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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24th October 2023

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Moses Crook
Councillor Jo Lawson

Apologies: Councillor Bill Armer

35 Membership of Committee

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Bill Armer.

**36 Minutes of Previous Meeting
Resolved –**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

37 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

38 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

39 Deputations/Petitions

A deputation was received from Carl Mason in relation to the proposed closure of Colne Valley Leisure Centre.

A response was given by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Finance and Regeneration Portfolio.

40 Public Question Time

Under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11, the following questions were received:

1. At the Kirklees Cabinet meeting of 26th September 2023 a report was presented, the title of which was “Kirklees Active Leisure Centre Offer 2024/25 – Consultation”, Section 2.3 of this report explains how KAL delivers services to over 65k registered customers and received 2.5m customer visits in 2022/23, why then does the consultation booklet produced by the Council only attribute 22,391 members to these visits, the effect of this is misleading to the public by vastly underestimating the number of customers who use these vital community assets and could be affected by any closures?

2. Section 2.8 of the same report sets out a review programme which started in June 2023, nowhere in this discovery phase does it mention reviewing the willingness and or ability for people to pay additional fees to support the centres, likewise the same question has not formed part of the consultation, why have the people of Kirklees not been asked if they are willing to financially support these vital community assets with a change in the fees structure?

Responses were provided by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Finance and Regeneration Portfolio.

41 **Leader of Council - Priorities**

Councillor Cathy Scott, the Leader of Council, was welcomed to the meeting to talk about her priorities for 2023/24.

She explained that a new Council Plan was in development and would be finalised in early 2024. She set out her four core priorities as follows:

- **Address the financial position in a fair and balanced way.**
Balancing the budget was the most pressing challenge, against the background of funding issues affecting local authorities across the country and the economic pressures. This would necessitate some difficult decisions and the aim was to do this in a transparent, fair and balanced manner. There was a need to protect the most vulnerable and to continue to assist residents in respect of the cost of living. The impact of decisions would be assessed, and the Council would lobby for changes to the funding system.
- **Strive to transform Council services to become more efficient, effective and modern.**
Limited resources would be used as efficiently and effectively as possible. This would include work on early intervention and prevention, and safeguarding. The Council would continue to work with partners to avoid duplication and share knowledge and resources. The work already being done to deliver and improve services, such as in adult social care and children's services, would continue.
- **Continue to deliver a greener, healthier Kirklees and address the challenges of climate change.**
This would include the prioritisation of delivery of an environmental strategy and net-zero commitments. Progress would be pursued in respect of energy, waste, and improvements to green spaces. There would be a continued focus on prevention work in health services, alongside partners.
- **Continue to invest and regenerate our towns and villages to support our diverse places and communities to flourish.**
This priority addressed the need to build resilience for local people. Aiming to ensure the necessary infrastructure was in place to offer opportunities for the future and to bring investment into the district. It would include improving housing. This would be undertaken prudently, and the Capital Programme was flexible to allow the plans to be responsive to changing conditions and challenges.

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

- The Cabinet's agenda was 'to do with, not to' and to enable and support local communities. The Leader would own the priorities. It was important that there

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was a clear vision but there had to be fluidity in the approach to facilitate a response to external pressures.

- It was suggested that there would be value in the Council looking at Climate Emergency UK's Action Scorecards as a useful tool to help demonstrate its action on climate change; the Council had been rated below average by this organisation. It was explained that the Council had responded to the score it had been given by Climate Emergency UK but this had not been reflected in the published version.
- The Council had been the first local authority to receive an award from the Royal Meteorological Society for its work in this area.
- The Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) score was due to be published shortly and an improvement on last year's rating, of B, was anticipated. This score was widely recognised as an important measure in terms of climate impact.
- It was noted that the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Panel was to look at the issue of air quality at their meeting the following day.
- Reports would be submitted to Cabinet in respect of the work to achieve the priorities, including risk assessments and timelines, so that progress towards targets would be in view.
- The impact on the Council's staff of the current financial position and the negative narrative in the press was acknowledged and it was very important that they were provided with the necessary support and reassurance; systems and packages were in place to do so.
- The assurance in respect of the need to build economic resilience and to protect the most vulnerable was welcomed.
- In respect of the investment into towns and villages, there were a number of current investment zones and there had been a recent Government announcement about funding for Dewsbury of £20 million over a ten-year period. There were still opportunities to deliver on the Council's blueprints and other regeneration plans, albeit that this may have to be through a phased approach.
- The importance of effective consultation, the correct information being in place, and ensuring that everyone has a fair opportunity to respond was stressed.
- The feedback provided and the impact of each decision would be considered as part of the process.
- With regard to the continuation of ward-based budgets, no decisions had been made at this point. This funding was much valued by ward councillors and could be used as 'seed funding' in certain instances. The role of ward councillors as leaders within their communities and their ability to enable and support them, in conjunction with partners and volunteers, or in signposting to relevant funding opportunities was vital.

