

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A Khan in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, H Bithell, S Burke,
D Chapman, S Firth, T Hinchcliffe,
A Parnham, M Robinson and E Thomson

27 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

28 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information on the agenda.

29 Late Items

There were no late items.

30 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations.

31 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Cllr W Kidger.

32 Minutes - 17 July 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

33 Matter Arising

Minute 22 – Leeds 2023 Update

Additional details have been provided to the Board on Leeds 2023 including the ING report on visible cities, Leeds Creative Skills Festival and some specific requests related to Rothwell Ward and school involvement in Leeds 2023. There remains an issue around data that the Leeds 2023 team do not have the capacity to capture 'in year' as they are busy delivering the programme of events – over 60 participation data and a ward breakdown of participation to date. These two items are being pursued by the scrutiny advisor.

Minute 24 2022/23 Financial and Treasury Management Outturn Reports

Information has been provided to Board Members on the children and families budget requests in terms of overall C&F budget comparisons and Children Looked After budget comparisons with core cities.

34 Staff Survey Analysis

The report of the Director of Strategy and Resources provided an update on the latest Staff Survey carried out in Spring 2023. In total, 14729 staff were sent the survey and 7647 completed it – an overall response rate of 52%. Figures for response rates for offline staff were also provided. The report outlined the survey approach and response rates, the results and analysis, and how the Council is responding to the feedback.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Graham Sephton, Head of Human Resources
- Frank Perrins, Senior Intelligence and Policy Officer

Supported by presentation slides the Board were given an overview of key findings, results and planned actions resulting from the staff survey. One key piece of data highlighted by those attending was that colleagues gave an overall satisfaction score for their jobs at Leeds City Council as 7.4 out of 10.

The links between the staff survey and the 'Be Your Best' Organisation Plan and manager development programme that have featured at the Board in recent months were highlighted. Having an effective, productive and happy workforce gives the Council the best chance of delivering against the Best City Ambition and delivering stronger services to Leeds residents and within localities. Ensuring that staff have a voice and are listened to is a key element of this.

The following areas featured in the presentation:

- Why the survey matters - understanding how the majority of staff feel about their job, their team, their workplace and employer, identifying what is working well and what is not and why, capturing honest feedback and fresh ideas, delivering better services and supporting managers to get the best from everyone and to help direct the Council's employment/people agenda and identifying improvement actions for the future.
- What has been done so far on the 2023 survey and what future actions are planned.
- Analysis of the results has revealed that on the positive side response rates are up, staff know what is expected of them at work, receive support from management and colleagues, and feel that their team supports equality and preventing discrimination. Where there is more

work to do focussed on career progression, better tools and equipment, workloads and the need for more support through periods of change.

- The need for key issues to be addressed from the survey findings in the coming weeks and months.

The Executive Member for Resources, Cllr Coupar, emphasised the strong positives that have emerged from the staff survey and in particular highlighted the increased response rate (especially for offline staff) but also noted the need for staff concerns to be addressed and the importance of staff are voicing concerns and having them responded to.

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

- Members were interested in the response to staff concerns about tools and equipment and how improvements might help staff do their jobs better. In terms of digital improvements, it was suggested that IDS colleagues are contacted to ask for more information in terms of specific actions and plans. It was noted that the quality tools comments were not just about digital tools but also related to frontline staff such as park staff for example. The issue regarding tools and equipment on the frontline does not relate to health and safety concerns which was immediately checked out when the result from the survey were analysed. Further work is ongoing on the equipment and tools concern to get more detailed information about specific issues.
- The Board asked about the systems and support in place when staff are really struggling from a well-being perspective or from the demands of their role. Throughout Covid a strong well-being offer was developed to support staff and this has continued for staff who need extra support beyond what their managers offer, this offer is widely promoted and there are ongoing efforts to increase take up where appropriate.
- Whilst recognising the clear improvement in responses to the survey there were concerns about the high variation of response rates, with some areas scoring as low as 12%. Additionally, members sought further information on appraisals and the quality of them given feedback from the staff survey. On the different levels of response to the survey work is underway through direct contact with those teams to understand the reasons and also to ensure that those staff can still have their voices heard, consideration is being given to how response rates might be higher in the future for areas with low response rates, with Core Business Transformation hopefully helping this.
- On appraisals it was recognised that more training on appraisal and performance management is required to ensure consistent quality of appraisal discussion. Building on the recent manager EDI training, which has delivered significant improvements in that area, there are plans to deliver more mandatory face to face training for managers to deal with appraisals. It was also emphasised that the staff survey is an 'additive' and not the only way in which feedback from staff is sought.
- Members picked up on the identified staff groups where there was more likely to be positive feedback for example recent appointees and

