

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 11TH DECEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A Khan in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, H Bithell, S Firth,
M France-Mir, T Hinchcliffe, R Jones,
W Kidger and E Thomson

51 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

52 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information considered by the Board.

53 Late Items

There were no late items.

54 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

55 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

The Board received the following apologies:

Cllr Andrew Carter

Cllr D Chapman

Cllr S Burke (Cllr R Jones attended as substitute)

Cllr A Parnham (Cllr M France-Mir attended as substitute)

56 Minutes - 16 October 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 October 2023, be approved as an accurate record.

57 Matters Arising

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser highlighted the following areas as matters arising from the 16 October meeting of the Board:

Min 46 – The further updates on employee mental health and well-being to be considered as separate items have been noted as items for future meetings. The ‘you said we are doing’ document has been circulated to members in advance of this meeting.

Min 48 – Following discussion on KPIs under the Best City Ambition item the Performance Report in January will now feature some of the metrics discussed under the OFLOG item considered in September.

58 West Yorkshire Joint Services Update

The Board received a report from the Head of Democratic Services providing an update on the services delivered by West Yorkshire Joint Services (WYJS) in the Leeds District and their broader regional role.

To accompany this item a presentation was made covering the key points of the report and recent developments in terms of WYJS service delivery in Leeds.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Andy Robson Director of West Yorkshire Joint Services
- Cllr Pauleen Grahame, West Yorkshire Joint Services Committee Member and Leeds Councillor
- Andy Dodman, Chief Officer HR

West Yorkshire Joint Services (WYJS) provide a number of services, some of which are statutory, on behalf of the five West Yorkshire local authorities Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale and Wakefield.

Statutory services included in their activity are Archaeological Advisory Services, Archives, Ecology Services and Trading Standards along with other services such as West Yorkshire Archaeological Services, Asbestos and Calibration Services which provide a commercial resource.

WYJS has a Net Budget of £4.8 million in 2023/24 and also generates income of approximately £5 million which is used to deliver their services. The Leeds City Council contribution to WYJS is £1.6 million in 2023/24 which equates to 35% of Local Authority contributions to them. The cost per head of Leeds population is £2.00.

The Board were presented with the headline activities that WYJS had undertaken in the Leeds District in the last twelve months. Attention was drawn to the partnership approach with other agencies to target crime in the Harehills area and the role played by WYJS, their use of disruption tactics including seizures of illicit tobacco and illegal vapes. The Board were informed of the WYJS activities in respect to the recent challenges of the 'cost of living' crisis. WYJS has focussed their activities on issues in respect to fuel and food businesses in order to protect both citizens and businesses.

The Board heard about the work done by West Yorkshire Financial Exploitation and Abuse Team (WYFEAT). This is aimed at disrupting the activities of those who target and scam vulnerable people and includes investigation of scams, frauds and doorstep crime offences. An important aim of this work done by WYFEAT is to try to ensure that vulnerable individuals can live independently at home for as long as possible to help reduce costs that Local Authorities can incur when providing adult and social care services.

The recent work of the WYJS Archive Service and the West Yorkshire Archaeological Services in the Leeds District were also highlighted. Cllr Grahame and Cllr Coupar both expressed their thanks for the work done by WYJS in Leeds. Cllr Grahame added that the services delivered by WYJS have developed considerably in recent years and that there were many more examples of the good work that they do that could have featured in the agenda pack.

In response to comments and questions from the Board, discussion included the following:

- The Board requested additional information on data to get a clearer idea of case volumes on an annual basis and on comparisons with other Joint Services providers in different areas of the country. It was agreed that this will be provided after the meeting.
- The Board also wanted relevant contact details that could be shared for the reporting of illegal and under-age vape and tobacco sales, this will be circulated to the Board outside of the meeting.
- Board members noted the work done with WYJS on cold calling and the targeting of vulnerable residents through doorstep crime. The Board thought this work was really valuable and wanted to know if more can be done to tackle this crime. The Board heard that work is ongoing to explore the use of doorbell video cameras where possible to prevent doorstep crime. Due to resource issues, it is not possible for WYJS or the five local authorities to provide this to all vulnerable residents. However, the ideal scenario would be to encourage friends and families to be aware of the possibility of doorstep crime and potentially encourage them to fund video cameras to effectively be 'on call' when an incident occurs on the doorstep and to also act as a deterrent.
- Board members encouraged people to visit the Archive Service based in Morley to see the excellent material that is available to view and how interesting the services are.

