

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

### **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

Present:

Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)  
Councillor David Longstaff  
Councillor John Taylor

In attendance:

Councillor Munir Ahmed, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for  
Environment and Highways  
Martin Jordan, Emergency Planning Officer  
Katherine Armitage, Service Director, Environmental  
Strategy and Climate Change  
Phillip Waddington, Group Engineer – Highways  
Paul Farndale, ER Project Officer  
Chris Johnson, Operational Manager  
Cameron Hooper, Team Manager – Skills and  
Regeneration  
Sarah Holmes, Housing Services Strategic Manager  
Sean Westerby, Corporate Safety and Resilience  
Manager  
Katherine Hunt, Operational Manager – Highways

Apologies:

Councillor Will Simpson  
Councillor Matthew McLoughlin

#### **Membership of the Panel**

Apologies were received from Councillor Will Simpson and Councillor Matthew McLoughlin.

#### **2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Panel considered the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the previous meeting be approved.

### **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 public questions were received.

### **7 Severe Weather Debrief Report January 2025**

The Panel considered the Severe Weather Debrief Report January 2025 which was presented by Sean Westerby, Corporate Safety and Resilience Manager and Martin Jordon, Emergency Planning Officer gave a presentation which provided an overview of;

- The multiple services involved in the response to the severe weather events taking place between the 31/12/2024 - 03/01/2025 where sustained rainfall led to flooding, and between 04/01/2025 -13/01/2025 the sustained snow and ice event.
- A summary of what went well; during the flooding event, several factors contributed to an effective response, including (i) the integration of multiple sources of credible forecasting information, (ii) a well-received social media strategy, and (iii) strong collaboration among teams across the organisation in sharing information, resources, and delivering timely responses. Similarly, the response to the snow and ice event was strengthened by these same factors, alongside additional successes such as (i) the Council's provision of assistance to schools upon request, enabling safe reopening, and (ii) swift engagement of teams involved in the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), ensuring prompt assessments and referrals.
- A summary of learning and forward actions in relation to rain and flooding event including;
  - To mitigate the issue of road closures being ignored due to displaced signage, future flood events should incorporate enhanced communication via appropriate channels regarding the dangers of disregarding closures. Additionally, alternative methods of alerting the public—such as flashing beacons or flood gates—should be explored to enforce road closures more effectively.
  - Given that some residents did not report surface water or river flooding improvements to the Council's non-emergency online flooding form were being considered to encourage timely reporting and prevent residents from suffering in silence.
- A summary of learning and forward actions in relation to the snow and ice event for example;
  - To ensure a streamlined process for schools seeking Council assistance in severe weather, a single, clearly communicated procedure should be established. This should specify the support available, potential services subject to resource availability, and actions outside the Council's remit.

- Due to the limited availability of SWEP bed spaces (accommodating only six individuals), alternative cost-effective accommodation options should be explored to reduce reliance on expensive placements in B&Bs.
- In response to the issue of some Councillors' use of multiple request routes which resulted in duplicated efforts standardised procedures should be implemented to improve efficiency.
- Public criticism regarding incomplete gritting of roads and pavements highlighted the need for enhanced communication. Updates to the Council's website and severe weather communications plan should clarify the extent of gritting services while promoting community resilience and dispelling misconceptions.

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel raised several questions and comments as follows:

