

## **SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)**

**MONDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 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

### **78 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents**

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

### **79 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no exempt items.

### **80 Late Items**

There were no late items.

### **81 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **82 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

There were no apologies.

### **83 Minutes - 11 January 2021**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021, be approved as a correct record.

### **84 Matters arising**

Minute 73 – Initial Budget Proposals

Members requested further information in relation to WYCA releasing monies to support the recovery of the economy after the pandemic. Members were advised that information would be provided to the Board.

Members also requested clarification on the Minimum Review Provision (MRP). It had been noted that the MRP been approved in 2016, with cross party approval. However, it was checked by a Board Member and it seems that approval was given in 2017. Cllr. Lewis explained that there had been no opposition amendments and this was the basis of his comments in relation to cross party approval.

It was noted that at various points in recent meetings there had been discussions about a letter sent to the Government asking for a long term funding solution for Adult Social Care Services from the Chair of the Board and Cllr Hayden as Chair of Scrutiny Board Adults, Heath and Active

Lifestyles. The letter was originally sent in September 2020, and as yet no response has been received. A follow up letter seeking that response has now been sent and the Board Members will be kept informed when a reply is received and it will be shared it with Members. Members were disappointed that no response had been received.

## **85 White Rose Energy Closure**

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided information regarding the closure of White Rose Energy in 2020. The report focussed on the relationship with Robin Hood Energy and the reasons for the sale of that company, the achievements of White Rose Energy, the implications of its closure on residents in Leeds and any lessons learnt and future options for this type of arrangement in Leeds.

In attendance at the meeting for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- George Munson – Senior Project Manager, Resources and Housing

Members of the Board were advised of the following points:

- White Rose Energy was established in 2016, under Nottingham City Council's not for profit Robin Hood Energy Company and operated in Leeds for four years up to September 2020. The stated aim being to tackle fuel poverty through cheaper tariffs for customers in the city;
- There had been 8,500 customers, and the voids switching service was a positive aspect that tenants had benefitted from;
- It was noticed that Robin Hood Energy were in difficulties in April 2020, and a number of options were looked at to keep Robin Hood going. However, no buyer could be found. Leeds received a deed of termination for White Rose Energy in September 2020;
- All customers were moved to British Gas so that no customer was left without an energy supply or left using a 'supplier of last resort'. Protections were negotiated which included; no penalty fees; honouring of debt management plans; no customers left behind. Leeds City Council was not able to communicate directly with customers, however there was liaison with Robin Hood. There were no final figures as to how many customers who were switched to British Gas remained with them;
- Leeds City Council have now engaged with the energy market and have found Energy Angels who are able to supply a one year contract for void switching to replace the service previously supplied through the Robin Hood Energy/White Rose Energy arrangement. It was noted that this was going well;
- Achievements had been made whilst White Rose Energy had been running, with lower tariffs for 8,500 customers who had made savings of at least £100 per year;
- Lessons had been learnt that the energy market was very competitive and difficult for a local authority to engage with successfully. However,

it has raised awareness and customers are now extremely price sensitive, with people switching tariffs on a regular basis;

- There is a pressure to tackle fuel poverty and the team are now focussed on making physical changes to people's homes to tackle energy efficiency, including insulation.

Member's discussions included:

- Green Doctors Scheme – creating more affordable fuel for the city;
- Use of fuel vouchers;
- Difficulties in setting up energy companies in the competitive market of the 'big 6';
- The need to provide homes which are better equipped to deal with fuel poverty and climate change agenda.

The following points were noted:

- There is a focus on better energy systems for insulation to properties to tackle both fuel poverty and the climate emergency agenda;
- The HRA Capital Programme for the District Heating System is ongoing and work will progress for those who are unable to attach to the District Heating Scheme;
- The Council had partnerships with Calderdale and Bradford, however Wakefield had decided that the partnership would not be beneficial to them, and although Kirklees had been keen to join they were unable to do so;
- All 250 staff employed by Robin Hood Energy had been made redundant;

Members requested information in relation to numbers who had started tenancies on White Rose Energy.

