

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 9TH JANUARY, 2017

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors C Campbell, R Grahame,
M Harland, G Hyde, J Illingworth,
M Robinson, R. Stephenson, K Wakefield
and N Walshaw

53 Late Items

There were no late items.

54 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

55 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

An apology for absence was submitted by Councillor Maqsood.

56 Minutes - 7 November 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November 2016 be approved as a correct record.

57 Performance Report

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) presented information on the Citizens and Communities directorate's contribution to the delivery of the Best Council Plan that are under the Board's remit, alongside service performance information in relation to the 2016/17 quarter 2 and 3 periods.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor James Lewis, Executive Member for Resources and Strategy
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer Communities
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- John Mulcahy, Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Charles Oxtoby, Head of Finance

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Mental Health Employability Project - in view of the increasing demands for this support service, the Board were pleased to note that the Council is working with Leeds MIND to extend this service by providing training to Customer Service Officers in supporting those customers presenting mild mental ill health.
- Web/online development – the Board noted the work being undertaken to improve the customer experience of the Council’s on-line services. Linked to this, the Board made particular reference to improving the customer’s experience of the on-line planning service.
- Allocation of Registrars resources – reference was made to the provision of death registration appointments and a particular decision to cease this provision at the Otley Once Stop Centre. The Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration agreed to seek further clarification of the current position and report this directly to the relevant Ward Member.
- Welfare Appeals – the Board acknowledged the increased numbers of appeals being received by the Council. Whilst noting that the service will be recruiting more staff to deal with this demand, questions were raised about the accuracy and robustness of the decision making processes of DWP and agreed to explore this further as part of its Welfare Reform update briefing at its next meeting.
- Food banks – the Board sought clarification surrounding the demand for food banks and requested that this information also forms part of its Welfare Reform update briefing.
- Library services – particular reference was made to children having easy access to library services and the potential value of engaging closely with local schools as well as Children Centres in exploring opportunities for improving access to this service for children.
- Neighbourhood Planning Referendums – in acknowledging the preparations being made for the Neighbourhood Planning Referendum for the Clifford area, the Board sought further clarity surrounding any other Neighbourhood Planning Referendums being planned in the near future.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the requests for information be provided.

58 Financial Health Monitoring

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support presented the latest financial health monitoring update (month 7) that was considered by the Executive Board at its meeting on 14 December 2016. The Board was invited to consider and provide any comment on the current financial health of the Citizens and Communities directorate.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor James Lewis, Executive Member for Resources and Strategy
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer Communities

- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- John Mulcahy, Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Charles Oxtoby, Head of Finance

The key areas of discussion were:

- Particular reference was made to the directorate's reported underspend and particularly an underspend of £241,000 at month 7 in relation to Elections, Licensing & Registration. It was noted that the month 7 figure reflected a significant projected income increase relating to Registrars, Local Land Charges and Entertainment Licensing.
- Council Tax collection rates – whilst acknowledging the in-year Council Tax collection rate at the end of October, the Board requested further information to show the Council's general performance trend in relation to Council Tax collection.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That further information is provided to show the Council's general performance trend in relation to Council Tax collection.

(Councillor K Wakefield left the meeting at 10.25 am during the consideration of this item).

59 2017/18 INITIAL BUDGET PROPOSALS

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support provided details of the initial 2017/18 budget proposals as set out in the report to the Executive Board during its December meeting. It was noted that these proposals had been submitted to all Scrutiny Boards for consideration and review.

The Board was asked to consider matters and proposals relevant to the Citizens and Communities directorate. Any comments or recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board would then be reported back to the Executive Board at its February meeting.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor James Lewis, Executive Member for Resources and Strategy
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer Communities
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- John Mulcahy, Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Charles Oxtoby, Head of Finance

The key areas of discussion were:

- Local Government Pensions – the Board acknowledged that whilst an increase of 0.5% on the employers’ contributions has been included into the proposed budget, this will need to be updated once the outcome of the 2017 actuarial valuation is known.
- Parish and Town Council Election costs – the Board sought clarification of the cost responsibilities linked to local Parish and Town Councils. It was noted that local Parish and Town Councils are responsible for covering their own election costs through their precept and that all local Councils have already been advised to plan ahead for the 2019 local elections.
- Communities Teams – the Board acknowledged that the proposed efficiency measures are primarily linked to a review of the management and leadership structures.
- Reduction of well-being grants – the Board was informed that further consultation would be undertaken with Community Committee Chairs to establish how best to apportion this proposed saving.
- Implications of the Brexit vote – the Board was informed that the budget proposals linked to the Citizens and Communities directorate do not factor any potential fallout from the Brexit vote as the Council’s Strategy and Resources directorate has thus far been tasked with taking the lead on this particular matter.
- Reduction of service failure – the Board acknowledged the proposed saving linked to the reduction of service failure and the work already being undertaken by the Scrutiny Board this year to assist the directorate in achieving this target.
- Council Tax Support – further to the recent work undertaken by the Scrutiny Board in developing a revised Council Tax Support Scheme, the Board acknowledged the potential impact of Council Tax increases on this scheme and therefore emphasised the importance of monitoring this closely.

In consideration of the initial budget proposals of the Citizens and Communities directorate, the Board did not wish to make any specific recommendations back to the Executive Board.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

60 work schedule

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support invited Members to consider the Board’s work schedule for the municipal year.

Request for Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Board discussed a request made by Councillor Robinson to undertake a piece of Scrutiny work that explores the issues and potential repercussions of immigration in Leeds in light of the European Union referendum result and Brexit vote.

Whilst acknowledging that further clarity is still required from the Government in terms of what immigration changes it would wish to put into place post-

Brexit, the Scrutiny Board discussed the benefits of the Council undertaking early preparatory work to establish what key concerns and questions are currently being raised across directorates and other local partners in relation to Brexit.

Reference was also made to the inquiry undertaken last year by the Scrutiny Board on Migration which included a recommendation to establish a new city-wide Strategic Migration Group. It was acknowledged that this Group was also likely to explore the local implications of Brexit. The Chair advised the Board that it would be tracking the recommendations arising from its earlier Migration inquiry in March and therefore proposed that the Board also receives an initial briefing in relation to the Council's approach towards Brexit at its March meeting.

Best Council Plan

The Chair highlighted that the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board was taking the lead in facilitating the views of Scrutiny in relation to the proposals for revising the Best Council Plan. Other Scrutiny Boards had been invited to nominate a representative(s) to contribute to this particular agenda item at its meeting on Monday 16th January 2017. The Board agreed that Councillor Anderson and Councillor Ron Grahame would attend this meeting on behalf of the Citizens and Communities Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Board notes the request for Scrutiny by Councillor Robinson and receives an initial briefing in March in relation to the Council's approach towards Brexit.
- (b) That Councillor Anderson and Councillor Ron Grahame represent the Board during the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board meeting on Monday 16th January 2017 in consideration of proposals to revise the Best Council Plan.

61 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 13th February 2017 at 10 am (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am).

(The meeting concluded at 11.10 am)