Black/Black British. Some of this did not tally with direct feedback heard by members. Analysis is ongoing on these results and members were informed that there are quite a lot of factors at play when analysing demographics for example certain demographic groups are more prevalent in some services so disaffection or happiness can be based around service management and culture more than simply demographic groups. More work is planned with HR on this to understand the data and ensure that the right problems are being worked on.

- In response to questions relating to cultural awareness the Board were assured that the training for managers is not yet complete and there is more to come in terms of that training for managers being taken back to wider teams and the actions that will follow.
- Members raised questions around neutral responses both in terms of how that is interpreted, as in not necessarily a positive, and the validity of having a survey that allows a neutral response. Some members believed that it would be preferable to have at the least slightly negative or slightly positive options, rather than neutral options.
- Following further questioning on EDI and the broadly positive responses in the survey, members were keen to understand if this positivity represents staff who have protected characteristics or more an overall feeling of staff who do not in terms of how that agenda has been progressed. The board was assured that staff with protected characteristics have been part of the analysis and there are plans to drill down into this as some of the positive response to EDI from those with protected characteristics has not been as positive. A request was made for any additional information on this once the work is complete to be shared with the various elected member champions for protected characteristics.
- Members suggested that a 'you said, we did' type approach could be adopted in response to the staff survey findings. This was met with a positive response, building on work done in advance the survey that took this approach, and with an additional commitment to assure members that managers are being encouraged to adopt that approach in dealing with staff engagement in their respective services.
- Comparison of staff survey results with other local authorities has taken place along with other public sector organisations and where the questions match in terms of each survey comparisons are made.
- Referring to the lower response rates for offline staff, members wanted to understand more about the reasons for that and possible digital solutions that might address it such as use of smart phones to complete the survey. One third of offline staff responded (two thirds of online staff did for comparison) and digital solutions were offered such as QR codes. Members were also informed that there was a significant effort to increase responses through site visits, liaison with Trade Unions, videos from members, and poster campaigns, it was noted that 33% was the highest response ever from offline staff. It was also hoped that the Core Business Transformation Programme could assist in driving response rates up further.

- Members wanted to know more about techniques to manage workloads and it was suggested that a further report could come back on the corporate approach to managing workloads. The LGA Peer Challenge also noted growing workloads as an issue and work is underway to tackle the problem through digitising, automating and simplification of policies. It has been decided that single solutions such as 'email free Fridays' that have been used elsewhere are not suitable for the Council due to the complexity of the differing council services and varied workloads. Instead, the Council does encourage extension of deadlines where possible, taking regular breaks, the wellbeing offer, and other innovative local approaches that can make a difference to staff who are struggling with high workloads.
- In terms of the next staff survey this is likely to take place in 2025.
- The Board also stressed recognition of work and also continuing to encourage managers to say thank you when work has gone well and delivered positive results.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report and survey results, analysis and response plans and:

- a) Receive further updates and reports as this work progresses, making links to the current and future scrutiny work programme as appropriate.
- b) Once the further EDI analysis is complete share the findings with the elected member champions representing the staff networks