Members were of the view that the Council needed to make the right investment for council properties, including tower block heating systems, which need upgrading.

The Chair thanked all for their contributions, and suggested that this item should remain on the Boards work programme for future meetings.

**RESOLVED** – To note the content of the report.

## **86 Implementation of Social Value into Procurement**

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing invited the Scrutiny Board to consider an update report on social value in procurement following previous consideration in January 2020 that focussed on social value guidance for commissioners in the Council.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr. James Lewis – Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing

- Kieron Dennett - Head of Commercial in Procurement and Commercial Services
- Sasha Walton - Procurement Officer

Members were provided with the following information:

- A really robust social value guidance has been created for commissioners which includes; best practice for social value champions within the Council, case studies on how social value helps customers in communities, the objectives and also a step by step process on how to use social value in procurement. A Social Value Board has also been established which is chaired by the Director of Resources and Housing.
- On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, the Council went into a contract with the Social Value Portal. This portal will support the Council to deliver to social value commitments, provide good data in one place and enable the proper presentation of information to our requirements from suppliers;
- The Team have utilised the national Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) approach. A set of bespoke TOMs have also been created in consultation with all Directorates across the Council to ensure that all their priorities are covered. The TOMs were appended to the report. It was noted that the TOMs would be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they remain fit for purpose;
- The Social Value Portal and the TOMs help the service to evaluate contracts, performance manage contracts and provides live reporting at a community level;
- A smaller set of TOMs are used to assess contracts under £100,000;
- 120 staff have been trained, with 5 officers who are super users of the portal. It was also noted that engagement sessions had also been undertaken with partners of the council;
- Leeds City Council feeds into the national Social Value Conference where Leeds has the ability to showcase the work that is being undertaken in the city;
- At present work is being carried out to create a social value matrix to assist the team to prioritise the workload for this year.

Examples from another council who have been using the portal for a longer period were provided, they showed how using social value in procurement can be beneficial to the Council and wider community.

Responding to Members questions the Board were provided with the following information:

- There had been no impact on the procurement process with timescales for tenders being met;
- Use of social value would not be at the detriment of council services;
- TOMs were identified on a procurement by procurement basis;
- Employment practices were being identified and this would be an area that would be picked up in the review;

Members requested more information in relation to NT18a.

**RESOLVED - To note the content of the report.**

**87 Improving the experience and outcomes of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues at Leeds City Council**

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing set out the Council's response to a call for urgent action from the BAME staff network in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on those communities and colleagues and the need to address a broad range of issues for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) colleagues working in the Council, some new and many longstanding.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Graham Sephton – Head of HR in Resources and Housing

Members were advised of the following points:

- The Council has 2,000 Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) colleagues;
- Since July 2020, work has been progressing with colleagues in relation to Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter. There have been debates, regular contact with colleagues, meetings and networking. These have culminated in a joint statement being released which includes an action plan with a number of priority actions these had been submitted on staff experiences;
- For 2021-22 the Council proposes to get further feedback from all BAME colleagues.

It was noted that this is a Team Leeds effort and that we all have a part to play in this issue.

In response to Members questions the Board were informed of the following:

- Results of the staff survey have been shared and work is continuing with trade unions in relation to Covid safe work areas, risk assessments and individual assessments;
- BAME network has been a success, with a number of success stories;
- Work is ongoing to anonymise recruitment and selection including;
  - Looking to build this into the recruitment system;
  - Different people on recruitment panels; and
  - Inclusion training

Members requested figures in relation to complaints of racial incidents both internally and externally. It was noted that this information would be collated and brought back to Members;

Members suggested surveys should gather information in relation to different characteristics such as BAME colleagues with disabilities and or learning disabilities and also staff take up of the vaccine for Covid.

**88 RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.  
Future Ways of Working and Workplace Realisation (Third Report)**

The report of the Director of City Development provided the third report in the Board's inquiry into agile working, developing new ways of working and estate realisation. On this occasion the report of the Director of City Development looked at how the Council has adapted to Covid-19, how the pandemic has accelerated existing trends around new ways of working and changes to how services are delivered and from which buildings and facilities.

