

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

THURSDAY, 22ND MARCH, 2018

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors S Bentley, A Garthwaite,
R Grahame, J McKenna, D Nagle,
D Ragan, E Tunnicliffe and T Wilford

78 Late Items

There were no late items of business.

79 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests made at the meeting.

80 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

The following apologies for absence and notifications on substitutes were reported to the meeting:

- Apologies from Councillor A Sobel, with Councillor R Grahame attending as a substitute member.
- Apologies from Councillor A Smart, with Councillor D Ragan attending as a substitute member.
- Apologies from Councillor R Wood. No substitute member was in attendance.

Although not a member of the Scrutiny Board, apologies had also been received from Councillor James Lewis, Executive member for Strategy and Resources, who regularly attended and contributed to the Board's discussions across a range of topic areas.

81 Minutes - 22 February 2018

RESOLVED – The draft minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2018 as presented, were agreed as an accurate record.

82 Expenditure on external residential placements in Children's Services

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report that provided some background information in relation to Children's Services' commissioning of external residential placements for children in the authorities care; and the assurance work undertaken by Internal Audit regarding the associated processes and procedures.

Jason Brook, Senior Audit Manager (Internal Audit) was in attendance for this item.

The Board received a verbal update from the Senior Audit Manager, which included the following matters:

- A brief outline of Internal Audit's assurance work, which formed part of the Council's annual audit plan.
- The limited assurance previously identified by Internal Audit in relation to the 'call-off' of external residential placements for children in the authorities care.
- The limited progress identified through the initial follow-up work undertaken by Internal Audit.
- Details of Internal Audit's second follow-up, which identified significant improvement had been made which provided the necessary assurances.

Members of the Scrutiny Board considered and discussed the information detailed in the report and provided at the meeting; raising a number of matters, including:

- Some of the reasons why 'external placements' may be the appropriate solution.
- The Council maximising its spending power.
- A request for details associated with the different costs associated with residential placements for children.
- Ensuring the framework contract was 'fit for purpose' and delivered value for money. The Board was advised of a planned review of the current framework contract arrangements.
- The recruitment of 'in-house' foster carers.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the details presented in the report and the further assurances provided at the meeting be noted.
- (b) That, on behalf of the Scrutiny Board, the Chair highlights the Board's comments regarding the proposed review of the current framework contract arrangements to the appropriate officer in Children's Services.

83 Equality Impact Priorities refresh

The Director of Communities and Environment submitted a report that provided a summary of performance information relating to Equality Improvement Priorities refresh.

Lelir Yeung, Head of Equality was in attendance for this item and confirmed the report should refer to 'Improvement Priorities' rather than 'Impact Priorities.

The Head of Equality briefly introduced the report, including an outline of the Equality Improvement Priorities, updated in November 2017. Other matters highlighted included:

- Poverty being recognised as a specific barrier as part of the Equality Improvement Priorities.
- The Equality Improvement Priorities complimented the priorities and ambition set out in the Best Council Plan.
- The review of Equality Improvement Priorities was due to be completed during April 2018, with the annual update and revised priorities likely to be reported to Executive Board in July 2018.

Members of the Scrutiny Board considered the report and the details highlighted at the meeting and raised a number of issues, including:

- The identified priority for women (i.e. Reduce the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and abuse) appeared limited; and did not reflect the current worldwide position in relation to sexual harassment.
- Concern that the 'access' issues for disabled people identified did not fully reflect the following matters:
 - People's desire to 'feel safe'.
 - Difficulties resulting from parking around schools.
 - Significant issues caused by poorly placed wheelie bins on pavements.
- Enforcement action where pavement access issues had been identified and reported.
- The benefit of including benchmarking data in order to demonstrate progress and comparative performance.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.
- (b) That specific service matters identified by the Scrutiny Board be highlighted with the appropriate service areas.

84 Council wide review of Workforce Development and Training

The Director of Resources and Housing submitted a report that sets out the scope of a review of Workforce Development and Training; with a view to presenting further updates as the review progresses

The following were in attendance to present the report and address any questions from members of the Scrutiny Board:

- Graham Sephton – Head of Human Resources
- Libby Megson – Human Resources Service Manager, Strategy and Housing

The Head of Human Resources introduced the report and highlighted the Council's £1.5M overall annual on development and training, with the overall purpose of the review to maximise the level of return on expenditure and value for money.