- In response to the Panels comments around the absence of snow wardens, with volunteers reporting to Councillors that they felt underutilised and disconnected, it was advised that for safety reasons, it would have been above and beyond snow wardens volunteer capacity to be involved. The Panel noted the response but highlighted that the Council may have missed opportunity for more volunteers to get involved. The Panel were further advised that snow wardens provided feedback through surveys annually and it was agreed that the responses from the next survey be shared with the Panel when received.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to gritting, it was confirmed that 450 grit bins were in place across the network. The Council's policy and operational plan were publicly available on its website, with no additional bins provided due to resource constraints. The bin-filling process took approximately three weeks, with initial stocking occurring at the beginning of the season in October and a subsequent refill at the end of January following severe weather. Councillors were encouraged to explore opportunities for redistributing bins within their wards as needed. The Panel noted the response but emphasised that it did not feel fair for Councillors to take one bin away from some residents to give it to another. Concerns were also expressed around streets surrounding key health and adult respite centres not being gritted.
- In response to the Panels questions in relation to supporting housing growth alongside ensuring adequate gritting resources to support new developments and all residents fairly it was advised that there were plans for the Winter Policy to be brought to scrutiny going forward, but highlighted that Kirklees compared well with other authorities in terms of how much of the network that was gritted.
- In response to the Panels questions in relation to improving gathering feedback from residents who chose to 'suffer in silence' rather than report that they were struggling it was advised that alongside improvements to the Council's non-emergency online flooding form the approach would involve
- and information gathering needed to take place within weeks of a severe event to ensure timely and relevant insights. It was also acknowledged that vulnerable individuals became even more at-risk during emergencies, with quieter residents being harder to identify. To address this, emergency

volunteers conducted welfare checks, while the good neighbour principle encouraged residents to check in on one another. Elected members were also engaged to support and escalate concerns effectively.

- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to support for waste collection services during a severe snow and ice weather event recognition and thanks was given to the Waste Collection Teams for the work they carried out under very challenging circumstances, and it was noted that support was given through gritting teams keeping a large portion of the network clear and accessible.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the limited availability of SWEP bed spaces, it was confirmed that only six places were available, necessitating additional B&B accommodations. While costs were not significant this winter, the Council aimed to reduce reliance on B&Bs by securing alternative placements with partner support. The Council committed to assisting in setting up placements through internal services both during and after emergencies, but challenges remained, as placements were only needed when the emergency protocol was activated, requiring rapid mobilisation.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the potential for flexibility within the Winter Policy to support the ad-hoc restocking of grit bins to enable residents to deal with issues as they arise, it was advised that all policies allowed for discretion, which had been exercised during the winter. However, the need for consistency and a balanced approach was emphasised. The Panel acknowledged this but suggested that targeted discretion could be more effective, recognising that a uniform approach may not suit all severe weather scenarios. Early flexibility was considered essential in mitigating further damage or disruption.
- In response to the Panels inquiry as to whether the planning process accounted for management companies gritting new housing estates, given the Council's policy of not providing gritting services in such areas. It was agreed that discussions would take place with planning colleagues to verify whether new estates would be assessed differently under existing policies.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel noted the Severe Weather Debrief Report January 2025 and expressed their thanks and appreciation to all teams involved in the emergency responses for the fantastic work they had delivered during very challenging circumstances. It was recommended that:

1. The feedback from the next Snow Warden Survey be shared with the Panel.
2. Discussions would take place with the Planning Department to verify whether new estates would be assessed differently under existing policies in relation to gritting services.
3. The Winter Policy be added to the Panel's work programme for the 2025/26 municipal year.

## **9. Highways 2 year Capital Plan allocation 2025/26 and 2026/27**

The Panel considered the Highways 2-year detailed Capital Plan allocation 2025/26 and 2026/27. Katherine Hunt, Operational Manager - Highways gave a presentation which provided an overview of;

