

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor M Harland in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, P Carlill,
D Chapman, S Firth, H Hayden, D Jenkins,
J McKenna, M Midgley, M Robinson and
S Seary

65 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

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

66 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

67 Late Items

There were no late items.

68 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

69 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies.

70 Minutes - 16 November 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

71 Matters arising

It was noted, that in recent meetings there had been discussions in relation to a letter sent to the Government asking for a long term funding solution for Adult Social Care Services from Cllr Harland as Chair of Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources and Cllr Hayden as Chair of Scrutiny Board Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles. This was originally sent in September, but as yet no response had been received. Members were advised of a follow up letter seeking that response which would be circulated to them, and that Board Members would be informed when a reply is received.

The Board noted that Cllr Jenkins had requested a follow up in relation to Welcome to Yorkshire. The Chair advised that she would consider a follow up either in a written briefing or in a report to a future Board meeting.

72 Financial Health Monitoring 2020/21- Month 7 (October)

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided members of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) with information regarding the projected 2020/21 financial health position of those service areas that fall within the Board's remit at Month 7 (October).

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Resources;
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing;
- Victoria Bradshaw – Chief Officer Financial Services.

The Chief Officer Financial Services presented the report informing the Board Members of the following points:

- This report covers this financial year for 2020/21 up to October and going forward;
- The report showed a balanced position and included:
 - Cost of severance in relation to Early Leavers Initiative (ELI);
 - Proposals as to how the balance had been achieved including none Covid savings, ELI savings;
 - Adult Social Care and Government funding;
 - Collection fund deficit;
 - Housing Revenue Account;
 - Dedicated schools fund;
 - Council Tax and Business Rates.

The Board was advised that Capital Receipts and none Covid savings had been used to mitigate the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), and this had been reported to Executive Board throughout the year.

RESOLVED - To note the content of the report.

73 Initial Budget Proposals for 2021/2022

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided members of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) with the Executive Board's initial budget proposals for 2021/22 for consideration, review and comment on matters and proposals relating to service areas that fall within the Scrutiny Board's remit.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Victoria Bradshaw – Chief Officer Financial Services

Members were informed that this report detailed the proposals for 2021/22 and also the provisional budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24. This report took into consideration the spending review announced on 25th November 2020, it was noted that subsequent to the report being issued there had been an announcement on the 17th December, around the provisional local government financial settlement. This had been reviewed and information provided to Members. The Board were advised that the settlement means the Council is better off by £560,000.

The report covered the spending review, economic forecast, Council tax and business rates forecast, the devolution deal and the gain share.

In response to questions from Members, the Board was informed of the following:

- Loss of income related to the Covid-19 pandemic is compensated by the government scheme who provide 75p in every £1. The government had also said that there will be additional funding of around £2.3m for each month that we are in lockdown. This will be taken into account when reporting to the Executive Board in February;
- It was noted that the courts had been holding virtual meetings, but at the time of the meeting there were no figures in relation to court fee income. However, the Chief Officer said that she would come back with the information;
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) is within the Council budget, therefore, is taken into consideration. Members were provided with a detailed explanation as to how the Council proposes to mitigate MRP in the budget for 2021/22, although it was recognised that it has had some impact on the budget proposals. It was noted that at full Council in 2016, the Members had agreed to MRP adjustments to ensure that frontline services were not cut;
- The Board was provided with an explanation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Regional Entrepreneurship Accelerator Programme (REAP), Leeds is participating in the programme. Funding from the Business Rates Pool had assisted with the employment of an individual to develop the plan and procure a programme which will be starting soon. Discussions are ongoing with WYCA to gain access to monies to support the recovery of the economy throughout the region to encourage recovery from the pandemic. The Board requested more information on this and to have an oversight on decision making in relation to this;
- There are reserves for Adult Social Care (ASC) totalling £17.7m with some established for unprecedented events, therefore there could be a need to use some of these reserves to deal with Covid issues, this was contained within the submitted report. It was noted that full Council will consider the precept for ASC in relation to Council tax in 2021/22;
- It was recognised that in relation to right to buy there would be a loss of income. However, the Board was advised that the plan was to build 300 council homes per year and that the Council continue lobby government around the technicalities of right to buy;

- Members were advised that information would be provided in relation to budgeted amounts for staff in ASC;
- It was recognised that there had been an increase in voids, and that this had been due to health and safety of staff visiting and repairing properties during the pandemic. The Board was advised that once restrictions have been lifted the amount of voids would be lowered as there was still a significant waiting list for those wanting council accommodation.