The Scrutiny Board considered the report and discussed the details presented at the meeting, highlighting a number of issues, including:

- Dedicated training for customer service staff within the Council's Contact Centre.
- The introduction of entry level customer services apprenticeships.
- Focusing on transferable skills across different staff groups.

Resolved – That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.

85 Civic Enterprise Leeds Performance Report

The Director of Resources and Housing submitted a report that provided a summary of performance information relating to Civic Enterprise Leeds covering the third quarter of 2017/18.

The following were in attendance to introduce the report and address any questions from the Scrutiny Board.

- Sarah Martin – Chief Officer, Civic Enterprise Leeds
- Mandy Smith – Head of Service (Catering Leeds)
- Julie Hatton – Head of Service (Passenger Transport)
- Mo Afzal – Principal Financial Manager (Resources & Housing)

The Chief Officer, Civic Enterprise Leeds (CEL) briefly introduced the report.

The Scrutiny Board considered the report and discussed a range of issues, including:

- The Holiday Hunger initiative.
- Concerns regarding the reduction in demand for weekday/ weekend meals for Adult Social Care service users.
- Positive impact of the changed menu choice at John Charles Sports Centre.
- The level of 'defibrillation training' among specific staff groups.
- The accurate recording and monitoring of Fire Safety audits / checks.

Resolved – That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.

86 Digital Information Service (DIS) Performance Report

The Director of Resources and Housing submitted a report that provided a summary of performance information relating to Digital Information Service and follow-up actions following the Board meeting in November 2017.

The following were in attendance to introduce the report and address any questions from the Scrutiny Board.

- Dylan Roberts – Chief Officer, Digital and Information Service

- Bev Fisher – Deputy Chief Officer, Digital and Information Service

The Chief Officer, Digital Information Service (DIS) briefly introduced the report.

The Scrutiny Board considered the report and discussed a range of issues, including:

- The performance of the service desk in terms of the time taken to answer telephone calls.
- The revised approach for recruiting service desk staff to ensure continuity of service.
- Councillor access to the case management system and the new General Data Protection Regulations due to become a legal duty from May 2018.

Resolved – That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.

87 Business Rates Update

The Chief Officer, Financial Services submitted a report that presented a range of additional information in relation to the Scrutiny Board's inquiry into Business Rates.

The following were in attendance to introduce the report and address any questions from the Scrutiny Board.

- Richard Ellis – Head of Finance (Communities and Environment, Resources and Housing, Corporate Finance)
- Mark Amson – Business Rates Manager

The Head of Finance briefly introduced the report and highlighted some of the work undertaken to maximise the Business Rates collection rates and revenue for the Council, including:

- Balancing losses from successful business rate appeals
- Providing local intelligence in terms of business occupation and developments.

The Scrutiny Board considered the report and discussed a range of issues, including:

- The current level of outstanding business rate appeals.
- The current budget allocation for potential business rate appeal losses.
- Outstanding national 'test cases' which may have a significant impact on some locally lodged business rate appeals.
- The rate relief scheme for small businesses.

Resolved – That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.

88 Financial Health Monitoring - Month 10

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Monday, 18th June, 2018

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report that introduced the Financial Health Monitoring 2017/18 – Month 10 report, considered by Executive Board at its meeting on 21 March 2018.

Richard Ellis (Head of Finance (Communities and Environment, Resources and Housing, and Corporate Finance)) was in attendance and gave a brief outline of the report that presented a projected an overall balanced budget position. Within the overall balanced position, it was highlighted that the Children and Families Directorate projected an overspend of approximately £400, 000.

Resolved – That the details presented in the report and outlined at the meeting be noted.

89 Work Schedule

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report that outlined the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the current municipal year, 2017/18.

Resolved – That the report and details relating to the Scrutiny Board's work schedule be noted.

90 Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was noted that there were no plans for any further meetings during the current municipal year.

The Chair thanked all members for their contributions over the course of the year – with particular reference to Councillor S Bentley and Councillor T Wilford who both planned not to seek re-election in the forthcoming local election in May 2018.

The meeting closed at 12:50pm.