Resolved –

(1) That the Leader be thanked for attending the meeting and that she be invited to return to the Committee, at an appropriate time, to give an update on progress with her priorities.

(2) That it be noted that the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Panel will be looking at climate change and that the points raised be taken forward by the Lead Member as appropriate.

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The Director of West Yorkshire Joint Services (WYJS), Andy Robson, attended the meeting and gave a presentation about the work of the organisation, with a particular focus on work within Kirklees. A briefing note had been included with the agenda for the meeting which explained that WYJS delivered a number of shared services, including a number of statutory services, on behalf of the five West Yorkshire Councils.

Information relating to specific cases within the district was provided to members as background information. This briefing note, Appendix 2 to the report, was private, in accordance with Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, in that it contained information relating to an individual/individuals and information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

The following points were highlighted in the presentation:

- Kirklees' financial contribution was based on its proportion of the West Yorkshire population and was approximately £821,000 per annum, equivalent to £1.90 per head.
- A modernisation agenda was being pursued, whilst ensuring that the core activities were maintained and linking into the priorities of the West Yorkshire districts.
- The Trading Standards service had an excellent reputation at national level, but funding was challenging; funding in other areas of the country was much higher per head.
- The current financial challenges facing many local authorities were acknowledged.
- Resources had to be prioritised and the approach was intelligence-led enforcement.
- Work was undertaken to disrupt the activities of those who targeted and scammed vulnerable people, with the aim of trying to ensure those vulnerable individuals could live independently at home for as long as possible, which would help to reduce the burden on local authorities.
- The recent challenges associated with the cost-of-living had meant that the organisation had focussed on issues in respect of fuel and food businesses, in order to protect both citizens and businesses.
- The Archives Service also had a fantastic reputation and was also a leader in the field of moving, packaging and labelling collections. There were challenges associated with the suitability of some of the current Council accommodation where archives were being housed.

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

- Work was being undertaken with the relevant Kirklees officers to address the issues with the archive accommodation but there was a need for some elements to be dealt with as soon as possible.
- The Asbestos Service provided a service to local authorities and efforts were being made to extend this to those that did not currently use WYJS. The service was also trying to compete commercially in the marketplace, where there could

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be issues with economies of scale and, potentially, viability concerns in the longer term.

- In terms of the level of resourcing for the work of the Trading Standards Service, the intelligence-led approach meant that action was directed to where intelligence reports/complaints had been made. If more funding was available then this would facilitate the undertaking of more pro-active and preventative enforcement work. In respect of addressing the sale of illegal and unsafe tobacco products or vapes, that were often targeted towards young people, this could include initiatives such as the use of test purchasing by minors or a programme of surveillance across the wider business community.
- The intelligence-led core service in West Yorkshire was very effective.
- Educational work and early interventions could reap benefits in the longer term. The organisation did work with partners, within the confines of the resources available, and asked them to signpost and relay messages on its behalf.
- It was noted that the costs incurred by people who were successfully prosecuted for selling illicit tobacco did not compare to the street value of the items being sold.
- National resources were accessed in respect of specialist dogs used to sniff out illicit tobacco products, the suggestion that the service/the Police might benefit from having their own trained dog could be considered.
- Community engagement, to raise awareness and offer advice in respect of scams and fraud, was an important element and ideally there would be more capacity to do so. The impact on vulnerable victims and the barriers to reporting were recognised. Requests for engagement with particular groups could be considered and would be prioritised if there was intelligence to indicate that this may be valuable in a particular community.
- The quality of the archive service was excellent.

Councillor Davies, the relevant Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder, gave assurances that the position in respect of the current accommodation for the archives had been discussed with WYJS and a plan was in place to address the issues.

Resolved –

(1) That the Director of West Yorkshire Joint Services be thanked for attending the meeting to report on the work of the organisation in Kirklees.

(2) That copies of the ‘Little Book of Big Scams’ be shared with the Committee.

43 Cost of Living Programme - Update

Councillor Paul Davies, the Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder, introduced a presentation which provided an update on the work being undertaken as part of the Council’s Cost of Living Programme. He drew Member’s attention to a report recently published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in respect of destitution in the UK and its impacts, which provided some context for the work being undertaken in Kirklees.

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The presentation, by Lucy Wearmouth, Head of Improving Population Health and Stephen Bonnell, Head of Policy, Partnerships and Corporate Planning, highlighted the following points:

- The three priorities within the programme:
 - (i) Emergency Response: focussing on those people already in crisis.
 - (ii) Resilience: focussed on building places where people look after each other.
 - (iii) Prevention: acting now to address the medium and long-term challenges and prevent future economic crisis.
- Programme Delivery and Governance, which included a Programme Board which brought together those Council services aligned to each of the priorities on a monthly basis and which reported to the relevant Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director and then fed through to Cabinet, Council and Executive Team.
- The Challenges; including the complexity of addressing the issue, the impact of persistent poverty, reaching those in need, and the pressure on resources and finance.
- The Successes; including the establishment of ten sustainable 'The Bread and Butter Thing' hubs, the use of ward budgets to support cost-of living initiatives; and the management of £14.8 million of funding through the Household Support Fund.
- A case study illustrating the impact for the community and benefits for those involved as volunteers.

