

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 21ST JANUARY, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors G Almas, A Blackburn, S Firth,
R Grahame, D Jenkins, J McKenna,
M Robinson, A Smart and P Wray

CHAIRS COMMENT

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She wished everyone a Happy New Year as this was the first meeting of the Board in 2019.

51 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

52 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

53 Late Items

There were no late items.

54 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

On this occasion no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

55 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies.

56 Minutes - 12th November 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2018 be approved as a correct record.

57 Matters arising

Minute No. 45. Work Schedule

Further to the Board's discussion surrounding the Social Media Guidance Note, Members noted that the Chair subsequently met with the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support to discuss how further rigour can be brought to ensuring Members' awareness of the Guidance. Linked to this, there was an acknowledgement of a recent Member Code of Conduct Complaint case in Oxford City Council where an investigation recommended that the Council adopt a Social Media guidance for councillors with the purpose of encouraging members to at least aspire to act in a manner that is conducive to supporting the principles set out in the Code, even in their private capacity.

To address this matter swiftly, the Chair had made a request to the Monitoring Officer and the Chair of Standards Committee, to support a similar application of the Social Media guidance document that we already have the benefit of in Leeds. This request had been positively received and assurance given that the Board's comments will form part of the Standard Committee's forthcoming review of the Guidance Note.

Minute No 47. Devolution

It was noted that Board Members had received a copy of the letter sent by the Chair to the Secretary of State and will be notified once a response has been received.

58 Financial Health Monitoring

The meeting was advised that Cllr. Lewis had other engagements to attend and therefore items 8, 9 and 10 were moved up the agenda on the agreement of the Board.

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support provided Board Members with information with regard to the financial health of those service areas that fall within the remit of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.

Members were advised that the financial health monitoring report for month 7 had been considered by the Executive Board at its meeting on 19th December 2018.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor James Lewis – Executive Member for Resources and Sustainability
- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Strategy
- Doug Meeson – Chief Officer Financial Services
- Richard Ellis – Head of Finance
- Mark Amson – Business Rates Manager
- John Bywater – Head of Finance

In consideration of the report, the following areas were discussed:

- *Street lighting* – The Board was informed that an over spend on street lighting was a reflection of the rise in energy prices. It was noted that action was already being taken to switch street lighting to LED and that whilst there would be initial costs involved, this change would be better economically going forward for the future;
- *Energy costs* - Members were advised of how the Council procures energy and manages costs, with reference made to the work being undertaken as part of the Council's wider Low Carbon Programme;

- *Business Rates* - An update in relation to Business Rates reminded Members of the links between Business Rates and the Budget. There was particular discussion surrounding Business Rates appeal cases. It was noted that the Valuation Office, who deal with appeals, provide figures on a monthly basis and that figures in December 2018 showed appeals reducing to 1,475. Whilst it was not possible to provide information on individual appeals, the Board learned of 300 appeal cases outstanding in relation to ATM's. Whilst this issue was thought to have been resolved with businesses winning the appeals, it was noted that the Valuation Office is now challenging the decision through the Supreme Court. Until this matter is resolved, these appeals cases cannot be closed out;
- *Parks and Countryside underspend* – Further clarification was sought regarding the reasons for the £50k underspend in this service area;
- *Aireborough Swimming Pool refurbishment* – Members discussed the financial impact of the delayed refurbishment works, acknowledging that this was a result of additional essential capital works being identified;
- *Kirkgate Market increased security costs* – It was noted that security guards had been employed at Kirkgate Market due to Anti-social behaviour around the markets area. It was noted that the Anti-social behaviour had now dropped since the introduction of the security guards;
- *Carnival and Black Music Festival Events* – The Board was informed that additional spending had been incurred for such events linked to required safety measures;
- *Nationality Checking Service* - More detailed information was requested from Electoral and Regulatory Services in relation to the Nationality Checking Service.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the content of the report.
- b) That the Board be provided with the information requested.

