

Interim Scrutiny Statement – Future Working Arrangements at Leeds City Council

Date: 19 July 2021

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report presents a scrutiny statement following four evidence sessions and a summary of evidence report all looking at future working arrangements, agile working and estate realisation at Leeds City Council. The statement is included in this report at Appendix 1.
- The statement sets out key findings to date and seeks the views of board members ahead of full approval at the next formal meeting of the Board. Following this it is intended that the issue will feature later in the municipal year through further evidence sessions and a draft Inquiry report to be agreed in the New Year.
- Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources has focused on the new working arrangements that have emerged and been accelerated as a result of Covid-19. This has led to proposals to develop a more flexible approach to workforce arrangements based on a balance between home and office working and has accelerated the need for enhanced ICT systems to support that. In addition the Council has begun to develop proposals for estate realisation in response to the likely reduced use of council buildings and to meet the ongoing financial challenge brought about by past Government budget reductions and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ensuring that the Council agrees appropriate principles to guide future working arrangements and that any additional costs and income associated through the new arrangements are fully considered promotes the Best Council Ambition to be an efficient, enterprising and healthy organisation. The focus on delivering the future working arrangements whilst maintaining service delivery and service standards as suggested by the board contributes to the clear focus on delivering high quality, locally integrated public services set out in the Best Council Plan.

Recommendations

Board members are asked to consider and discuss the scrutiny statement and commit to returning to this issue as the municipal year progresses with a view to agreeing the statement at the next formal meeting of the Board, consider future evidence sessions and finalise an inquiry report in the New Year.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources first considered future working arrangements at its meeting in November 2020. Since that time there have been two further evidence gathering sessions in January and February followed by a summary of evidence item in March and a further evidence gathering session at the Boards last meeting in June.
- 2 How the Council delivers new working arrangements is an evolving agenda and it is likely to remain a focus of the Board throughout municipal year 2021/22 as the Council begins to firm up its proposals as they become operational. However, given the number of reports already considered by the Board it is now appropriate to agree some interim findings to ensure that scrutiny can influence the evolving agenda and provide pre-decision scrutiny that adds value to policy development and decision making in this area.
- 3 Appendix 1 provides more detail but the main focus of this report is on the evidence provided from HR in relation to staff flexibility, effective service delivery, the principles that will underpin the future working arrangements, staff wellbeing and mental health, staff surveys and the costs associated with the provision of equipment to work at home.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected: Please state the specific wards affected here. If city-wide, state "All" for clarity.

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 4 Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources has set out its initial views on the development of future working arrangements at the Council and these are detailed at Appendix 1. A key aim of the scrutiny function in Leeds is to add value and enhance policy and decision making at the Council. By providing early feedback from the Board the aim is to summarise the views of scrutiny as this important, strategic agenda develops.
- 5 Ensuring that future working arrangements and the move to more home working blended with time spent in the office is delivered effectively will contribute to the city's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also clearly important that staff can benefit from an enhanced work life balance but maintaining service delivery and performance standards is also of equal importance and the comments and feedback from the Board contained at Appendix 1 reflect that and highlight areas where the Board feel more could be done.
- 6 The Board will continue to monitor progress on this agenda throughout the municipal year with plans to consider further evidence as the programme evolves in the coming months.
- 7 In line with the Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules, Scrutiny Boards will also continue to ensure that equality and diversity/cohesion and integration issues are considered in decision making and policy formulation.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 8 This item has featured at Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources consistently over the past 9 months. Board members have been consulted and the details contained at Appendix 1 reflects comments and feedback based on that.

- 9 In terms of an area of scrutiny focus in 2021/22 the Director of Resources has been consulted on the intention of the Board to feature further reports on this issue throughout the municipal year.

What are the resource implications?

- 10 There are no specific resource implications linked to this report.

What are the legal implications?

11. There are no specific legal implications linked to this report.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

12. There are no specific risk management implications linked to this report.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

13. The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Boards continue to promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the Best Council Plan.
14. Ensuring effective delivery of the future working arrangements proposals will contribute to the Councils three key pillars agenda as staff will be operating effectively and will be deployed appropriately to ensure that the Council can continue to work towards delivering inclusive growth, supporting health and well-being and tackling the climate emergency.

Appendices

- 1 Appendix 1 – This sets out the scrutiny statement for members approval.

Background papers

- 2 None