

## **SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)**

**MONDAY, 16TH JANUARY, 2023**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, S Burke, P Carlill,  
D Chapman, S Firth, B Flynn, M France-  
Mir, C Gruen and K Ritchie

### **71 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents**

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

### **72 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no exempt items.

### **73 Late Items**

There were no late items.

### **74 Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

### **75 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

No apologies were received.

### **76 Minutes - 12 December 2022**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022, be approved as a correct record with the addition of the following to minute 66 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Update and staff Networks:

‘In order to ensure that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the core of the Council’s activity reverse monitoring is undertaken and this includes the Chief Executive, Tom Riordan, who is engaged in reverse mentoring with the Chair of the LGBT+ network with the aim of developing social learning, strengthening employee relationships and shaping the Council’s inclusive culture’

### **77 Matters Arising**

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser highlighted the following actions from the previous minutes:

Minute 66 -Equality Diversity and Inclusion Update - Staff Networks

Further information had been sought on workforce characteristics as discussed at the meeting. It was noted that 61% of staff are female. Also, a query about progression for female staff has been followed up with HR.

#### Minute 67 – Devolution Update

Some points of clarification have been requested from West Yorkshire Combined Authority around the role of the PCP and communication linked to Adult Education. In addition, the plans to invite Tracy Brabin the West Yorkshire Mayor to a meeting of Council, where Elected Members could meet her and ask questions in 2023 have been relayed back to Governance Services. Chair asked the Principal Scrutiny Advisor to relay the need to provide the information as soon as possible.

#### Minute 69 – Work Programme

The possibility of an Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) working group has been explored (members received an email in December) and the date of this will be confirmed once finalised. The focus of the working group will be on the corporate approach to EDI as opposed to the staff networks as this aspect was not covered fully due to time constraints.

## **78 Consultation and Mass Communication**

The report of the Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement set out the Council's approach on the roles of communications and marketing team, and the small corporate consultation and engagement function which is part of intelligence and policy. The report outlined their roles and responsibilities, described the approach both take to their direct delivery of activity and highlighted where they may also provide broader cross-council oversight and advice.

In attendance for this item were:

- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Mariana Pexton - Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement (soon to be new Director of Resources)
- Cllr Coupar - Executive Member for Resources
- Mike Eakins - Intelligence and Policy Manager
- Frank Perrins - Senior Intelligence and Policy Officer
- Carl Whalley- Communications and Marketing Business Partner

The Chief Officer Strategy and Resources presented the item and informed the Board of the following points:

- This is an important set of functions which includes inter-related issues mass communication, consultations and engagement and the contact centre.
- The teams are fairly small but have a good set of expertise within them.
- The report had been good to draw out new ideas of what the teams might do in the future and these ideas were within the submitted report.

Responding to questions from Members the following information was provided:

- Many of the communications including surveys are directorate led and the teams are not involved in all pieces of work. The officers present were unable to comment on all the surveys being undertaken at this current time due to the directorate led approach. However, the teams do use their experience and learn from feedback provided by residents. All communications, surveys etc. should use plain English with no jargon, where legal jargon is required, they assist to navigate round this for ease of understanding.
- It was acknowledged that in some cases there can be a number of similar surveys taking place from different sectors and services which can cause confusion, but the teams do try and communicate with other sectors and partners to assess timing of surveys.
- The continued development of a shared access planner on MS Teams to assist with consultation planning, ensuring that subject experts have input into major consultations and to avoid the potential for duplication was welcomed by the Board and was noted as a possible work item for the next municipal year.
- The service is currently developing the MS Teams Planner, but this was in its early stages of use and is currently only used internally. It was the intention to open up access to external partners in the longer term once the approach is established across the council.
- Different forms of communication have been tried and it is recognised that not everyone is comfortable using digital forms of contact.
- It was noted that analysis was carried out to ensure that communications and surveys were sent to residents where more meaningful data would be captured on a specific issue.
- Good quality communications should have legal necessities, timeliness, be accessible, use plain English, have questions that are fit for purpose and able to draw out findings.
- Staff engagement full satisfaction surveys are undertaken every two years. Through the pandemic these were adapted to include more frequent Wellbeing Pulse Surveys to look at the personal wellbeing of staff which is fed through to management for discussion and action.
- The Budget Consultation is undertaken with both teams working together, and with Finance colleagues, to design the consultation and get results in a short time frame.
- Members requested further information on how the Voice and Influence Team communicate with children, parents and carers.
- It was suggested that the Member Updates be modified to include planned consultation and long-term aspirations for consultation.
- It was acknowledged that some service areas do include communications to Members on specific consultation and surveys.
- It was noted that moving forward it was the intention to present an annual report on consultation to Members to try to draw out key findings that could be used to improve future consultations and identify themes across different consultation exercises. It was also noted that first half of postcodes were used to analyse data and information could be provided to show how representative consultation was in the city in

terms of feedback from different areas of Leeds whilst also protecting anonymity or identification.