59 Initial 2019/20 Budget Proposals

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support set out the initial budget proposals for 2019/20. In accordance with the Council's budget and policy framework it was referred by the Executive Board to Scrutiny for consideration.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor James Lewis – Executive Member for Resources and Sustainability
- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Strategy
- Doug Meeson – Chief Officer, Financial Services
- Richard Ellis – Head of Finance
- Mark Amson – Business Rates Manager

- John Bywater – Head of Finance
- Cluny Macpherson – Chief Officer, Culture and Sport

In consideration of the report, the following areas were discussed:

- *Elected Member training* – The Board raised the issue of Member Development and the potential use of the Apprenticeship Levy. However, it was advised that only accredited training programmes could qualify for the Apprenticeship Levy and that the budget allows for Member development separately.
- *Managing financial risks* – Particular reference was made to recent studies and reports from the National Audit Office regarding the financial sustainability of local authorities. Whilst it was noted that other authorities were facing severe financial pressures in services such as Adult Social Care and Children’s Services, such pressures were being contained in order to avoid Leeds being at crisis point like many other authorities. Linked to this, particular acknowledgement was given to the Council’s focus on targeting resources into preventative measures.
- *Preparing for Brexit* – the Board discussed the need to prepare for service provision post 29th March 2019 and the UK’s planned exit from the European Union.
- *Implications of Right to Buy* – The Board was advised that a representation was to be made to Central Government raising concerns that the Right to Buy process could be undermined by the claims that private landlords buy the properties to rent. It was noted that the Council was also lobbying the Government for the whole of Right to Buy receipts to be retained by local authorities.
- *Future management of the Settlement Funding Assessment* – Whilst the Board discussed the wider consideration of the core spending power assessment of funding coming to Leeds and also the implications surrounding the national Growth and Infrastructure Bill, particular importance was placed upon the Council’s duty to demonstrate value for money and financial sustainability with regard to the management of the Settlement Funding Assessment. Linked to this, concerns were expressed that the 2019/20 represents the final year of the agreed 4-year funding offer, thereby intensifying financial uncertainty for the future.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Board notes the Executive’s initial 2019/20 budget proposals as set out in the attached Executive Board report;
- b) That the Board’s comments are reflected as part of the Scrutiny submission to Executive Board for its consideration.

60 Best Council Plan Refresh 2019/20 - 2020/21

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support advised Members of the approach to refresh the Best Council Plan for 2019/20 to 2020/21. In accordance with the Council’s budget and policy framework it was referred by the Executive Board to Scrutiny for consideration.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor James Lewis – Executive Member for Resources and Sustainability
- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Tim Rollett – Intelligence and Policy Manager

Members were advised that this was a refresh of the current Best Council Plan, with this document sitting alongside the budget proposals, taking into account progress in delivering the Plan's priorities and latest insight from the Joint Strategic Assessment.

The following key areas were discussed:

- The Board sought clarification of the role of the Clinical Commissioning Group as part of the Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment for 2018;
- The Board raised the issue of the Leeds Clean Air Zone, particularly in relation to meeting the Council's ambition to be the best city for health and wellbeing. Particular reference was made to the future funding of the CAZ and technology used for measuring and monitoring its impact;
- The Board was informed of the Council's offer to assist EU citizens who work for the Council and to pay the £65 application fee to settle in the UK. Members were supportive of this gesture of goodwill. The Council will also be asking other employers to consider assisting their EU workers. It was noted that the Communities Team would also be organising events aimed at offering advice and support to local EU citizens who wished to stay in the UK.
- Acknowledging the Board's previous and ongoing interest in the health and wellbeing of the Council's workforce, the proposal to expand the Best Council 'efficient and enterprising' strapline to incorporate 'healthy', encompassing a focus on health across the council's workforce, was welcomed by the Board.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- b) That the Board's comments are reflected as part of the Scrutiny submission to Executive Board for its consideration.

(Councillor Wray vacated the meeting at 12:10 pm at the end of this item).