35 Electoral Services Update – 2023 Election Review/Postal Voter Validation

The report of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment provided an update on Voter participation May 2023, Voter ID, Changes to the postal and proxy voting application process and the outcome of the Parliamentary boundary review following a request for an Electoral Services Update from the Board.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- John Mulcahy, Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory
- Sue Wolfe, Deputy Head of Electoral Services
- Cllr Coupar, Executive Member for Resources

The Board was given a presentation which focussed on the following main areas:

- The impact of the pandemic on postal voter numbers in Leeds and subsequent impact on footfall in polling stations, Leeds has the largest number of postal voters of any local authority in England.
- Further information showing that Leeds has always had a large number of postal voters and how the peak of postal voting following and during the pandemic is beginning to ease with more people attending a polling station compared to 2021 and 2022.

- Comparative data showing the percentage of voters unable to vote, with Leeds performing well in comparison to other core cities, with just 0.29% of voters attending a polling station unable to vote due to the new voter ID requirements.
- Plans to focus resource in wards where voter ID issues were most prevalent in future years to increase awareness.

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

- The Board were keen to thank Electoral Services for the communications campaign that led into the 2023 election in Leeds ensuring that residents were aware of the new voter ID regulations.
- Reference was made to accessibility of voting following the voter ID changes particularly for ethnically diverse communities and those with disabilities. The Board were informed that whilst polling stations are as accessible as possible no record of those that have voted in terms of demographic details is kept, due to it being a secret ballot.
- In response to queries about 'greeters' at polling stations and the potential for these to skew the number of people who are recorded as not being able to vote, Members were informed that 'greeters' were not used in Leeds so there would be no impact on the figures for the city.
- Members were concerned that the wards with the highest number of voter refusals because of ID were focussed in areas with diverse communities and where relative deprivation levels are highest both in terms of those being initially refused and then not returning to vote. Overall Leeds had a very low refusal rate, 225 in total across Leeds. However, an action plan will be drawn up based on the data from the elections and resources and communications will be targeted at those areas where there were the highest number of refusals.
- A small correction was advised at paragraph 4.3 linked to different figures in the report. It was agreed that the figures will be checked, and correct ones circulated as appropriate.
- Members asked about postal votes where the voter has made a mistake and the ballot is 'spoiled' and also where the voter has not received the postal vote. The Board were informed of plans for those voters where the postal vote has not been received, resources allowing, to hand deliver postal votes to people who are in this situation so that they are able to vote.
- The new constituency boundaries were queried with a particular focus on cross border co-operation with other authorities that will now 'share' a parliamentary constituency with Leeds. The Board were assured that work is underway on this and that Leeds has experience with this having worked with Wakefield City Council on a shared constituency in the past. Similarly working groups are in place to ensure co-ordination when there is more than one election on the same day, for example WYCA mayoral elections.

- The Board welcomed the suggestion of bringing back action planning for the Local Elections in 2024 to set out how the service is trying to improve awareness of the Voter ID requirements and other planning.
- The Chair asked about the robustness of resources to deal with postal voting given the increased number now using that method. He was reassured about arrangements and additional staffing that is available to ensure that the postal voting experience runs smoothly.

Cllr Coupar, the Executive Board Member for Resources, highlighted that the work in Leeds had received ministerial recognition at meetings she attended in the build up to the Election in 2023 and wanted to put on record her thanks to Electoral Services for the work they did to deliver a successful Election. The Executive Member also expressed concerns about the Voter ID changes at a higher profile Elections such as the expected General Election in 2024.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report and

- a) Consider an item on planning for the Election in 2024 as part of the Board’s work programme in 2023/24.