It attendance at the meeting for this item were:

- Cllr. James Lewis – Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources and Housing
- Angela Barnicle - Chief Officer Asset Management & Regeneration
- Mark Mills – Asset Management
- Graham Sephton – Head of HR, Resources and Housing

Members were provided with the following information:

- This is the third report to the Board on agile working and it is a constantly evolving process;
- Prior to the pandemic the Change in the Workplace programme had been looking at a rationalisation of the Councils estate, as some of the Councils buildings were under-utilised. At the start of the pandemic the Council had 200 key buildings of these 80 were closed due to covid restrictions. Some of the buildings have now re-opened after being made Covid secure to allow officers back in, albeit with limited capacity to restart some services which had closed. In offices which have been re-opened there has been a reduction of 1,000 desks;
- From the staff surveys undertaken the vast majority of staff indicated that they would wish to work from home on a more permanent basis either full time or utilising a more mixed approach base around some time working at home and some in the office. This has meant a rapid re-adjustment of how we may use buildings in future for meetings and collaboration working, a key concept being the team as the destination as opposed to the building;
- The key principles and drivers for future working is how services are provided and the financial challenge that the Council is currently facing. There is also a need to address the Climate Emergency Agenda reducing carbon, using the estate more effectively and appropriately and how that impact son staff travel to and from work;
- Teams want to come together for collaborative working and there will be a requirement for buildings to have a variety of spaces available not just office space, and this will also require different furniture and layouts;
- The review of the estate has also considered geographic choices, trying to reduce the commute, also the work travel around the city to meetings or appointments with customers. This may look at utilising

different buildings such as community hubs, and museums as drop-in centres;

- To enable staff to work more flexibly there would be a requirement to work more deliberately by booking desks and spaces, this is currently being worked on by DIS and has been used successfully throughout the pandemic;
- Asset Management, HR and DIS are working together on this constantly evolving process, focussing on where investment is needed to upgrade and provide suitable working spaces for the future. To do this data on the estate is key.

Member's discussions included:

- The right balance of home and office based working;
- Utilisation of buildings not only in the city centre but also in the district centres with a view to getting the high street and the economy going outside of the city centre;
- Recognition that the disposal of buildings would not have a negative impact on the climate emergency agenda;
- Financial sustainability of the estate for the future, including making the buildings fit for purpose with the right spaces and furniture, use of technology and analysis of how hybrid meetings may be used going forward;
- Members noted that Appendix 2 listed the capacity of those buildings proposed to be retained;
- Use of those buildings which are classed as sensitive with a view to re-purposing them, offering space to partner organisations. It was recognised that each building would need to be assessed on an individual basis;
- Member's views were that community hubs were an important part of the estate and should be reviewed to look at ways in which services could be provided from them in the future which in turn could benefit local district and town centres.

Members requested figures for desk based roles of those who took the Early Leavers Initiative (ELI).

**RESOLVED** – To note the content of the report.

## **89 Work Schedule**

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

The principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the work schedule which was appended to the report at Appendix 1.

Members were advised that the agenda for the next meeting would include reports on:

- Council Tax and Business Rates;
- Financial Health Report; and

- Agile working, including the use of technology or a summary of evidence received to date.

**RESOLVED** – To note the content of the report.

**CHAIRS CLOSING COMMENTS**

The Chair thanked Members and Officers of the Scrutiny Board, Strategy and Resources for their support during her time as Chair. She said that she would miss being Chair of this Scrutiny Board and had enjoyed working with all the Members of the Board.

Members and Officers congratulated Cllr. Harland on her appointment to the position of Executive Member.

Board Members also congratulated Cllr Hayden on her appointment to Executive Member. Cllr Hayden said that she had enjoyed her time on this Scrutiny Board and also Scrutiny Board - Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles of which she was Chair.

**90 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) will be held on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021, at 10:30. (A pre-meet will be held at 10:00am for all board members)

*The meeting concluded at 12:30pm*