- It was acknowledged that there was a need to balance online consultation with face to face activities but there were limited resources to deliver face to face sessions.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and welcomed the suggestion of an annual report.

**RESOLVED –**

- a) Note the content of the report and the ongoing work to enhance how the council consults and communicates with Leeds residents.
- b) Continue to monitor the next steps in this work with a focus on development of an annual report on consultation and the use of a planning tool to ensure more effective and consistent consultation across the Council.
- c) Consider this as a possible work programme item for municipal year 2023/24.

**79 Best City Ambition and Performance Update**

The report of the Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement provided the Scrutiny Board with an update on work to implement the Best City Ambition since its adoption by full Council in February 2022. In addition, the report also sets out a summary of performance against the Organisational Plan for the council and city and other performance areas relevant to the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board and in line with the Best City Ambition.

In attendance for this item were:

- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Mariana Pexton - Chief Officer Strategy and Improvement (soon to be new Director of Resources)
- Cllr Coupar - Executive Member for Resources
- Mike Eakins - Intelligence and Policy Manager
- Tim Rollett - Intelligence and Policy Manager

The Board was provided with the following information:

- The Best City Ambition was adopted by full Council in February 2022. This has been a transitional year implementing the revised strategic framework for the Council.
- The Council has a wide range of strategies and following consultation with Executive Board members, CLT and Directors, key strategies have been selected to focus on as the strategic framework for the Best City Ambition. Alongside this, is a clear intention for some of the strategies to be done as action plans focused on delivery.
- There has been engagement at Community Committees with more work planned at a community level with Local Area Plans to be developed to enhance strategic focus in localities.

In response to questions from Members the Board was provided with the following information on the development of the Best City Ambition and on the performance indicators presented:

- For procurement purposes SME's still need to demonstrate value for money as well as being local to the Leeds area and contributors to the Leeds economy.
- It was acknowledged that Covid has had an impact on sickness absence for frontline staff as they are unable to come into work. However, back office staff were able to work from home even if they had covid symptoms. It was noted that there had been a significant reduction in long term sickness in recent months, but more work would need to be done to reduce absence in line with assumptions contained in the budget for 2023/24. The Board noted that sickness absence is a potential area of interest to the Board in the coming months.
- Members requested a more detailed break by ward in relation to climate PI's if possible.
- It was noted that work was ongoing in relation to private landlords and the Council continued to lobby Government in relation to private landlords.
- It was recognised that collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates were down on the previous years. However, staff were working hard to get various new payments made and summons were being processed. Members were advised that the Courts were getting back to normal after the pandemic and it was expected that collections would start to increase.
- Members were advised that a separate risk report is presented annually and not included within this report.
- The Board requested more detailed information for future reports in relation to the Breakthrough Priorities in particular mental health in the community.
- It was noted that in relation to the procurement and the 30 days, time limit, information would be checked and provided to Members.
- The Board asked for more information in relation to Social Value in procurement KPI's and information evidencing the fair payment of tax by our suppliers. If possible, the Board were keen to see performance information relating to these areas in future reports.

**RESOLVED – To:**

- a) Note the content of the report and consider any further scrutiny actions that may arise.
- b) Note the performance information contained in the appendices to the report and the issues which have been highlighted and consider if they wish to undertake further scrutiny work to support improvement over the coming year in any of these areas.

**80 Financial Health Monitoring 2022/23 (Month 7)**

The report of the Head of Democratic Services asked the Board to consider the Financial Health Monitoring report in the context of wider discussions

about the proposed budget for 2023/24 and performance against strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the Board.

In attendance for this item were:

- Victoria Bradshaw - Chief Officer Financial Services
- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Cllr Coupar - Executive Member for Resources

The Chief Officer Financial Services presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- This report covered the financial position at month 7, October and there was a forecast of a £15.4m overspend. It was noted that the main areas for the overspend were Children and Families with an overspend in Resources and a slight underspend in strategic.
- The savings plans in the majority of service areas are on target to be achieved. These total £16.5m which was set out in the 2022/23 budget.
- There was a shortfall on the Passenger Transport savings as there had been a significant increase in numbers requiring transport.
- Procurement savings have also been more challenging due to the inflationary pressures being felt by suppliers.
- There was a reduction in the non-essential spend at month 7, which was 7.5% lower than the same period in 2021/22 due to actions put in place to freeze that type of spending.
- The HRA is currently projecting a balanced position.
- Council Tax and Business Rates are below collection rates from the previous year, with work ongoing to resolve this.