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

- Existing hubs had been utilised as 'warm spaces' and although, in practice, it had appeared that people would rather have assistance to allow them to stay at home, this use had contributed to creating networks within areas which had been beneficial in building connections and knowledge of what was available. It was acknowledged that such provision worked best when it also had a purpose such as access to activities or support.
- In response to a question about whether more could be offered in the area of benefits advice/advocacy it was explained that there was a wish to develop more support and signposting, using existing facilities where possible. The Council had a small Advocacy Team and also had a contract with Kirklees Citizen's Advice Bureau and Law Centre. The ways in which advice could be delivered in the future was under consideration and the views of Members would be welcomed.
- The Council response to the impact of the increased cost of living was commended, as well as the support provided by numerous community groups. It was noted that additional benefits also resulted from some initiatives, such as the saving of food from landfill, that contributed positively to other Council priorities.
- Further extension of 'The Bread and Butter Thing' would be welcomed. In addition to its core purpose, this model was also valuable in terms of building connections and friendships between those volunteering, and it was suggested that it might also offer opportunities to provide financial advice and support.
- Prevention was a key aspect to this work; breaking the cycle of poverty, developing resilience in communities and developing community wealth building.

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This approach was being actively pursued alongside the Combined Authority and the third sector.

- 98 grants, from the Household Support Fund, had been provided to local community groups via One Community; there was a broad spread across North and South Kirklees. It was recognised that some smaller groups might find it difficult to make a bid, but One Community took a relatively 'light touch' approach.
- Delivery of the initial funding from the West Yorkshire Mayor's Fund had been analysed and the Kirklees model; the way it had been allocated and used, had been found to be strong.
- There were concerns about smaller groups understanding that they were able to access funding and how to apply. In some cases, they may not be specifically labelling what they did but were nevertheless achieving appropriate goals.
- There was a need to give consideration to widening the provision of information and signposting, on the help and support available, beyond the main hubs.

Resolved –

That the comments of the Committee be taken on board in future work on the Council's Cost of Living Programme.

44 Corporate Property Strategy

The Committee received a report which provided a summary of the approach to property asset management, and the use of good practice in developing and bringing forward the Council's Corporate Property Strategy.

Councillor Graham Turner, the Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder, introduced the presentation given by Daniel McDermott, Strategic Manager, Assets and Estates, and Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director – Development. The following points were highlighted:

- The aim of the Strategy was to provide a fit for purpose, modern, effective and efficient estate to support and facilitate Council services; promote and enable the Council's corporate priorities; and link and collaborate with key strategic partners and local interest organisations and groups.
- The approach followed good practice and the RICS professional standard for strategic asset management of local authority assets.
- The strategy was at a formative stage, and the key steps for the process to be taken in bringing it forward:
 - Definition
 - Context
 - Standards
 - Policies
 - Application
- Disposal of surplus and unused land and property assets was not only a response to the financial position but was also Government policy. A holistic review was in progress which was taking a core estate approach.

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

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- The strategy being at an early stage did not prevent the authority taking considered and transparent decisions on the disposal of land and building assets, as it had done in the past. A process had been undertaken to ensure that there was an understanding of which assets were being utilised to their full effect, the necessary geographical spread in terms of service delivery, and the Capital Plan, revenue and maintenance budgets in respect of the ongoing needs of each asset, prior to proposals being brought forward. All service delivery buildings would have an Integrated Impact Assessment associated with them.
- Consultation would take place in respect of any alternative service delivery prior to decision.
- Regular reviews would be undertaken and reports taken to Cabinet as appropriate.
- It was anticipated that the strategy would be in place in 2024. There were existing, approved, policies and procedures in place that were being followed, the strategy aimed to bring these together. Assurance was given that these were fit for purpose for the decisions that had been/were being undertaken.
- Key stakeholders included both local and regional NHS, blue light services and more local organisations and partners.
- Engagement would be undertaken with local organisations and Ward Councillors about proposals for future use of building assets, where appropriate, and taking account of commercial sensitivities. Land could be more complex and may involve the Planning Authority which had a significant reach in terms of engagement with the public.
- It was noted that the Authority had a duty to seek to achieve best value in disposing of assets; this could include consideration of the end use of an asset.
- Consideration of internal need and possible future need would be taken into account when developing the core estate. The use of a building if converted, such as to meet a need for housing, would also be considered.

Resolved –

That the strategy be brought back to the Committee for further consideration at an appropriate point.

45 Work Programme 2023/24

The latest version of the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24 was considered and noted.