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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Friday 28th February 2025

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)
Councillor Zarina Amin
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Jo Lawson

Apologies: Councillor Itrat Ali

48 Membership of Committee

Apologies were received from Councillor Itrat Ali.

49 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Chair noted that, further to their consideration at the last meeting, the Budget and the Council Plan had been considered by Cabinet on 11th February 2025 and would be considered by full Council on 5th March 2025. The comments made by the Committee and the amendments made in response, had been detailed in the Cabinet and Council reports.

RESOLVED -

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th January 2025 be approved as a correct record.

50 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

51 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

52 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

53 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

54 People Strategy

A report was submitted which provided an update on the Council's People Strategy and invited feedback from Committee Members.

Councillor Hawkins, the Corporate Portfolio Holder, provided an introduction. Rachel Spencer-Henshall, Deputy Chief Executive was also present for the item.

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Michelle Moss, HR Manager, presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The refreshed People Strategy had been soft launched to Kirklees senior staff and managers in January 2021.
- The strategy was underpinned by the Council's values and behaviours.
- The vision was to 'achieve our shared outcomes through people with the right skills values and behaviours working in partnerships in our places'.
- Delivery of the strategy was currently within Phase 3 and this had included a review of the format, supported by the Policy and Partnerships Team, to take account of benchmarking of themes across the public and private sectors.
- It was recommended that the current approach continue into Phase 4. Priorities had, and would, change, as the delivery of the strategy progressed, to take account of both internal and external factors and employment trends.
- The four desired outcomes, as set out below, would remain the same for Phase 4:
 - Skilled, Flexible and Engaged People.
 - Effective and Compassionate Leadership.
 - An Inclusive Employer of Choice.
 - Healthy and Well People.
- Governance of the strategy was undertaken by the People Strategy Programme Board and regular meetings took place with the People Strategy Steering Group which was made up of key stakeholders, such as the employee networks and Trade Unions.
- The People Strategy and the revised Inclusion & Diversity Strategy worked alongside each other and were complementary in their aspirations.
- The priorities and a summary of the key activities delivered during Phase 3 were set out in the report and the following were highlighted:
 - Workforce planning was one of the key areas of activity and was taking a longer-term view of recruitment and retention challenges and skills shortages. These were the same as most other local authorities and the Council was actively participating in the Local Government Association (LGA) recruitment campaign and task and finish groups.
 - Using apprenticeships effectively, with particular success in social work and legal. It was anticipated that numbers would increase over the next twelve months.
 - Proposals for mandatory learning were to be submitted to the Executive Leadership Team.
 - The development of improvements to the staff survey, including changes to the questions and increasing participation.
 - In terms of performance management and appraisal, 'My Conversation' had been launched, alongside a package of support for managers. Positive feedback on this had been received from the recent LGA Peer Review.
 - Project Search and the positive impact on the individuals and the wider organisation.
 - Achieving the Society of Occupational Medicine Outstanding Occupational Health Initiative Award for the work undertaken in developing a pathway for staff and neurodiversity.
 - The benefits of the work carried out in relation to stress and prevention of sickness absence.

