

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 7TH MARCH, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors S Bentley, D Blackburn,
B Chastney, M Hamilton, A Lowe,
N Taggart, J Hardy, K Groves, J L Carter,
R Wood and A Gabriel

75 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

76 Minutes - 24 January and 7 February 2011

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January and 7 February 2011, be confirmed as correct records.

77 Scrutiny of the Budget and Performance Reports

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development introduced the following papers:

- Financial Health Monitoring 2010/11 – Third Quarter Report. This set out the Council's financial health position for 2010/11 after nine months of the financial year and covered revenue expenditure and income projected to the year end. It also highlighted the position regarding other key financial indicators, including Council Tax collection and the payment of creditors.
- Council Business Plan Performance Report Quarter 3 2010/11. This presented performance information summarising progress against the Council Business Plan improvement priorities for the third quarter of 2010/11 which was the final year of delivery for the plan. A performance indicator report was included and of the indicators which could be reported, 43% were currently predicted to hit target, 30% were amber and 13% were red.

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this item:

- Nicole Jackson, Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)
- Doug Meeson, Chief Officer (Financial Management)
- Alex Watson, HR Manager
- Dave Almond, Head of HR
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive, (Planning, Policy and Improvement)
- Julie Meakin, Chief Commercial Services Officer

With regards to the 3rd quarter Financial Health Monitoring report, the Board was informed that at this stage of the year, the figures available provided a more accurate position of the Council's financial health and were also to help the formulation of the following year's budget. Members were informed of an improvement in the financial position since the last Financial Health report and the various factors that has led to this. These included savings made across directorates, the benefit of low interest rates on short term borrowings, projected savings made through the Early Leavers Initiative and changes to accounting arrangements that allowed the use of capital receipts connected with meeting credit liabilities on PFI schemes. It was noted that this accounting treatment did have implications for the funding of the capital programme, in that these capital would not be available.

It was now projected that there would be a £5.2 million underspend with reserves of £19 million for the following year.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following issues were discussed:

- The use of agency staff and the possibility of having an 'in house' agency – it was reported that the Council was looking at reducing the use of agency staff and currently had a full time equivalent of 280 agency staff in employment. Many of these were still required due to a variety of issues and there is a question of whether any of these should be directly employed. There was also the position of staff awaiting redeployment to be considered before it could be decided whether there was a need to internalise temporary staff arrangements or create a bank of temporary staff.
- The following years budget had been projected on the latest figures that had shown savings since the six monthly financial health report.
- PFI – in response to a question of how long the Council would be able to use capital receipts linked to PFI credit liabilities , it was reported that the programme was due to run until 2034.
- Procurement savings – the Council had targeted an overall saving of £20 million through procurement, £5 million of which had already been achieved. Efforts to achieve this include improved monitoring of contracts, re-negotiation of existing contracts (aiming for a 10% reduction), joint procurement at a regional level or with other public bodies and reduced expenditure following changes to methods of ordering and spending.
- Future planning and budget challenges – Children's and Adult Services had continual pressures and challenging targets but it was felt that plans were in place or where being developed.
- Payment of bills – the council had a target of 92% payment of undisputed bills within 30 days.

The item was deferred to later in the meeting.

(Councillors M Hamilton and N Taggart joined the meeting at 10.05 a.m. and 10.40 a.m. respectively during the discussion of this item.

78 New Strategic Plans 2011-15

The report of the Chief Executive presented proposals for the new set of strategic planning documents for advice and consideration before they went to Executive Board and Council for approval. They included the proposals for the long term partnership strategy for the City, the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030 and the first set of delivery plans for the first 4 years. These proposals had been developed in light of the current financial situation which meant that priorities had to be more focussed than in previous plans. The proposals also took into account, the results of two recent public consultations on the Vision for Leeds and the Spending Challenge.

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this item:

- Tom Riordan, Chief Executive
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)
- Martin Dean, Head of Leeds Initiative and International Partnerships

Members attention was brought to the appendices in the report that outlined the new City Planning Framework and the City Priority Plans 2011-15. There was an ambition to get Leeds recognised as the best City in the United Kingdom and the new values of the organisation as highlighted in the Council Business Plan were highlighted.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following issues were discussed:

- Staff appraisals – Members welcomed the approach to ensure that all staff had appraisals and it was reported that it was a target for all staff to have had an appraisal before the end of March 2011.
- Scrutiny of external partners – external partners had a duty to co-operate and the need to get the right relationship with partners to respond to each others concerns was stressed.
- The role of partners and turning plans into action – it was recognised that the plans would be meaningless without actions and work had to take place with all partners across the public and private sectors to achieve targets. The Board was informed of the various partners the Council was involved with and work with developers to ensure employment opportunities and apprenticeships for local people was cited as an example of how working with partners could contribute to the success of the city.
- Work with health partners and how this affected services across the Council.
- The role of Marketing Leeds – it was reported that Marketing Leeds submitted an annual report to Executive Board and had also submitted reports to Scrutiny Board (City Development)

- Transport – it was recognised that there could be improvement and that more control and influence over public transport services would be beneficial
- Population/Housing pressures – this was regarded as a major challenge and would require in depth work with planners and developers.
- Culture – it was felt that there was a lack of things to see and do in Leeds compared to other similar sized cities. It was reported that Leeds did not always promote many of its cultural achievements as well as it could such as the College of Art which had the best results in the country.
- Other issues discussed included communications, skills, foster care, use of retail space and the use of social media.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

79 Scrutiny of the Budget and Performance reports continued

Members considered the performance information detailed in the report and were informed of the progress with those indicators that were currently classified amber and red.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following issues were discussed:

- There had been a reduction in the proportion of disabled staff employed by the Council due to higher numbers of disabled staff leaving under the Early Leavers Initiative.
- There had been a high increase in the number of e-mails received by Benefits and Streetscene Services which had meant re-prioritisation of work. These areas were now back on track to meet targets.
- Recording of statistics for the call centre, criteria used to classify missed or abandoned calls and the possibility of introducing voice recognition software.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

80 Work Programme

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development outlined the Board's Work Programme and also included recent Executive Board Minutes and a copy of the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

The Board was made aware of a request on behalf of the Corporate Governance & Audit Committee regarding the spend on Legal Services. Depending on resources and time available, this would be programmed into the April meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the report be noted and work programme be updated accordingly.
- (2) That the Forward Plan and Executive Board minutes be noted.

81 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 4 April 2011 at 10.00 a.m. Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 a.m.