

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY & RESOURCES) - CONSULTATIVE MEETING

MONDAY, 19TH JULY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, S Burke, P Carlill,
D Chapman, S Firth, S Hamilton,
J Heselwood, A Hutchison, J McKenna and
S Seary

13 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or other interests.

14 Meeting Notes - 21 June 2021

Matters arising

In reference to the matters arising of the minutes of the last formal meeting held 22 March 2021, Members were advised that the Long-Term ASC Funding letter from Cllr Robinson had recently been issued.

RECOMMENDED – That the note of the meeting held 9th June 2021 be noted.

15 Financial Update, Financial Challenge and Service Reviews

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report providing a financial update to members focussed on ensuring budget robustness and long-term sustainability in financial year 2021/22 and in the years ahead. This item was provided to the Board in advance of further consideration of financial matters throughout the municipal year.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor James Lewis, Leader of Council
- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Victoria Bradshaw, Chief Finance Officer

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report, highlighting the key issues set out in the report and appendices, noting the significant challenge faced in relation to forecasting during an unprecedented year due to ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Children Looked-After.* Members noted the delays as a result of the pandemic for young people previously looked-after to move on to independent living, and queried whether any specific funding had been made available to assist. Members were advised that the initial financial settlement from central government can be used for this purpose, however the Council will be looking to government for further funding to support young people to move into more permanent accommodation.
- *Alternative options within reports.* Members were advised that the proposals set out in the report were approved at Full Council in February 2021, however future reports ahead of the approval of the budget for next financial year will include a number of options for the Board to consider.
- *Annual Audit.* Members were advised that the audit for the financial year ended 31st March 2021 has been delayed. The Chair advised that the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee will be monitoring the process.
- *Breakdown of vacancy data.* Members requested that further information be circulated setting out the amount and type of vacancies within each service.

RECOMMENDED – That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

16 Future Working Arrangements, agile working and estate realisation

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that set out a statement from Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources in respect of the ongoing work on future working arrangements at Leeds City Council. Whilst recognising the agenda is still developing the Board is taking this opportunity to provide some initial feedback to decision makers on the work to date and in the spirit of pre-decision scrutiny and adding value.

The following were in attendance:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Andy Dodman, Chief Officer HR
- Graham Sephton, Human Resources
- Mark Mills, Head of Asset Management

The Chair noted that the item will be considered formally at the Board meeting in September, and that Members views will inform the future discussions.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Early careers and apprenticeships.* Members recognised the importance of maintaining the wellbeing support to the entire workforce, particularly for staff at the early stages of their careers at the council and apprenticeships during periods of homeworking.

- *Flexibility and individualised approach.* Members recognised that an individualised approach to home working is necessary, taking into consideration personal circumstances. Members also recognised that specific considerations must be made to support front-line workers who are not office-based.
- *Climate Impact.* In response to a query, Members were advised that an assessment of home working on reducing carbon has been made and the overall net effect has been beneficial when compared to more people travelling to work in Leeds. Members requested that this information be circulated separately. It was suggested that the Board's statement includes a specific recommendation to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board to look at the impact of working from home on the Climate Emergency in greater detail.

RECOMMENDED – That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

17 **DIS - Project Prioritisation, Resource and Capacity Management, Workforce Planning**

The Chief Digital Information Officer submitted a report on the Council's Digital Information Services. Focussing on issues raised at the last scrutiny board meeting in June specifically on project prioritisation, resource and capacity management and workforce planning.

The following were in attendance:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Leonardo Tantari, Chief Officer Digital Information Services
- Bev Fisher, Deputy Chief Officer Digital Information Services
- Claire Grundy, Head of Application Development

The Chief Officer introduced the report, providing an overview of the context of prioritisation of DIS projects, upcoming review, and workforce planning, as set out in the report.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Investment in training agency staff.* Members recognised the significant investment in training agency staff, paid for by the council, who may not remain in their roles for their entire contract. Members were advised that handover training is in place as part of the scheme, and that staff are now required to repay the cost of training if they leave within the two years, which is the norm in the private sector.
- *Overall cost of increasing salaries.* Members were supportive of increasing the salaries of some roles to fill vacancies in a competitive market, noting that this is more cost efficient than employing agency staff at a lower rate.
- *Five Year Plan.* Recognising that there is significantly more demand than capacity in the service, Members requested that the initial draft of

the Five Year Plan be circulated to allow the Board to identify an appropriate time for a further session to be added to the work programme.

RECOMMENDED – That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

18 Agency Staff at Leeds City Council

The Chief Officer of Human Resources submitted a report on Agency staffing at Leeds City Council covering costs, value for money, the impact on financial strategies and links to inclusive growth.

The following were in attendance:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Andy Dodman, Chief Officer HR
- Alex Watson, Head of Human Resources

The Head of Human Resources introduced the report, setting out the key headline figures of the report, along with the benefits associated with agency work, balanced with the premium overhead costs of employing agency staff.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Agency contracts during Covid-19 periods.* Members noted that the number of agency contracts in place during the pandemic may conflate the picture, and the need for future plans to identify exceptional need against the underlying need.
- *Permanent staff overtime.* Members recognised that agency costs are often cheaper than paying staff premium rate overtime to provide cover. It was confirmed that more details around overtime and agency staff spend/use for each directorate will be provided at a future meeting, where possible to identify the reasons why cover was needed, appreciating the impact of vacancies and other causes which may include ELI.
- *Additional data for future meeting.* Members requested further data for vacancies alongside the number of agency contracts in place, along with time taken to recruit, and length of time vacancies have been advertised.

The Chair advised that he is working with Councillor B Anderson, Chair of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board, to look at refuse collection more broadly, which can incorporate particular issues with vacancies and use of agency staff.

RECOMMENDED –

- a) That the information requested during the meeting be provided at a future meeting.

- b) That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

19 Work Programme

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented the draft work schedule for the forthcoming municipal year. This included the traditional items of Scrutiny work which involves performance monitoring, recommendation tracking and Budget and Policy Framework Plans.

RECOMMENDED – That the draft work schedule be noted, along with the amendments discussed earlier in the meeting to be agreed with the Chair.

20 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board is on Monday, 20 September 2021 at 10.30am (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.00 am)