- In response to a question about how many staff are available to tackle underage or illegal sales of tobacco and vapes the meeting was informed that there are four inspectors working across West Yorkshire to tackle illicit tobacco sales, three staff who work on test purchasing to deal with underage sales and four officers to deal with counterfeiting of food and alcohol products amongst other responsibilities. It was noted that these services do deliver value for money in terms of seizures and enforcement activity given the small size of the team.
- Responding to a question relating to links to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) the Board heard that links have been strengthened and that work is ongoing to strengthen these further around support for start-up businesses, archive services and work on archaeological services.
- The Chair, Cllr Khan, added his thanks for the work done by WYJS in general but particularly related to recent work in Harehills and Burmantofts and Richmond Hill.

Resolved:

The Board noted the content of the report and appendix and the breadth of work undertaken by WYJS in Leeds and raise any questions related to these services in the city.

59 LGA Peer Challenge - Progress Review

The Board received a report from the Head of Democratic Services that sets out progress on the recommendations made in the LGA Peer Challenge inspection conducted in November 2022. This follows consideration and comment on the 15 recommendations by the Board at its meeting in February 2023.

In attendance for this item were:

- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Board Member for Resources
- Cllr Abigail Marshall-Katung, Chair of the Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board

A presentation was made setting out the key points in the report and developments since the Board last considered this item in February.

Cllr Coupar noted the positive progress that has been made against the 15 recommendations particularly when set against the backdrop of the ongoing financial challenge being faced by the Council and the wider cost of living pressures being faced by residents in the city.

In response to comments and questions from the Board, discussion included the following:

- Responding to comments about workforce developments and equal pay claims the Board heard that Leeds does not currently have any outstanding equal pay claims. Leeds has a process of job evaluation in place that guards as far as possible against any equal pay claims. In addition, consideration is being given to doing an Equal Pay Audit in 2024 to ensure that any issues are dealt with.
- The Board heard about recent discussions held at the Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Board meeting. That Board has been focusing on assets and how these are linked to elected members and local communities in the city. It was clear that community assets and buildings are an important element of meeting the Council's challenges and delivering against the city's ambitions in terms of making effective use of buildings, meeting the ongoing financial challenges and delivering on the ongoing work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Resolved:

The Board noted the following:

- a) the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report, following the Peer Challenge team's revisit on 11th September 2023.
- b) the progress made against the original LGA Peer Challenge recommendations from November 2022 and the findings of the peers following their revisit in September 2023
- c) the proposed next steps developed in response to the findings of the peers following their revisit in September 2023.

60 Annual Corporate Risk Report

The Board received a report providing an update on the risks and summary assurances presented in the Annual Corporate Risk Report, which was considered by Executive Board on 20 September 2023.

In attendance for this item were:

- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Tim Rollett, Intelligence and Policy Manager
- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Board Member for Resources

A presentation was made to support this item, highlighting the key points in the report and providing a joined up picture of the risk and resilience activities undertaken by the council. This included details on the corporate risk register providing descriptions, risk ratings and the accountable director and portfolio member risk owners. It was also noted that risk management is the responsibility of all staff working for the council and to support that a series of risk workshops have been held to provide more information to staff and to support reporting of risks.

Responding to comments and questions from the Board the following issues were discussed:

- Members sought clarity on an update to the risk register that was referenced in the submitted report. The Board heard that a recent round of risk updates had led to an increase in the risk rating of the medium-term finance risk. This was already a high rated risk but as a result of the update the risk was increased, reflecting the ongoing financial challenge being faced by Leeds and the local authority sector.
- Responding to a question on cyber attacks and cyber security and what might be learned from experiences in other public sector organisations, the Board heard that cyber security is also a high risk area with extensive measure in place. High profile cyber-attacks at other local authorities such as Hackney and Cleveland and Redcar have raised awareness of these issues and the Council is part of West Yorkshire Resilience Forum which sees the five local authorities coming together to discuss high profile incidents and to share learning on risk mitigation. In recent years this has seen a test exercise conducted to evaluate systems and identify weaknesses. A key learning area from this was a need to ensure that IT systems are kept up to date with the latest cyber security software. In addition, work is ongoing with colleagues in IDS to ensure greater cyber security and to review the existing cyber controls. It was suggested that feedback could be provided on this once the work is completed.
- The Chair noted that some of the risks in the corporate risk register actually fall into the remit of other boards. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the other scrutiny chairs to highlight these risks and to make a link between risk and performance reporting which all boards consider in June and January, the key point being that if the financial challenge impacts performance in key areas then there could be an impact on risk.

Resolved:

The Board noted the annual risk and resilience report and the assurances given on the most significant corporate risks in line with the council's Risk Management Policy and Strategy and the Board's overarching responsibility for their management, and:

- a) Agreed that the Chair should write to the other scrutiny chairs setting out the corporate risks that sit within their remits and making a link between risk and performance reporting which is considered by all scrutiny Boards in January and June each year.