36 Office For Local Government (OFLOG)

The report of the Director of Strategy and Resources provided the Board with information in relation to the newly launched Office for Local Government. The launch outlined the Government’s vision for Oflog, to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local government and to support its improvement. In addition, a summary of the performance indicators (metrics) Leeds City Council will be required to report against and the current set of results for the council’s performance against relevant comparators, were provided.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Mike Eakins, Head of Policy
- Richard Ellis, Deputy Chief Finance Officer

It was noted that Oflog is in its early phases and this report is very much an early look at the implications of it for the Council. The expectation is that the role of Oflog will become clearer in the coming months as will how the data provided in the report will be used by Government.

From a finance perspective, which is data that will fall in the Strategy and Resources Board’s remit in the future, these indicators have been available for a number of years and previously were in CIPFA’s resilience index. It was noted that Leeds is aware of the indicators and is taking steps to address the reserve position and improve performance in some of the areas identified.

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

- Board members requested a training session on Oflog and the data that is used to better understand the metrics used given that it is new and could be a factor for a number of years. It was agreed that this would be taken forward through member development.
- Members were interested in the role of WYCA in Oflog and the development of a digital dashboard. In terms of WYCA they are involved in employment and skills and will be an important partner in that work and that metric. On the digital dashboard it was hoped that the Oflog dashboard is developed and improves to become more accessible in addition to potential local approaches to deliver a dashboard containing the data across West Yorkshire.
- Members noted debt levels and the performance of Leeds on that and asked about the implications of that on the revenue budget. It was estimated that debt repayments and interest on debt is in the region of £120m annually though it was important to note that the debt figures for Leeds include the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and not all local authorities have HRAs, with housing companies and arm's length arrangements being used in other authorities, so the data perhaps needs to be treated with caution.
- Members raised some queries regarding the data for adult social care contained in the report, it was agreed that this will be provided to members following consultation with the relevant services, and for members to note that these KPIs will be examined through the relevant scrutiny board.
- Members raised concerns about the reliability of the data and data contamination and whether each authority is submitting the same information to ensure that it is a fair measure of performance. In some areas such as waste there will be differences between what each authority submits, as the approach isn't as mature as say in the adult social care block where there is an established framework, and the Board were informed that this is a concern, and it would be a wait and see approach to see which direction Oflog goes in dealing with this.

RESOLVED –

The Board agreed to:

- a) Note the information provided in the appendix to this report which contains an overview of the Oflog metrics and results for Leeds and relevant comparators.
- b) Oflog metrics being incorporated into regular performance reporting to the relevant Scrutiny Board as part of the regular reporting which takes place twice per year.
- c) Establish training for elected members on Oflog metrics.

37 Work Programme

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the 2023/24 Work Programme for the Board. The report reflected Elected Member comments made at previous meetings on the work programme item.

Members received a report on the LGA Peer Challenge return visit that had taken place earlier recently from the Director of Strategy and Resources.

Overall feedback from the visit was positive with strong comments on progress since the initial visit in relation to EDI, the use of data, the change and transformation agenda, ownership of the budget challenge and Leeds having a positive impact on national issues such as funding for Children Services. The visit also noted the 'Be Your Best' approach and the wellbeing offer to staff.

In terms of areas to continue to focus on the budget challenge, workforce resilience and work on locality arrangements, which was a recommendation in the original LGA report, were particularly mentioned.

It was also noted that a full update on the Peer Challenge will be provided to the Board at the December meeting.

Members attention was drawn to recommendation b) and paragraph 7 of the Work Programme report which refer to a request for two nominees from the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board for a Cross Scrutiny Working Group on the forthcoming Community Committee Review.

Following discussion four duly nominated and seconded members were put forward to participate in the Cross Scrutiny Working Group from the Board. These were Cllr S Firth, Cllr D Chapman, Cllr H Bithell and Cllr S Burke.

Following a vote Cllrs H Bithell and S Burke were nominated to the working group.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report and work programme be noted.
- b) That Cllr H Bithell and Cllr S Burke are nominated to the Cross Scrutiny Working Group on the Community Committee Review.

38 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 16 October 2023 at 10.00 a.m. Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 a.m.