needs could be amplified at a national scale through local MP's.

- The importance of ensuring engagement with a wide base of Kirklees Businesses

Outcomes:

The Panel recommended that:

- 1) Work continued 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.

Monitoring Work

In December the 2022 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) was circulated to the Panel for their consideration. The ASR had been appraised and approved by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The ASR is a legal requirement under the Councils obligations to undertake Local Air Quality Management (LAQM). The ASR provided a look back on Air Quality monitoring data for the calendar year of 2021 as well as some progress made in relation to the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)

Looking Ahead

At upcoming meetings of the Panel, the following items are to be considered:

- The outcomes of the public consultation on the 'Affordable Housing and Housing Mix SPD' , pre-decision scrutiny ahead of adoption of the SPD by Cabinet
- Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's) Review Update
- Future of Housing Homes and Neighbourhoods
- Statutory Food Hygiene/ Health and Safety Plans 2023 – 2024