The Chair said that this was an unprecedented year, and the approach to developing budget proposals, with closer involvement of scrutiny boards, was good and had produced much more dynamic conversation on budgets, and for Members to have input through scrutiny. She thanked the staff in finance for all their hard work on the Council budget at this current time.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Board was informed that due to staff leaving through the Early Leavers Initiative (ELI) there would be some difficulties and pressures. However, a robust decision making process had been used, including detailed business cases, to ensure there were plans in place for business continuity and to address our priorities.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

74 Performance Reporting: Culture and An Efficient, Enterprising and Healthy Organisation

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing, Director of City Development and Director of Communities and Environment provides a summary of performance information relating to the Best City Priority: Culture and the Best Council Ambition: An Efficient, Enterprising and Healthy Organisation, both of which fall within the scope of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr. James Lewis – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Chris Shillito - Performance & Improvement Officer
- Eve Roodhouse – Chief Officer Economic Development
- Graham Sefton - Head of HR in Resources and Housing

Members were informed that this report was a periodic performance update to Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board providing a summary of the Best Council Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that relate to both the Culture priority and the Best Council ambition of being an Efficient, Enterprising and Healthy Organisation. The report was based on the most recent performance results submitted to the council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in November 2020.

Member's attention was drawn to the two appendices, the first was a summary of the most recent KPI results relevant to the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board portfolio areas, the second showed a breakdown of the council's workforce profile.

Members were informed that due to the impact of Covid on the culture sector some figures were significantly lower especially in the case of museums and galleries. Also due to restrictions there have been no major events. Although, it was hoped that some events would be able to go ahead in the forthcoming year and that as restrictions are lifted, museums and galleries would start reopening.

Members were advised that there was a number of concerns in relation to staff employed in this sector due to the impact of the pandemic which may have led to some staff seeking employment in other sectors.

Member's discussions included:

- The morale of staff as detailed in the Pulse Survey. They recognised that HR were supporting individuals in relation to wellbeing and mental health concerns and in setting up staff who are working from home to ensure that they have the correct equipment.
- Use of online facilities in relation to museums and galleries.
- Focus on the workforce provided through the Pulse Survey including:
 - Equality and religion;
 - Signposting to appropriate network groups and support;
 - Relaunch of the exit interviews;
 - Encouragement of staff to complete the survey;
 - Mid-year check-in for all staff.

It was reiterated that staff had done well to continue to provide services for the community through a very challenging period.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

75 Covid-19: Agile working approach and Estate Realisation - second report

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing provided the Scrutiny Board Members with an update on the wellbeing support being provided to all employees, including a specific reference, as requested, to the practical arrangements of those working from home. The report also shared the latest plans for further engagement around future working arrangement and patterns.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Resources
- Graham Sefton - Head of HR for Resources and Housing

Members were informed of the following points:

- HR are looking at how to engage with staff going forward as we move towards more home working in the future;
 - HR continue to assist and support staff who are going into the office especially if the person is going in for wellbeing issues;
 - Over 50% of staff who were surveyed were happy and were of the view that they were receiving support from their managers and were supported to work at home;
 - Staff appraisals had not taken place this year due to the circumstances created by the pandemic. However, staff were completing mid-year check-ins asking staff about the support received and about their wellbeing. These were due to be completed by end of January;
 - Managers were being requested to update business plans where necessary especially in relation to posts where staff had left on ELI;
 - IT equipment had been provided to those staff that required it to work at home, with 13,000 pieces of equipment being distributed to staff. Some equipment had been bought but the council had also recycled IT kit where possible;
 - It was noted that in the future staff would combine working from home and going to the office and that office working would be for more collaborative working. HR were engaging with the unions on this and further proposals will be brought forward in the future.
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- Member's discussions included:
 - Praise for how quickly staff had got straight in to working from home;
 - The positive feedback from staff in the Pulse Surveys, although they recognised that it was difficult to retain a positive happy attitude with the continued lockdown restrictions;
 - Recognition that staff were receiving support through a variety of means but were of the view that it was difficult to substitute coming together to have conversations, as it was a different experience meeting on line and could be seen as a barrier;
 - It was noted that there was an established system in relation to listing equipment such as IT and furniture that had been provided to enable staff to work from home;
 - Request for information in relation to IT kit provided to Members and number of items recycled.

The Chair said that this report covered some really important issues and was of the view that the Board had an important part to play in how the council adapts and changes its ways of working in the future.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

76 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services requested Members to consider the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the municipal year 2020/21.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser informed the Board that the meeting in February would consider reports in relation to:

- White Rose Energy and Robin Hood Energy – Update Report, Implications and alternative suppliers
- Social Value Update - Procurement
- BAME CLT Action Plan
- Covid-19: Agile working approach and Estate Realisation (third report)

Members requested that the report on Social Value and Procurement should include apprenticeships and larger schemes.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

77 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources will be on 15th February 2021, at 10:30am (with a pre meet at 10:00am for all Board members).

The meeting concluded at 12:10