61 LCC Contact Centre Update

Members received a report from the Director of Strategy and Resources providing an update on transformation work at the Contact Centre and information on work volumes and current performance. This follows previous

interest in the Contact Centre principally through reports considered in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 municipal years.

In attendance for this item were:

- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Board Member for Resources
- Gemma Taskas, Deputy Chief Officer HR and Shared Services
- Elisha Barker, Deputy Head of Shared Services

The Board received a presentation to support the report covering key issues linked to performance and channel shift which is ongoing work to encourage the use of other means to contact the council such as online forms and apps.

It was particularly noteworthy that the average score for general satisfaction was 84%, which is an improvement of 4% compared to the same period in 2022 and that customer satisfaction benchmarking with other local authorities indicates that Leeds is performing well in this area particularly in relation to waiting times.

Responding to comments and questions from Board members the following issues were covered:

- The Board welcomed the improvements in performance at the Contact Centre both in terms of general satisfaction but also on waiting times which have been significantly reduced since the last time this report was considered, by more than half.
- Members wanted more information on the limited comparison available with other local authorities. The reason for this is that local authorities offer a varied range of services through their call centres and along with differing size of authorities it makes comparison difficult. It was also noted that Leeds delivers many of its services in house, including the Contact Centre, as opposed to other areas that use outsourcing for these services. It was agreed that more comparative data, including with regional neighbours, will be shared outside of the meeting but with the important caveat around the difficulty in making accurate comparisons and that this work needs to be proportionate.
- Responding to a question around staff reductions and budget savings and how that might impact upon performance in the future and also retention of staff with skills in customer contact, the Board heard that there are budget savings planned across shared services (totalling just over £2m in 2024/25) and these include the Contact Centre. This will be done through the voluntary leavers scheme, but it is likely that this will impact on the Contact Centre in terms of the total of staff available to take calls. To mitigate against that and potential impacts on performance, increasing the pace of channel shift is an option that could be pursued which would see a reduction in call volumes and more digital means of contact.
- The Board were interested in development of online chat technology, apps and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to reduce waiting times and improve services. In response, the Board heard that the new telephony system

'Genesys' will be deployed from April 2024. This will initially provide improved telephony functionality, with future phase 2 developments that will see the introduction of additional digital technology at the Contact Centre.

- Members were concerned about the March/April 2024 deployment of the new telephony system which is at one of the busiest times of the year. There is an option to retain the current phone system for a further 6 months if the Genesys system is not ready to be deployed in March.
- The Board were keen to draw comparison with some waiting times experienced in the private sector and how good the Council's waiting times are when compared to those with many well into double figures in terms of length of wait.
- The Board asked about the volume of emails received in Leeds over 75,000 over a 6 month period much higher than in other local authority areas and there were concerns about the amount of time it takes to deal with that type of query. In response the board heard that channel shift is the key element in reducing the volume of emails with plans to introduce more self-service options to free up staff time, improve performance and improve the customer experience.
- The Board were concerned about the possibility of digital exclusion for those who are not able to access IT or are not confident in using digital means of contact. The Board heard that an EDI assessment will take place to ensure that people are not excluded and that there is a commitment to always having a phone number available to residents which is also supported by the community hubs that offer face to face services as well.
- Responding to member questions about who to contact when members have concerns about customer contact services the Board were advised to contact senior officers and this will be further supported by a generic email address for members to use when there are service concerns.
- The Board also heard about innovative recruitment approaches which has seen more varied shift patterns offered to staff, for example based around the regular school run which has enabled better deployment of staff. In addition, a programme of training has been developed to upskill the workforce and create more varied expertise amongst staff to enable wider deployment on the various phone lines.
- The Executive Board Member, Cllr Coupar, also welcomed the improvement that has been made in this service and thanked the staff that have contributed towards this, the Chair of the Board, Cllr Khan, supported those comments and added his thanks for the improvements that have been taking place at the Contact Centre. It was agreed that these thanks should be passed on to the teams working in the Contact Centre.

Resolved:

The Board noted the content of the report and the progress that has been made against the actions that were reported to this Board in September 2022.

62 Work Programme

The Board considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year.

In attendance for this item was:

- Rob Clayton, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

The Board were informed of the forthcoming Budget Working Group on 20 December at 10.00AM, this will be a remote meeting through MS Teams.

In addition, the Board were informed of a possible site visit to the Council's Contact Centre to take place in January 2024, which would be opened up to the Board should any members wish to attend. This is linked to the item considered earlier on today's agenda providing an update on service development and performance at the Contact Centre.

Resolved:

The Board noted the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year.

63 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next public meeting of the Board will take place on 15 January 2024 at 10.00am. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at 9.30am.