

# Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel

7 November 2023

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.20pm

**Present:** Councillors Reid (Chair), Alam (Deputy), Chadwick, Ferguson, Glover, Gwynne, Robinson, Roderick

**Apologies:** Councillors A Holland, McLaren

## 23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted by members of the Scrutiny Panel.

## 24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel held on 12 September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

## 25. ECONOMY, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

The Panel welcomed Councillor Jack Naylor, Executive Member (Inclusive Growth, Business & Employment); Julian Jackson, Director of Place; Nicola Elsworth, Assistant Director; and Sarah Jamieson, Head of Economy, Employment & Skills; to receive an update on strategic priorities, work streams, local delivery and support for business and employment.

Councillor Naylor introduced the item and updated members on the breadth of provision specific to business and employment support. An example of how this work can make a real difference was provided by sharing feedback received from a resident supported by the in-work progression team and the positive impacts that employment support and improved confidence has made to their life.

Members received an overview of the primary work streams that sit within the Council's Economy, Employment and Skills Service, that include:

- Business support and networks
- Employment support provision
- Skills provision
- Digital inclusion
- Raising participation age (including NEET)
- Routes to work

It was reported that some of the services provide specific support that aim to improve general attainment levels within the borough. Tameside currently has the lowest attainment of NVQ Level 4 or equivalent in Greater Manchester and the highest percentage of residents paid below the living wage.

Responses from a recently commissioned survey of 1200 residents has provided useful insight on the experiences, challenges and barriers for residents that find it difficult to access employment opportunities locally. The majority of people lacking the skills to access better employment have not accessed any related support services.

The Panel heard that employment support for residents is wide ranging and delivered by a variety of providers. It is also funded in different ways but is primarily under the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) national provision, or GMCA devolved monies such as the Adult Education Budget and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Routes to Work supports employment for residents living with disabilities who want to work, with Tameside In Work providing support for employed residents. Funded by DWP as a proof of Concept and running since January 2022, a total of 315 residents supported to date, with 206 interviews and 124 job offers. Funding for the 2 year project does end in January 2024 and challenges have presented with waiting lists in place due to capacity in support.

Local learning as part of Tameside In Work programme has allowed the DWP perception of skills gaps to be challenged by direct feedback, which has shown that an under-utilisation of existing skills is more common than a lack of skills for individuals

A range of examples and case studies provided members with detail on specific projects across local business support and networks; Employment and Skills support; and digital inclusion. It was reported that Tameside Work and Skills Integration Board meets monthly and has 130 members. Events supporting residents to access employment include:

- Bi-annual jobs fair (Spring and Autumn)
  - Autumn 2023 attracted over 300 jobseekers and 60 local employers and providers.
- Employer lead and joint events

The Council's statutory duty relating to the support and tracking of young people aged 16 and 17 or up to 24 with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), not in education, employment or training (NEET), is currently externally commissioned to Positive Steps. They also provide careers advice in schools and to our priority cohorts including care experienced young people.

It was reported that in summary, too many residents find it hard to navigate the support available and efforts will focus to raise awareness of support and events. This includes the ongoing responsiveness and flexibility of services to accommodate individuals and businesses.

Councillor Naylor and officers responded to a number of questions from the Panel on:

- The sustainability of funding and projects in Tameside, specifically DWP in-work progression and the opportunity of new or extended funding.
- Wider strategic priorities and aspirations – identifying gaps and opportunities for the borough relating to business growth, employment and investment.
- Community engagement and digital inclusion – outreach and awareness of support available to businesses and residents.
- Emerging opportunities in areas such as new technologies and jobs for the future.
- The effectiveness of links between local businesses and education providers, identifying gaps and opportunities. Informing the offer in educational and technical provision.
- The continued commitment to support and encourage local networks and partnerships for business and employment support.
- The challenges faced by residents that have been economically inactive for long periods, the awareness of support and navigating what is available to them.

## **26. RESPONSE TO LGSCO FOCUS REPORT**

The Panel welcomed Councillor Vimal Choksi, Executive Member (Towns & Communities); and Emma Varnam, Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods; to receive a response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Focus Report, Out of Order – learning lessons from complaints about antisocial behaviour, published August 2023.

## **27. RESPONSE TO ASB POLICY**

The Panel received a formal response of the Scrutiny Panel, submitted to the Executive Member (Towns & Communities) on 10 October 2023 regarding the draft Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy.

The Chair reported that an updated version of the policy had been shared at a recent working group meeting, with a number of comments and points raised included within the final document.

## **28. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair advised members of upcoming Scrutiny reports to be tabled at the meeting of Overview Panel on 21 November 2023.

The next working group meeting of the Community Safety review to consider strategic arrangements of the CSP, with a date and time to be confirmed and circulated to members by email.

## **29. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel will take place on Tuesday 9 January 2024.

## **30. URGENT ITEMS**

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

**CHAIR**