- The Background; noting that the Governance Arrangements to manage delivery of the 2025/26 and 2026/27 schemes within the Capital Plan were in place via regular monitoring of programmes and budgets and that the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funded a large portion of the capital programme and supported the Councils efforts to achieve its 2038 climate change ambitions.
- The Highways Capital Plan for 2025/26 and 2026/27; which was a detailed programme of works to be implemented in 2025/26 (with provisional schemes identified for 2026/27) and includes programmes of works and individual schemes for:
  - Highways Maintenance
  - Structures
  - Street Lighting
  - Public Rights of Way (PRoW)
  - Highways Drainage
  - Highways Safety and Network Management (UTMC)
  - Includes the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement fund (CRSTS-1) and any other capital funding available to Highways (including council borrowing and any additional grant monies)
- The funding allocation 2025/2026, key programme areas , the prioritisation process and the highways scheme lifecycle.
- Innovation, Governance and Preperformance, noting how schemes contributed to the Council Plan and the objectives of the Combined Authority .
- The decisions Cabinet would be asked to approve which were;
  - The budget and programme / scheme allocations as outlined in the associated report and appendices for 2025/26 and 2026/27, to allow the budget allocation and spend on the schemes identified to improve the highway network, increase safety on our roads support the improvement of air quality, and positively impact climate change across the district.
  - To approve officer delegation to the Executive Director of Place in accordance with the Council Financial Procedure Rules and any other relevant legal requirements and governance.
  - The delegation of powers to the designated positions and for the period stated in the associated report, that in the event we are awarded additional funding within year, they have the authority to develop, agree and implement the Highways Capital Programme.

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel raised several questions and comments as follows:

- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the absence of Vision Zero in the report, it was confirmed that the Council remained fully committed to its objectives. While some details were included, it was acknowledged that they were not as prominently featured as they should be and it was agreed that Vision Zero be clearly acknowledged in the report , with efforts made to communicate its goals effectively and ensure widespread awareness of the target.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to Climate Change and what Kirklees's current position was in relation to net zero targets it was agreed that the Kirklees Data in relation to the targets would be shared with the Panel.

- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the use of AI, it was confirmed that AI was being utilised to monitor road conditions and assess infrastructure requirements. Work was being undertaken to explore its application in network management and to develop AI-driven tools for managing bus movements and ensuring punctuality. AI was also being considered for road marking assessments and within street lighting services to identify missing or obscured signage. The Panel welcomed these advancements.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to AI Assisted Repair Checks for poorly executed repairs it was confirmed that video footage collected by highways was reviewed and sent through to the Highways Team and to utility companies for rectification at their expense if necessary. This process was subject to a defined time limit for corrective actions.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to road closures, the promotion of the free-to-use platform, One.Network was highlighted as providing real-time information on network activity, including ongoing and planned roadworks. It was advised that the platform allowed users to see locations, responsible parties, anticipated impacts, and forecasts up to 12 months in advance. Whilst it was acknowledged that displaced traffic cannot always be prevented, efforts were made to identify potential congestion areas and collaborate with works promoters, including utility companies, to raise concerns in advance and minimise disruption. The Panel welcomed the response and commented that it would be positive to link this platform to My Kirklees account to promote us to residents.
- In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the highways maintenance funding, it was confirmed that funding was withheld until authorities demonstrated compliance with specific criteria. It was noted that funding could be either devolved or non-devolved, depending on these requirements. The prior CRTS settlement required authorities to showcase their asset management approach at a district level. The current criteria were expected to be similar, including assessments of network condition, the number of potholes, the type of works undertaken, and their locations. It was advised that a report detailing these criteria would need to be published on the Council's website.
- In response to the Panel's questions around LED street lighting it was advised that the transition to LED street lighting was determined by budget constraints, with capital funding allocated to replacing end-of-life columns. A procurement framework had been issued for street lantern replacements, ensuring installations aligned with the latest technology and current standards.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel noted the Highways 2 year Capital Plan allocation 2025/26 and 2026/27 and it was recommended that:

- (1) Vision Zero objectives be clearly acknowledged in the report, with efforts made to communicate its goals effectively and ensure widespread awareness of the target.
- (2) The Kirklees Data in relation to Climate Change targets be shared with the Panel.
- (3) Consideration be given to providing a link to the One.Network platform to My Kirklees Accounts.

**10. Work Programme 2024/25**

The Panel reviewed its Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year and requested that all officers who had presented to the Panel throughout the year be thanked for their work and attendance at the Panel.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel noted the Work Programme, and it was agreed that: