

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 27TH MARCH, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, S Burke, P Carlill,
D Chapman, B Flynn, C Gruen and
K Ritchie

97 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals were made.

98 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

The agenda contained no exempt information.

99 Late Items

There were no formal late items of business.

100 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

101 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillors Finnigan, Firth and France-Mir.

102 Minutes - 20 February 2023

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor provided the following updates to the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources).

Minute 85: In light of the confidential information that formed part of the Procurement and Commercial Services update, further consideration is being given to how scrutiny of such matters may be managed and referenced in future.

Minute 91: A letter from the Chair of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources) summarising the discussions about the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge item has been sent to the Leader of Council, the wider Executive Board, directors and all Scrutiny Board Chairs.

Minutes 92: Additional information relating to Civic Enterprise Leeds has been circulated to members of the Scrutiny Board as requested.

Minute 93: Additional information relating to the item on Procurement and Commercial Services has been provided to members of the Scrutiny board as requested.

Minute 95: A proposed working group on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion will no longer be taking place, as the information is being presented to the Scrutiny Board as part of the public agenda on 27 March 2023.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

103 **Attendance Management Update**

The report of the Chief HR Officer provided the Board with an update regarding the current position in relation to attendance management and the support offered to managers and employees in relation to health and wellbeing.

The report included the following:

- An outline of the level of sickness absence across the Council.
- Details of the targeted interventions, including refreshed management reporting, targeted service support, prioritisation of long-term sickness cases, and an examination of the reported reasons for ill-health.
- Building manager capability and embedding the #BeWell Offer.
- Highlighting 13 priority service areas that have been identified for additional support from the HR Business Partnering Team.
- An overview and update of the Health and Wellbeing offer that is already in place and has previously been reported to Scrutiny.

The following were in attendance:

- Cllr Debra Coupar (Executive Member)
- Mariana Pexton (Director of Resources)
- Andy Dodman (Chief Officer, Human Resources)
- Claire Matson (Head of Human Resources)

Members noted the content of the report and the progress towards reducing the level of absence. The Scrutiny Board welcomed the further development of the #teamleedsbewell offer.

The Chief Officer for Human Resources outlined the progress delivered through targeted interventions since summer 2022 and the forecast trends for the next few months.

Members noted the financial savings sought across the organisation associated with vacancy management and questioned whether this generates additional pressure for staff managing increasing workloads. It was noted that the recent LGA Corporate Peer Review highlighted similar concerns. In response the Scrutiny Board was advised that the Council is strengthening its offer of support for staff, particularly around managerial capability.

Members sought and received further information about the role of attendance coordinators as part of targeted service interventions.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the themes emerging from work to develop a West Yorkshire Fair Work Charter and requested that further detail be presented to the Scrutiny Board once the framework is available.

The Scrutiny Board requested further information about the main reasons for sickness absence over the period covered by the report and the correlation of those absences with protected characteristics. Concern was expressed about the increase in absence related to mental health.

The Board noted an increase in absence attributable to unspecified viruses in the post-pandemic period. Members sought and received assurances that the organisation is continuing to promote public health advice, particularly for front line staff with higher levels of public interaction, as was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members sought further information about the support offered to women going through the menopause, noting that this is likely to be underreported as a specific cause of absence.

Staff perception of the main HR interventions was explored. Officers noted the upcoming staff survey will provide a snapshot of general perceptions regarding health and wellbeing and wider satisfaction of staff employed by the Council. It was agreed that additional detail on the staff survey will be provided as part of a further update to Scrutiny that would also cover absence monitoring and performance management in the new municipal year.

It was noted that there are no significant differences in absences relating to staff working increasingly from home and those same groups when they were predominantly office-based pre-pandemic. The most significant variations in sickness absence relate to staff working in environments with more physical demands, where there is a higher prevalence of absence linked to musculoskeletal issues.

Further information was requested in relation to the ongoing reporting of covid-related absences and along with detail on the types of illness that make up the Days lost per FTE chart on page 20 of the agenda pack.

The Scrutiny Board reflected on the balance between the level of support and challenge required to ensuring a healthy workforce and recommended that the successor board carries out further work in this area in 2023/24.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the content of the report and the ongoing work and progress to reduce the level of absence including the further development of the #teamleedsbewell offer.
- b) To note the contents of the Boards discussions which included requests for:
 - a. Further updates on this agenda to be provided to the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources) in 2023/24.