61 Performance Reporting - Culture and An Efficient and Enterprising Organisation

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support provided a summary of performance relating to the Best City Priority: Culture and the Best Council Ambition: An Efficient and Enterprising Organisation, which fall within the scope of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor Jonathan Pryor – Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Tim Rollett – Intelligence and Policy Manager
- Cluny Macpherson – Chief Officer, Culture and Sport

Members discussed the following points:

- *Gender pay gap* – It was acknowledged that the Council’s budget had accounted for an increase in pay for lower level paid jobs, such as care workers and catering staff, to help in narrowing the gender pay gap. It was suggested by the Board that it would be helpful to have a further breakdown of pay by Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and part-time staff both male and female;
- *Staff sickness levels* - Particular concerns were raised by the Board in relation to staff sickness levels which had increased gradually throughout the year and particularly in all high-volume frontline services despite action plans being in place alongside the wider Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy. The Board was particularly interested to learn that during that 12 month period, 42,289 sickness days were attributed to mental health conditions. The Board was therefore pleased to acknowledge that more preventative measures were being introduced as well as plans to look at specific areas of concern. It was noted that more emphasis would also be placed upon the role of managers/supervisors in terms of looking out for their staffs’ general health and wellbeing.
- *Workforce representation* – It was noted that work is ongoing to explore a better way of reporting in relation to the current KPI on ‘workforce more representative of our communities’ given that this is currently assessed and compared to the baseline of 2011 census data and has always proven difficult to provide a simple numerical way to express an overall result for this indicator.
- *Workforce diversity data* – It was reported that disclosure rates surrounding the workforce diversity indicator were low (particularly in relation to the disclosure of being a carer) and whilst such disclosures will remain optional to staff, there will be ongoing efforts to improve disclosure rates in underrepresented areas.
- *Staff appraisals* - The Board was pleased to see that appraisals had taken place with staff across the Council, although the Members did request more details of why appraisals were low within the Children and Families Service.
- *Aging workforce* - concerns were raised in relation to the stability of the workforce given that only 6% were under 25 years of age. The Board were advised that redundancies had been kept to a minimum with a reduction of the workforce through natural wastage. It was the hope that more young people would be encouraged to work for the Council through apprenticeships, however the Board acknowledged that apprenticeships were open to people of all ages;
- There were opportunities for disabled people within the workforce however, it was acknowledged that there is still some sensitivity around

disclosure of a disability. Linked to this, the Board was advised of the work of DAWN – the Disability and Wellbeing Network;

- *Staff satisfaction* – Members expressed an interest to learn more about the results of the staff satisfaction data and acknowledged that the Board would be receiving an update report around employee engagement at its next meeting.
- *Customer complaints* – Once completed, the Board requested an update on the findings of the analysis work being undertaken by Customer Relations.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the content of the report.
- b) That the information requested be provided to the Board.

62 Work Schedule

The Principal Scrutiny Officer presented the report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support which set out the latest iteration of the Boards work schedule which was attached at Appendix 1 for consideration.

With Members agreement it was proposed that the Board should have an extra meeting on Monday 1st April 2019, at 11:00am, with a pre meeting for all Members at 10:30am.

In consideration of the agenda items planned for its meeting on 11th February 2019, the Chief Officer for Culture and Sport requested that the update report relating to the Leeds Culture Strategy be deferred until April, which was agreed by the Board. Linked to this, Board Members also expressed an interest to receive an update surrounding the Tourism Levy.

The Chair also requested that further information in relation to Business Rates Appeals comes back to the Board in February.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the work schedule be updated to reflect the discussions of the Board during today's meeting.
- (b) That an additional Board meeting is scheduled for Monday 1st April 2019 at 11 am (pre-meeting at 10.30 am)
- (c) That the update report on the Culture Strategy be scheduled for the Board's April meeting.
- (d) That further information in relation to Business Rates Appeals comes back to the Board in February.

63 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board will be Monday 11th February at 10:30 am with a pre meeting for all Board Members 10:00am

The meeting concluded at 12:25pm

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Monday, 11th February, 2019