

Kirklees Council

Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Cooper

Panel: Corporate Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update : From September to December 2019

Panel Work Programme Highlights:

Financial Monitoring:

The Panel continued to monitor the Council's financial management and received reports which included information on:

- Issues arising from the Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring Report 2018/19 and other key financial management updates.
- Results for Quarter 1 2019-20 and updates on preparation for the forthcoming budget strategy update report to Cabinet/Council in early/mid-October.

The Panel also held an informal training session in September on Council Finance which attracted attendance by Members from across the Council; positive feedback was received both on the content and presentation.

Preparations for Leaving the EU

In July and September, the Panel considered reports in respect of Kirklees' preparations in association with the departure of the UK from the European Union.

Members were advised that a tactical group involving officers from the Council and partner organisations had been operational for several months and a Brexit Lead Officer had been appointed. A tactical plan had been developed, supported by an action plan, which helped to monitor and address key issues. There were established links at regional level and with Central Government and proactive information sharing arrangements in place. A research study was being commissioned to aid the group in compiling a clearer picture and a greater understanding of the current position and the potential economic impact on Kirklees.

Corporate Performance Report

The Panel considered a report giving an overview of the Council's corporate performance at the end of Quarter 1 2019/20, in respect of those aspects that related to the Corporate Plan aspiration to 'work smart and deliver effectively and efficiently'.

Commercialisation

Members explored the Council's approach to commercialisation, and how this should be developed, at an informal meeting in July 2019, and it was agreed that this matter should be given further consideration later in the municipal year. On 21st November a session on commercialisation was held, run by the Local Government Association and which included input from the Chief Executive of Rushcliffe Borough Council and a Councillor from Luton Borough Council.

Outcomes:

Financial Monitoring

The Panel has requested a report on management of the Capital Plan, in terms of re-profiling and the availability of resources and capacity to deliver its ambitions.

It was also noted that the Panel may wish to consider the issue of delivery plans and tracking of progress associated with savings programmes in more detail, at a future meeting.

Preparations for Leaving the EU

Recommendations were made as follows:

- Future reports to include financial risks as part of treasury management preparation and details of critical processes within the Council that are currently dependent on partners in the EU.
- That the care leavers age range be extended to 25.
- That the following matters be included in the study to be commissioned in relation to the economic impact on Kirklees: the potential impact on business rates and the impact/risks associated specifically with the social care sector, around workforce and financial viability and any consequential risk for the Council.

Corporate Performance

It was recommended that consideration to be given to the inclusion of information in relation to the following matters in future reports:

- the Council's future ambition on sickness absence, benchmarking with other West Yorkshire Local Authorities and good news stories
- Explanation of Transformation within the organisation which has had an impact on the reduction in agency spend.
- improvements on the Local Wealth Creation, the Council's future ambition and benchmarking with other West Yorkshire Local Authorities
- Recommended that the Panel be consulted on the early development and testing of dashboards for self-service access to data.

In addition, officers were asked to explore whether mental health was effectively represented in the performance data and if it was having an impact in terms of staff absences; and the possibility of consultation and engagement with local businesses on performance data and whether this could then influence the Council's strategies and priorities.

The Panel also expressed a wish to receive a report on the volunteering offer, including details of the prospectus and volunteering opportunities, and how this could be further promoted by the Council.

Lead Member Briefings

Regular briefings have been held with Eamonn Croston – Service Director, Finance and other officers to discuss the ongoing agenda plan and focus of reports.

A briefing in relation to asset transfer/asset divestment, an item included on the work programme for monitoring by the Lead Member, took place on 10th December.

Further to a proposal by the Panel, a briefing is to be organised with the Electoral Services Manager, in relation to the proposals announced in the Queen's Speech in October 2019 for mandatory photographic id for voters, once more detail is forthcoming.

Looking ahead

The Panel has the following subjects programmed for its meetings in the early part of 2020:

Approach to Commercialisation – January,

Provisional Financial Settlement/Budget Update – January,

Capital Plan – Re-profiling and Capacity – February,

People Strategy - 'Attraction and Retention' – February,

and will continue to receive reports, as appropriate, in relation to preparations for leaving the EU.

Comments

A range of subjects have been considered, generating productive discussion by the Members and Co-opted Members. The constructive approach and challenge provided by the Members is appreciated by officers.

There has been an increased focus on involvement of the Panel at an early stage, to allow it to make a meaningful contribution and help to shape emerging policies and strategies, in addition to its ongoing monitoring of Council financial management and performance.