Responding to a question from the Board in relation to cross directorate working to address budget gaps, Members were advised that through the summer focus was put into the savings proposals for the next financial year. There is a weekly meeting with a representative from each of the directorates who work as a team to look at where pressures are and how and where the savings can be made to reduce budget pressures. These proposals are then presented to the Executive Board during the Autumn and feature at Scrutiny through budget working groups and consideration of the budget for the next financial year in January.

It was noted that looking at historical trends there has been a move towards prioritising funding to social care services which are often demand led budgets.

**RESOLVED** – To consider the relevant information within the attached Executive Board report and provide comment in relation to those service areas that fall within the remit of the Board.

## 81 Proposed Budget for 2023/24 and Provisional Budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided members of Scrutiny Board, Strategy and Resources with the Executive Board's proposed budget for 2023/24 and provisional budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 for consideration, review and comment on matters and proposals relating to service areas that fall within the Board's remit.

In attendance for this item were:

- Victoria Bradshaw - Chief Officer Financial Services
- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Eve Roodhouse - Chief Officer Culture and Economy
- Cllr Coupar - Executive Member for Resources

Chief Officer Financial Services provided the following information to the Board:

- This report recommended the 2023/24 budget for consultation and set out proposals for the HRA and the Capital Programme. It also detailed the dedicated school grant allocations.
- There has been a net increase in the budget of £35.2m after the additional resources identified from Council Tax, Business Rates and other sources.
- The report identified pressures of which the 4% pay increase, demand increases, energy costs, fuel costs are the most significant. In total the budget proposals contain a requirement for £69.8m of savings to be made.
- The report assumed Council Tax at 2.99% and Adult Social Care precept at 1.99% and additional income from Business Rates at £15.3m.
- There is a Capital Programme Review which is being undertaken to manage the additional requirement of current borrowing that the Council has. Details of the savings proposals were detailed within the submitted report.
- It was also noted that Executive Board had considered the application to form a Business Rates Pool for next year for the five west Yorkshire Authorities and York which has been approved.
- The provisional settlement has identified additional resources since the proposals went to the December Executive Board, these total of £4.6m. It was noted that a number of pressures had also been identified since December Executive Board, for example a number of grants had been rolled into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) of £1.2m which has now reduced the £4.6m to £3.4. It was known that there were pressures on Children and Families Transport because of the number of Education Health and Care Plans which are coming to the service. It was also noted that casual staff pay had increased due to the pay increases.
- The Board were advised that the Council was setting its budget, but the final settlement was not yet known.

Responding to questions from Members the Board were informed of the following:

- Inflation would continue to be monitored as it had been in this financial year. Provision has been made in the budget for CPI and RPI on required contracts from September with reports provided on a monthly basis to monitor this. It was noted that if inflation increases action would be required.
- It was noted that there were some significant office developments proposed for the city centre and when some complete this year, business rates income will come from them. The Board were also advised that since the pandemic businesses were moving around the city looking for the right premises for them which could have impacted on total business rate collection. There was a lot of positivity in the growth of the city and that the digital sector was growing quickly.
- The Board had noted the improved KPI's for the Contact Centre, and the potential savings this could have. The Board would like to keep a check on this improvement and to ensure that planned reduction in staffing do not impact on performance.
- On printing it was acknowledged that there had been a reduction of about 80% over the past few years. In relation to reducing postage there were still improvements to be made. Members noted that there had been changes to Council Tax bills with some now electing to receive their bills via email, and there was potential for even more changes and more savings through this.
- The Board was advised that that charging for parking, at parks and attractions was still under consultation by the Executive Board and was not yet a final budget proposal.

**RESOLVED** – To consider the relevant information provided within the submitted report on the proposed budget for 2023/24 and provisional budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and identify any specific comments and/ or recommendations for consideration by Executive Board as it prepares its final proposals for consideration by full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023.

## **82 Work Programme**

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the 2022/23 work programme for the Scrutiny Board, Strategy and Resources and was reflective of Board Member discussions to date.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report and requested Member's consideration of the Work Schedule appended to the submitted report at Appendix 1

The Board was advised that a Working Group to cover Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was to be set up and dates would be sent to Members as soon as possible.



The next meeting in February would consider the Peer Challenge item which had been scheduled for March. It was noted that other Scrutiny Chairs would be invited to the February meeting for this item.

**RESOLVED** – To consider and discuss the Scrutiny Board’s Work Schedule for the 2022/23 municipal year.

**83 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

To note that the next meeting of Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources will be on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 at 10am. A pre-meeting will take place for all Board Members at 9:45am.

*Meeting concluded at 11.35*