

Kirklees Council

Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Cllr Jo Lawson

Panel: Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update: From June 2023 to November 2023

Overview of Panel Activity and Meetings

Work Programme Workshop (informal) meeting held 14th June 2023

The Panel's work programming workshop was attended by the Strategic Director for Environment and Climate Change, and Service Leads/Senior officers. The relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders were also in attendance.

The workshop helped Panel members to gain a better understanding of the direction of travel of multiple strategies within Environment and Climate Change as well as Cabinet Members key priorities. This information was then used to inform the Panel's work programme for the 2023-24 municipal year and their 'golden threads' (i.e.- climate impact and delivery of net zero targets).

Lead member Briefings:

(Purpose overview of forward plan, the work programme, and Cabinet Portfolio Holder priorities)

- 31st July 2023 (Chair and Service Director - Highways and Streetscene)
- 14th November 2023 (Chair, Cabinet Portfolio Holder - Culture and Greener Kirklees and Service Director - Highways & Streetscene).

Meeting of the Panel held 4th July 2023:

- Cumulative Impact Assessment
- White Rose Forest – Summary Review 2022

Meeting of the Panel held 30th August 2023:

- Re-Profile of Kirklees Resource and Waste Strategy 2021-2030
- Snow Warden Volunteer Scheme Update

Meeting of the Panel to be held 25th October 2023:

- Council Owned Tree and Woodland Management Policy
Air Quality Update

Key Highlights and Outcomes

Cumulative Impact Assessment:

Background: The Licensing Act 2003 requires the licensing authority to prepare and publish a statement of its licensing policy at least every five years. The existing policy was adopted in January 2020 and was due for renewal in 2025. As a part of the review, work had been undertaken to consider the introduction of a CIA.

Meeting of the Panel held 4th July 2023:

The Panel considered a report on proposals to introduce a Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) Policy under the Licensing Act 2003.

The purpose of the report was to brief members of the Panel on proposals to carry out public consultation in respect of introducing a CIA for Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Centres prior to reporting to the Licensing and Safety Committee on 19th July 2023 for approval.

The Panel were informed that a review of crime statistics over the last 5 years had been undertaken and this demonstrated that there was sufficient evidence to propose consultation on the introduction of a CIA in Huddersfield and Dewsbury town centres. Concerns had also been raised by Ward Members around the number of Off-licences opening in town centres, and in response current proposals were to consult on the introduction of a CIA limited to the off-licence trade. It was also noted that whilst the initial evidence was reviewed for Huddersfield and Dewsbury town centres, there was potential for ward members to request consideration be given to introducing CIA's in other areas.

The publication of a CIA set a strong statement of intent about the Councils approach to considering applications. If approved a 12-week consultation would be undertaken with the view for submission to a meeting of the Full Council to consider the adoption or rejection of the CIA in January 2024.

In the discussion that followed, the Panel raised a number of key points highlighting the importance of:

- Setting a clear ambition for the number of responses from the public to ensure the validity of the consultation.
- The inclusion of the student population in the consultation as key stakeholders.
- The enforcement of existing licences and scope for these to be included in the CIA.
- Addressing issues in relation to fast food chains, electronic cigarette/vape shops and street-drinking.
- Scope for the introduction of a CIA in other areas outside of Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Centre.
- Data clarity and ensuring that the boundaries for the CIA's were set to achieve the best outcomes.

Outcomes:

In respect of the consultation, it was recommended that the ambition for the number of responses was made clear and that a statistically valid figure against the overall population be set to ensure broad representation, meaningful engagement and to set a benchmark to measure success. The Panel also recommended that consideration be given to amending the period within which the consultation was to be held to ensure the student population be represented.

The Panel welcomed the approach to consider other ward areas for a CIA, highlighting the importance of continuing to take an inclusive approach and it was agreed that if the consultation be approved, that an email be sent to all Ward Members asking them to put forward the areas that they represent for consideration if they felt it would be useful.

The Panel further recommended that the clarity of data be improved and that a review of the boundaries be undertaken where streets may be excluded and in doing so may increase the risk for issues to persist.

In terms of requests for further information and future monitoring the Panel requested to be provided with; (i) information in relation to those licences that were being reviewed, the scope for refusal and evidence of good practice (ii) The maps be made clearer and shared with the Panel following review with the Public Health Department and (iii) an update on progress prior to further consideration by Licensing and the Full Council if the Consultation was approved.

White Rose Forest – Summary review 2022/23 and looking ahead to 2023/24

The Panel considered a presentation on White Rose Forest (WRF) - Summary review of 2022/23 and looking ahead to 2023/24. The Panel were informed that the WRF was in its 3rd year of a 5-year programme and during this time the WRF had gained a national profile with a growing reputation. After 3 seasons the WRF had:

- Created 805 hectares of new woodland and supported the planting of 1600 trees.
- Invested £6.7m with landowners across North and West Yorkshire.
- Planted 235 hectares of new woodland next to the existing ancient woodland resource protecting its biodiversity value.