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

- In the last twelve months there had been seventeen new-starters in traditional-style apprenticeships, the remaining ones were developmental, being undertaken as part of the individual's current job.
- In response to questions about the percentage of employees that had had an appraisal within the last twelve months and if there were challenges within any particular directorate, it was explained that the 'My Conversation' performance management and appraisal scheme was relatively new so a full dataset was not yet available. The scheme was continuing to evolve but had been designed to be adaptable to different working environments recognising the need for different approaches for particular working arrangements. Further information could be provided for members after the meeting.
- In terms of capturing the mood and concerns of staff across the range of working roles and feeding that back into decision-making; the staff survey provided the foundation and work was being undertaken to boost participation particularly with frontline staff. The results would be used to inform consideration of further engagement, such as through focus groups and in terms of particular themes or areas, to achieve deeper understanding. It was acknowledged that during service change there could be an impact on morale. In respect of management it was important to ensure that support was provided to ensure that all managers were able to be good managers. The Portfolio Holder received regular updates and had ongoing dialogue with the Trade Unions. Executive Board gave consideration to workforce data on a regular basis and would also receive the outcomes from the staff survey. Regular communication with the various employee networks was also valuable in the respect. There were also policies in place, such as the one on whistleblowing, that allowed people to raise concerns if needed.
- The Trade Unions were very helpful in negotiating the approach taken across a range of issues such as the staff handbook, principles in relation to redundancy or service change, and assisting in reaching out to, and engaging with, staff in some areas where this may be more difficult, to aid understanding of their situation.
- The implementation of the 3-hour mediation model was welcomed. Further specific information in respect of the next stage, if a positive outcome was not achieved, could be provided to Members. It was noted that a range of other mechanisms and support sat alongside this model including counselling, coaching and other approaches through the Employee Healthcare Team. There was also a 24-hour support helpline 'Care First'. This service was also open to elected members and it was suggested that the Committee visit the Employee Healthcare Team to see what was on offer and the value of this resource.
- It was explained that a staff active travel survey had recently been completed in order to understand the barriers to doing so, and the inconsistency of facilities had been identified as an issue. Work would be undertaken to respond to this feedback and improve the position. It was noted that issues associated with active travel in the district that had been highlighted a few years ago had not yet been addressed.

- The most significant challenges in respect of recruitment, aligned with the experience of other local authorities, were in professional roles where there was competition with the private sector, such as legal, social work and social care, planning and highways. In terms of learning from other local authorities the Council was taking part in the Local Government Association (LGA) 'task and finish' groups on hard-to-fill areas. Workforce planning was also a key solution to help manage the longer-term recruitment challenges, an example being apprenticeships in social care.
- To assist with immediate recruitment pressures there had been a focus on social media activities which linked into other campaigns such as the LGA recruitment campaign. The Council's recruitment freeze was also acknowledged and reassurance was given to the Committee regarding the approach to vacancy management to minimise gaps in certain roles.
- A flexible approach was taken in implementation; the outcomes of the strategy remained the same, but the priorities were subject to change over time to take into account resources and capacity pressures. Engagement with the steering groups provided support across the Council.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the Corporate Portfolio Holder, Deputy Chief Executive and HR officers be thanked for the update in respect of the People Strategy and that the comments of the Committee be taken into account in future delivery and the shaping of the next phase.
- (2) That the approach in terms of the use of apprenticeships to address recruitment challenges in areas such as social work, and the positive impact of 'Project Search' be welcomed
- (3) That the Committee visit the Employee Health Care Service.
- (4) That further information be provided to members in relation to:
 - Data in respect of the percentage of employees who have had an appraisal in the last twelve months and any areas where delivery is challenging.
 - The next stage for mediation cases that have not achieved a positive outcome.

55 Tourism Strategy

A report was submitted which provided an update on the Council's Tourism Strategy and invited feedback from Committee Members.

Adele Poppleton, Service Director – Culture and Visitor Economy provided an introduction:

- The Tourism Strategy sat alongside the Culture and Heritage Strategies; the Heritage Strategy had been approved by Cabinet in 2024, and the Culture Strategy was in development.
- The themes had previously been discussed by the Committee and the draft strategy was now ready to go out for consultation to gather feedback from communities and the tourism sector.
- The strategy needed to align with the West Yorkshire Destination Management Plan which had been produced through the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). The LVEP undertook collaborative work and took a lead in this area, through partnership with the other West Yorkshire authorities and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

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Richard Smith, Creative Development Manager, gave a presentation covering the following key areas:

- A summary of activity to date.
- The tourism and visitor economy and its impacts.
- The current position in terms of the key motivators for people to visit the district: 'Where are we now?' and how the existing strengths would be developed.
- The West Yorkshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership Destination Management Plan which set out the ambition for the region, and the benefits this had for Kirklees. The LVEP was part of Visit England's national network.
- The aims and actions to achieve the vision: 'How will we get there?'
- The strategy would provide direction to an important area of work for the next few years
- Feedback via the public consultation process was welcomed and a specific survey would be created, along with undertaking in-person consultation sessions.
- The strategy would be further refined following analysis of the feedback.

