

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor M Harland in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, D Chapman,
L Cunningham, N Dawson, H Hayden,
D Jenkins, J McKenna, M Robinson and
S Seary

43 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

44 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

45 Late Items

There were no late items.

46 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

47 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Firth and Carlill. Cllr Dawson attended the meeting as substitute for Cllr Carlill.

48 Minutes - 14th October 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on the 14th October 2019, be approved as a correct record.

49 Embracing Digital Technology Solutions- Tracking of Scrutiny Recommendations

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the progress that has been made in responding to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Board's earlier inquiry around embracing digital technology solutions.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor James Lewis – Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Jo Miklo – Head of Digital Efficiencies

This inquiry concluded in December 2018 and a report setting out the Scrutiny Board's conclusions and recommendations was agreed in April 2019. The Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board received a formal response to the recommendations in July 2019.

Appended to the report at Appendix 1 was a standard set of criteria presented in the form of a flow chart. Details of progress against each of the recommendations were set out at Appendix 2.

In consideration of the progress made towards implementing the 3 recommendations arising from this inquiry, the following key points were made:

- *Digital Leadership Skills training* – it was noted that 11 senior managers had recently attended leadership training courses, with further places now filled going forward to March 2020;
- *Training provision for Elected Members* – linked to the Board's earlier consideration of the Council's Annual Corporate Risk Management Report, it was highlighted again that Elected Members would benefit from further digital training, particularly around identifying and dealing with potential spam/malicious emails;
- *Directory of Digital Innovation* – It was noted that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government was developing a national solution to the Directory of Digital Innovation and that the Council would therefore use this facility once it does go live;
- *Ecosia* – Linked to the climate emergency, it was noted that the Council was helping to promote a new search engine called Ecosia, which gives a commitment to use the ad revenue from its online searches to plant trees where they are needed the most;
- *Digital show and tell sessions* – It was noted that these sessions have allowed services to demonstrate how they are using technology effectively and sharing practical solutions. The Executive Board Member for Resources suggested that Scrutiny Board Members may be interested to attend the next planned session;
- *Bidding opportunities* – Board Members welcomed the positive efforts being made towards identifying and bidding for funding opportunities surrounding the delivery of digital solutions. Existing funding programmes and bids were set out in Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED – The Board agreed to sign off all 3 scrutiny recommendations as they were considered to be achieved.

50 Revenue Budget Update for 2020/21 to 2024/25 including proposed saving proposals.

Appended to the report of the Head of Democratic Services was a copy of the report by the Chief Officer for Financial Services to the Executive Board in October 2019 which presented the latest revenue budget update for 2020/21 to 2024/25 including proposed savings proposals.

In attendance for this meeting were:

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Monday, 20th January, 2020

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

In consideration of the budget update report, the following key points were raised:

- *Variation to the estimated budget gap* - The report had set out a number of variations made since the previous revenue budget update report in July and linked to these, the Board noted that the estimated budget gap had increased from £93.7m to £161.7m.
- *Business Rates Pilot* – the Board particularly noted the implications of the 75% business rates retention pilot for the North and West Yorkshire Authorities coming to an end in March 2020, with no new pilot for the North and West Yorkshire Authorities being approved for 2020/21.
- *Planning charges budget saving proposal* – linked to this proposal, the Board sought further information in terms of how the planning charges in Leeds compare with other core cities.
- *Public Work Loan rates* – the Board discussed the impact of the recent sudden decision made by Government to introduce a blanket 1% increase to the Public Work Loan rate in relation to any future new borrowing agreements. While acknowledging the Council's own efforts to help mitigate some of the impact, the Board agreed for the Chair and Executive Member to write a joint letter to Government expressing concern regarding this decision.
- *Staff pay increases* – while acknowledging the ongoing negotiations linked to the national NJC pay claim for 2020/21 by the Joint Trade Union Side (UNISON, GMB and UNITE), the Board welcomed the Council's own commitment to continue paying the national Living Wage as a minimum rate for staff.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the content of the report be noted
- (b) That further information is circulated to Board Members showing how planning charges in Leeds compares with other core cities
- (c) That a joint letter of the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board and Executive Member for Resources is sent to Government to relay the concerns expressed regarding the impact of the Public Work Loan rate increase.

51 Scrutiny Inquiry into the reduction of energy consumption in Council buildings - draft inquiry report

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the Scrutiny Board's draft inquiry report into the reduction of energy consumption in Council buildings.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Councillor James Lewis – Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing

RESOLVED – The Board agreed to approve the content of its inquiry report into the reduction of energy consumption in Council buildings.

52 Work Schedule

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report of the Head of Democratic Services requesting Members' consideration on the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

The work schedule was appended to the submitted report.

RESOLVED - To note the content of the report.

CHAIRS COMMENT

As this was the last meeting of the Board before Christmas, the Chair wished all the Members a Merry Christmas and best wishes for New Year.

53 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board will be on Monday 20th January 2020, at 10:30am. All Members are invited to the pre-meeting at 10:00am.

(The meeting concluded at 11.20 am)