Moving forwards, a WRF 25-year plan from 2025-2050 (aimed to launch 1st August 2025) was being developed which set out the Vision, targets and ambitions for woodland creation and woodland management for North and West Yorkshire. The Plan was to prioritise biodiversity, climate resilience, community mental health and job skills.

In the discussion to follow, the Panel explored several issues including;

- Value for money, measuring success and the risks of failed trees: and found that once the scheme had been designed that the contract was put in place which outlined the amount of maintenance and funding required. Kirklees as the accountable body and on behalf of DEFRA bought in a 15-year woodland. Up until that point if the trees weren't successful, legally the ownership was on the landowner to rectify this. It was also noted that where there were droughts or rain at the wrong time, there were sites where there

was inevitably failure.

- The use of tree guards noting concerns that the decision not to use guards increased the risk of failure; and found that the use of tree guards was dependent on several factors arising from the landowner and the purpose of the site. There were numerous ways of doing this, (i.e.- fencing, a weeding regime, species selection, or guards etc...) and most sites did include the use of guards unless there was a risk of increased vandalism, in which case more trees would be planted with the expectation of some losses. There were also some sites that chose to be plastic free.
- The ambition for the 'Green Streets' in Kirklees; and it was found that the Green Streets project aimed to target priority communities, areas of job growth and the key routes that linked them. Kirklees were currently undertaking mapping work around its transport routes to identify opportunities for tree planting and woodland creation and further agreed to provide the Panel with Kirklees specific data.
- Landownership, and support/best practice guidance for landowners in relation to the long-term maintenance of trees; and found that there was a bespoke process (the WRF delivery pathway) which involved working with landowners and assessing their needs. Support and training was then shaped around this, and Landowners were revisited on a 5 yearly basis to reassess any changing needs
- The importance of biodiversity and the targets in relation to increasing biodiversity; and it was found that native species were the default chosen for planting. In the case of Ancient Woodland, it was acknowledged that this was a finite resource which could not be replaced or expanded but action could be taken to plant around it to increase biodiversity. Work was being undertaken with Forest Research to link into key biodiversity corridors in North and West Yorkshire. The targets were long term and were dependent on the individual driver and design working with the landowner.
- Future scope to work with community groups; and it was found that the main challenges to smaller groups arose from the complex regulatory processes, but there were plans to help support Community Groups including the offer of bespoke training in relation to increasing understanding of the delivery pathway, 1:1 meetings to identify training/resource needs, and a planning grant which the Panel welcomed.

Outcomes:

The Panel welcomed the responses to their lines of enquiry and noted the report. It was also agreed that Kirklees specific data in relation to the Green Streets Project be provided to the Panel.

Background: The former Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel first scrutinised the new Waste Strategy in 2021. In 2022/23 there was a focus on pre-decision scrutiny of the Waste Strategy Capital Update and the Cabinet decision 2nd August 2022 was taken to approve funds. In 2023/2024, the Environment and Climate Change Panel received an update around work undertaken to refresh the strategy in light of recent financial challenges and changes to legislation.

Meeting of the Panel held 30th August 2023:

The Panel considered the report, Re-profile of the Kirklees Resource and Waste Strategy 2021- 30 and were informed that the Strategy set out how the Council aimed to achieve its vision of “a clean, green, sustainable future for Kirklees with zero waste to landfill and where waste was valued as a resource through re-use, recycling, and recovery.

It was advised that since the strategy was adopted in 2021 the financial climate had changed considerably. The strategy assumed that reforms and funding streams from central Government would allow the development and investment set out in the strategy. Due to delays and uncertainty from central Government, there were some elements that now needed to be reprofiled to meet the new timeframes provided and to allow time to understand what funding would be available. The strategy required significant investment to implement however, the re-profiling sought to reduce this cost. It was proposed to revise the strategy’s key targets as follows:

- Achieve a recycling rate of at least 70% at Household Waste and Recycling Centres by 2030.
- Recycle at least 65% of municipal waste by 2035.
- Achieve a 95% diversion from landfill rate by 2030.

The forecasted spend under the original action plan was £2.9m capital spend and the revised initiatives estimated to decrease spend to around £800k. Included within the presentation was a timeline for the revised strategy approval, initial delivery milestones and a list of overarching risks and dependencies. This was scheduled to be presented to Cabinet on 17th October 2023, where approval for the revision would be sought.

The Panel noted the presentation and expressed gratitude to the team for their work and ambition within the challenging financial context. In the discussion to follow the Panel asked several questions in relation to:

- The impact of the re-profile of the strategy on net zero targets.
- Increasing capacity for the emptying of community recycling points, noting that it was important that recycling bins were always available for use (not full).
- Understanding the data in relation to contamination; (i) local projections in comparison with the national average, (ii) the impact of contamination and the targets for addressing this
- The Reuse shop the potential for future expansion to more rural areas in Kirklees as well as concerns of the potential impact the introduction of the

Reuse shop may have on local charities (i.e.) reducing donations.

- Business Recycling and the disposal of single use electronic cigarettes.
- Access to disposal of bulky waste for vulnerable residents and residents who become vulnerable and the timeframe for the 'Period Dignity Scheme'.