- b. An update to be provided in relation to the West Yorkshire Fair Work Charter once the framework is available.
- c. Confirmation of the number of absences reported as Covid-related.
- d. A breakdown of the main reasons for sickness over the time period covered by the report and, where possible, the correlation to protected characteristics.

104 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Follow Up

Further to minute 66 of the meeting held 12 December 2022 the report of the Head of Democratic Services provided a follow up on the journey being undertaken corporately by the Council to improve the approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar (Executive Member)
- Mariana Pexton (Director, Resources)
- Andy Dodman (Chief Officer, Human Resources)
- John Ebo (Head of HR Projects – EDI)

Members of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources) noted the progress and ongoing work on equality, diversity and inclusion and the focus on embedding EDI within the council's values and behaviours.

John Ebo delivered an introductory presentation highlighting issues including:

- Progress to embed EDI priorities across the organisation
- Mandatory in-person EDI training for 2,200 managers.
- The need for a 'high challenge and high support' approach to tackle unacceptable behaviour.
- Progress with a Grievance Practice Review.
- The use of EDI data to evidence diversity of employees within different services.

The Scrutiny Board sought further information about the recently appointed Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, including her caseload, capacity, accessibility and ways in which the impact of the role can be measured.

It was confirmed that the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian has committed to attend a scrutiny session during 2023/24.

Members were reassured that the Corporate Leadership Team has agreed that network leads should have protected time to support their group, and that all other members of staff should be reasonably supported to attend staff network sessions. This message is being communicated through the current manager EDI training.

The Scrutiny Board agreed to invite representatives of the staff networks to attend further scrutiny sessions in 2023/24.

Officers were asked to consider whether it would be beneficial to introduce an EDI veterans group given concerns about matters such as access to services.

It was confirmed that EDI training for elected members is being developed and will be part of this year's new member induction programme. The Board agreed to consider whether it would be beneficial for refresher training to be provided to members of the 2023/24 successor board.

The Scrutiny Board sought clarification about how improvements in the grievance process can be measured and were informed that the time taken to resolve such matters is a key metric. Effective triage of grievances is enabling a swifter resolution in cases where the use of tools such as informal mediation may be appropriate.

Further information about the Terms of Reference for the EDI Task group was requested.

Mandatory training for managers was welcomed and members were advised that this is in addition to the suite of EDI resources that have been made available to all staff in recent years. It was noted that understanding intersectionality should be an important part of the EDI manager training.

Whilst noting the plans for managers to develop action plans with teams that will set out clear actions on this agenda, the Board sought assurances around effectiveness, monitoring and accountability of progress to ensure that managers do cascade information to their staff. It was noted that this is an area for further development in terms of how this can be monitored and reported.

Cllr Burke expressed an interest in attending one of the EDI training sessions and was invited to also spend time with Cllr Coupar's team to see how the EDI priorities are being embedded in practice.

The Scrutiny Board sought clarification about the work being undertaken to support the career progression of underrepresented groups. Members requested an update on any framework that is developed in this regard.

Members explored the use of the terms 'equity' and 'equality,' and were reassured that understanding equity is an important part of EDI training.

Concern was raised about how the Council's EDI priorities can be embedded in the culture of partner organisations contracted to deliver work and services for the Council. In response officers highlighted that procurement contracts can be used as a mechanism to help achieve this ambition.

Officers outlined work that has taken place in partnership with the NHS to promote neighbourhood recruitment. This has been targeted at priority neighbourhoods and has had some success. There is an ambition to increase the scope of this work to include anchor institutions.

Members also requested further information on the Grievance Policy Review to ensure monitoring of the changes that have taken place. It was agreed that Board members will be provided with a copy of the recent Grievance Policy Review report.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the progress and ongoing work on equality, diversity and inclusion and the focus on embedding EDI priorities within the council's values and behaviours.
- b) The Board requested the following additional actions:
 - a. A copy of the Terms of Reference for the EDI Tasking Group
 - b. The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to attend a scrutiny session in 2023/24.
 - c. Representatives from the staff networks to be invited to further sessions of the Scrutiny Board in 2023/24.
 - d. Cllr Burke to spend time with Cllr Coupar's team to understand how EDI priorities are being embedded in practice.
 - e. Consideration to be given to Cllr Burke attending an EDI manager training session.
 - f. Consideration to be given as to how monitoring of manager to staff cascading of information can be monitored.
 - g. Grievance Policy Review report to be shared with Board members

105 Electoral Services Update - Voter ID

The Board considered the report of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment which provided, for information, an update on Voter identification implementation.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Debra Coupar (Executive Member)
- Mariana Pexton (Director of Resources)
- Susanna Benton (Head of Electoral Services)

The Head of Electoral Services outlined the requirements of the Elections Act 2022 in relation to photographic identification for those wishing to vote in person at a polling station.