Councillor Martyn Bolt was also present for the item.

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

- The map had been developed through the original research work and was a starting point; the aim was to keep it relatively simple and useable. Feedback in terms of which places were included would be taken on board.
- The challenges associated with the identification of Kirklees, which did not exist as a place as such, and the general lack of knowledge/confusion about its location and whether the promotion was of 'Kirklees' or destinations, communities and towns within its boundary. This was acknowledged and part of the current process was trying to understand that and decide on the best approach to take. It was considered that a theme-based approach would assist. In addition, the district would be part of the promotion of West Yorkshire and Yorkshire as a whole, through work with partners. It would depend on the circumstances in each case what approach to promotion was taken.
- In response to questions in respect of: how it could be made relevant to local places and organisations, who the Council was engaging with, and how to identify the gaps where the Council could play a developmental role; it was explained that there was a desire to work with communities and to ensure that the conditions were right so that local groups could deliver, but also to bring all the activities together as a whole and to utilise the strength of the Council's support in marketing/promotion and the partnership approach.
- Once the three strategies (Tourism, Culture and Heritage) had been approved, local delivery plans would be developed to ensure that the different focuses and priorities of each area were recognised.
- Collaborative working did take place with volunteers and groups running heritage open days, such as opening historic buildings to the public, through support with communications and publicity. The view was expressed that these events should be included in the tourism offer.
- The reference to direct rail links to London did not mention Mirfield.

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- It was noted that the Tolson Museum was not currently included in the list of heritage assets and that Cleckheaton Folk Festival had been affected by the closure of Cleckheaton Town Hall.
- Consideration should be given to the local people who could be used as ambassadors for music and culture.
- In respect of development as a destination for sport and active holidays, the area had world-wide recognition in relation to cycling such as through the 2014 Tour de France and should capitalise on cycling tourism and the economic benefits from this. There should also be focus on the Pennine Way; the 60th anniversary of opening was this year.
- Golf and rugby were mentioned but there was no longer a rugby league museum in Huddersfield and municipal facilities for golf had diminished.
- It was suggested that it would be beneficial for the stadium to be called the Kirklees Stadium.
- Kirklees was fortunate to have a range of historical links and heritage assets which should be recognised including the largest open air political rally held by the Chartists in Hartshead, and links to the Luddites across the district including Milnsbridge, the Dumb Steeple in Mirfield and The Star Inn in Roberttown.
- The district had a number of famous actors and should be capitalising on screen tourism.
- The phraseology in terms of 'near neighbours' and 'distant cousins' was questioned.
- The importance of the role and contribution of Elected Members both in terms of their knowledge of activities and groups in their communities, and the leadership and promotion of events, was acknowledged. Officers would ensure that they had the opportunity to respond to the consultation and were involved when delivery plans were rolled out.
- The work should build upon the success of established events, such as 10k runs and local fetes and galas, noting that some of which had struggled or ceased due to funding issues.
- It was noted that some of the points raised, such as the naming/identity of Kirklees, lay outside the remit of the Tourism Strategy.
- The feedback was welcomed and would be taken on board.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the Creative Development Manager and the Service Director, Culture and Visitor Economy be thanked for presenting the report in respect of the development of the Tourism Strategy.
- (2) That the principles and objectives of the draft strategy be supported and that the comments made be taken into account in its further development.
- (3) That the opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny at an early stage of development of the strategy be welcomed and that a further report be submitted to the Committee following the public consultation.

Work Programme 2024-25

The latest version of the Committee's Work Programme for 2024-2025 was submitted for consideration.

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The Chair explained that he wished to introduce a standing agenda item to allow Lead Members to provide updates in respect of the work being undertaken by their scrutiny panel.

A request was also made for a briefing note in respect of devolution and what it might mean for Kirklees.