Outcomes: The Panel noted the Re-profile of the Kirklees Resource and Waste Strategy 2021- 30 and made the following recommendations.

In relation to increasing capacity for the emptying of community recycling points, it was agreed that investigation into the frequency of which they were emptied would be undertaken.

In relation to the impact of contamination and the targets for addressing this, it was found that, a detailed assessment of the content of bins had been undertaken to identify the sources of contamination. Culture change was highlighted as a key element of reducing contamination as well as enforcement if necessary to reduce continued abuse of facilities and the diversion/loss of loads. In response the Panel recommended that (i) the Panel be provided with Data in respect of the projected impact of contamination and that (ii) comparison between Kirklees and other Local Authorities with a similar demographic be undertaken in respect of contamination rates.

In relation to the ReUse Shop, the Panel were reassured that engagement was held regularly with third sector leaders with the ambition of creating a supportive network of charity organisations instead of a competitive environment. In response, the Panel further recommended that data be obtained to understand the potential impacts.

In respect of business recycling, it was found that the offer of access to the recycling service had been expanded to trade customers and the Panel recommended a mechanism to allow businesses to express their interest in the service be investigated further. In relation to the disposal of single use vapes, the Panel recommended that engagement be undertaken with local businesses around collection points, and that ideas to provide advice to customers on sale be explored further.

In response to a question raised by the Chair if Scrutiny around how residents whom were unable to travel be supported to dispose of garden waste it was found that free bulky waste collections were offered to a limited number of people on the assisted collections list and that it may be possible to link this with vulnerable residents who could no longer access the garden waste site. In response the Panel recommended that the possibility of (i) enabling vulnerable residents to dispose of garden waste through assisted bulky waste collections and (ii) the 5-year timeframe for the 'Period Dignity Scheme' be investigated.

Snow Wardens Volunteer Scheme

Background: The former Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel reviewed the approach taken to Winter Maintenance at its meeting held on 7th September 2021. Key issues noted included the maintenance of active travel routes during winter and of the challenges around housing growth, resources, and capacity for maintenance. It was agreed that the current policy for winter maintenance should be assessed. This work was undertaken, and a further update was given at the meeting of the Panel held 30th August 2022.

Meeting of the Panel held 30th August 2023:

As part of the Panel's work reviewing the theme of winter maintenance, the Panel considered a report on the Snow Wardens Volunteer Scheme. The Panel were informed that the scheme enabled the Council to equip residents with grit, equipment and PPE which would allow them to clear snow from residential areas that gritters would not cover. The Scheme was flexible, where residents were able to decide how much time they would like to dedicate to the scheme, allowing them to choose their own hours and locations of work.

In the discussion to follow the Panel raised several key points around communications. In response to a question from the Panel around direct communication with residents and the suggestion of use of email, it was found that the current key methods of communication were; 'Gritter Twitter,' the website and community networks. The ambition to engage more community groups and Parish Councils in the scheme as it expanded was also highlighted.

The Panel highlighted the importance of taking a consistent approach to communications and raising awareness of the scheme across the Council, including the provision of social media guidance. The Panel also suggested the use of handouts (for elected members) to share with residents and help to promote the scheme within communities, as well as encouraging the exploration of ways to promote the scheme in rural areas through community events such as agricultural shows.

Outcomes:

The Panel welcomed the Snow Wardens Volunteer Scheme and recommended that a consistent approach be taken to communications and raising awareness of the scheme across the Council through the provision of (i) social media guidance, (ii) handouts for elected members to share with residents and (iii) the promotion of the scheme through community events.

Panel Visits:

Energy from Waste Facility and Materials Recycling Facility Scrutiny Visit

Arising from the Panel's scrutiny of the Re-Profile of Kirklees Resource and Waste

Strategy 2021-2030, Panel members were invited to visit the Energy from Waste Facility and Materials Recycling Facility in Huddersfield.

The visit took place on 27th September 2023, where Panel members undertook a tour of the waste and recycling facility located on Diamond Street in Huddersfield.

During the tour, Panel members were shown how recyclable material is processed, separated, and baled ready for re-use, and how non-recyclable material is put to good use as an alternative to fossil fuels creating enough electricity to power over 15,000 homes. The Panel noted the risks from disposable vapes and felt that messaging to raise awareness of this was important.

General Comments from the Chair

As the newly appointed Chair, I look forward to working with the members of the panel. The panel has welcomed a number of new panel members this municipal year to assist in its consideration of a diverse portfolio and looks forward to meaningful debate and scrutiny across a wide range of items.

There are a number of items for consideration this year and it is important for the panel to prioritise pre-decision scrutiny alongside maintaining oversight across the panel's remit to be reactive to any arising issues.

It is also important to give consideration to the wider context of key national issues such as climate change as well local changes within Kirklees.

Looking Ahead

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

- Environmental Sustainability Strategy
- Heat District Energy Network
- Waste Strategy Re-Procurement
- Parks and Greenspace Vision
- Statutory Food Hygiene Plan 2024 – 2025 / Statutory Health & Safety Plan 2024 – 2025
- Parking Strategy Review
- Events (Woven/Pride/Year of Music)