Members were advised that this requirement will not apply to postal voters though there are plans to carry out ID check on postal voters in advance of elections in 2024. In Leeds 30% of the electorate are registered for a postal vote. There has so far been no significant increase in postal vote applications that could be attributed to electors choosing that method of voting to bypass the new identification requirements.

Susanna Benton set out the ways in which the changes have been communicated locally including via email, radio, neighbourhood forums,

advertising in multiple languages on refuse vehicles, and existing community and faith networks. This work will continue until final deadline for voter ID applications on Tuesday 25 April.

People who vote anonymously have been contacted separately.

It was confirmed that most polling stations currently have a female member of staff appointed to undertake the checking of voter ID. Should a female member of staff not be present, a female polling station inspector will be available to attend the polling station if required.

In respect of take up of the free Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) the Board were informed that research carried out by the Government and Electoral Commission suggested that in Leeds between 2,000 and 7,000 applications could be expected. In an update to the figure provided in the report the number of applications for VACs now stands at 951.

Concern was expressed about staff facing aggression if electors are turned away from a polling station. Additional training is being provided to staff and the Head of Electoral Services has been working closely with West Yorkshire Police to ensure support is in place on polling day.

It is anticipated that the polling station inspector would make the final decision about whether to refuse a ballot paper in cases where an ID document raises reasonable doubt for the presiding officer and a voter requests a second opinion or is dissatisfied with the initial view from the presiding officer.

It was confirmed that the Government has applied the new burdens doctrine to the implementation of Voter ID and the team is therefore recording additional costs with a view to applying for reimbursement.

The Head of Electoral Services confirmed that in cases where electors are turned away, they will be able to return with appropriate ID.

The Scrutiny Board thanked the Head of Elections for the extensive work undertaken to implement the new requirements relating to voter ID.

Cllr Coupar added that she has specific concerns about staff safety and whether all electors will have appropriate voter ID on election day and that she will continue to advocate for a delay to the introduction of voter ID in the coming weeks.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and discussions be noted.

106 End of Year Statement

The Board considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which presented the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources) Year End Summary: 2022/23.

Article 6 of Leeds City Council's Constitution states that the Head of Democratic Services, as designated Scrutiny Officer, will provide an annual report to Council setting out how the authority has carried out its overview and scrutiny functions during the preceding twelve-month period.

The Year End Summary is designed to complement the Annual Report with each Scrutiny Board providing links to all their agenda packs, minutes and webcasts from Board meetings over a twelve-month period.

The Year End Summary also includes a statement from the Scrutiny Chair, highlighting the issues that have been priorities for the Scrutiny Board over the last municipal year.

RESOLVED –

To note the appended 2022/23 end of year statement for the Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources) and, subject to any agreed amendments, approval be given to its publication.

107 Work Programme

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report requesting Members' consideration in relation to the Board's Work Programme which was attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report and asked members to note the provisional dates for the successor Scrutiny Board for 2023/24.

Alongside items required by the Budget and Policy Framework on an annual basis, members of the Scrutiny Board recommended that the following items of business be considered by the 2023/24 successor board:

- EDI update
- A summary from the elections service on the key information that emerges from the 2023 local elections, including details of the impact of the new national voter ID requirements. Members noted the potential opportunity for the Scrutiny Board to communicate any 'lessons learned' to Government regarding the introduction of voter ID requirements.
- Leeds 2023 updates: early in municipal year to understand progress with delivery and an update after the event to evaluate impact.

Cllr Coupar thanked the Scrutiny Board for the work carried out in 2022/23 and noted the value of influencing the development of policy through pre-decision scrutiny.

RESOLVED: - Members of the Board noted and approved:

- a) The Scrutiny Board's 2022/23 work schedule
- b) Recommended items of business for the 2023/24 successor board.
- c) Members further noted the Executive Board minutes from 8 March 2023 insofar as they relate to the remit of the Scrutiny Board.

108 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note that subject to the provisional 2023/24 committee dates being approved at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2023, the next public meeting of the successor Scrutiny Board will take place on **19 June 2023 at 10.00am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at **9.45am**.