

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors K Brooks, S Burke, P Carlill,
D Chapman, S Firth, B Flynn, K Renshaw
and S Seary

CHAIRS OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, the first face to face meeting of the Board since February 2020, the start of the pandemic.

He also sent best wishes to Cllr McKenna, who had tested positive for Coronavirus. He said that the Board wished him well and he was in their thoughts and prayers.

1 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

2 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

3 Late Items

There were no late items.

4 Declaration of Interests

Declaration of interests were declared by Cllr Sam Firth in relation to Agenda Item 8 Electoral Services Update. It was noted that Cllr Firth was the Chair of Leeds East Constituency Conservatives and Deputy Chair for West Yorkshire Conservatives.

5 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillors Hamilton, Heselwood, Hutchison and McKenna.

Councillor Brooks was present as substitute for Councillor Heselwood and Councillor Renshaw was present as substitute for Councillor Hamilton.

6 Meeting Notes - 19 July 2021

RESOLVED – That the meeting notes of the consultative meeting held on 19th July 2021, be approved as a correct record.

7 Matters arising

The Board was advised that a response has been received from Government in relation to the letter sent on behalf of Scrutiny Boards, Strategy and Resources and Adults and Health and Active Lifestyles. The letter had been sent to seek information from Government about long term funding of Adult Social Care.

The letter from Government had been circulated to Board Members in advance of the meeting.

Board Members said that they were grateful for the response but were disappointed in the length of time that it had taken.

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

The Director of Resources submitted a report to provide an update to the Board on the joint commitment from Corporate Leadership Team and the BAME Staff Network to improve the work experience and outcomes for BAME colleagues at Leeds City Council.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar- Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Graham Sephton – Human Resources

The Board was advised of the following points:

- That good progress had been made with the establishment of a Race Equality Action Plan. The action plan would look at progression opportunities and recruitment, a zero-tolerance approach and work to a stronger data set.
- Good work was progressing through all the Directorates to ensure that the Council was representative of all the communities of the City.
- BAME Network were continuing to listen to experiences of staff through network groups and surveys. It was recognised that using BAME characteristics would not be enough to cover whether all minorities were represented and that further analysis should be undertaken to ensure all protected characteristics and communities were represented.
- Sal Tariq the Director of Children and Families was leading on work highlighted as key themes. It was noted that it was important to have peers and partner groups also involved, as well as high level leadership.
- A wider piece of work was to be undertaken to look at inclusion for other protected characteristics such as disability and carers
- Work on inclusion with other anchor organisations such as CPS, NHS, Police and other health partners will also feed into this work.

The Boards discussions included:

- The correct use of terminology, building trust so that staff can talk honestly about their experiences.

- Establishing inclusive or independent recruitment panels. Further training to be given to recruitment panels. Assessments and applications to be as inclusive as possible for all the diverse communities.
- How outcomes will be measured, monitored and challenged. It was noted that the working group is currently putting together a set of measures which would cover race, gender, disability, and other protected characteristics. It was recognised that often data was presented without detail, the new measures would look to provide more detailed information than previously and compare with the working age population.
- Members acknowledged the use of anonymised shortlisting and welcomed this approach and were interested to learn if it made a difference through comparison with other organisations that have already introduced it.
- Exit surveys. Members showed interest in gathering information from leavers interviews and also the frequency of these interviews, to see what lessons could be learned. Members were advised that information from leavers interviews would be included in the next update report.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Note the contents of the report
- b) Note the Race Equality Action Plan 2021-23 and the Council wide activity in place to support the work
- c) Receive further updates and reports
- d) Receive wider inclusion updates to future meetings including staff networks providing direct feedback to the Board

9 Electoral Services Update - voting behaviour, postal voting and turnout

The Head of Electoral Services submitted a report to provide an update and inform the Board in relation to voter behaviour at the May 2021 elections and the proposed Elections Bill.

In attendance for this item were:

- John Mulcahy – Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory
- Sue Wolfe – Deputy Head of Electoral Services

The Board were informed of the following points:

- At the elections held in May 2021, there had been a significant increase in voters using the postal service to vote. It was noted that 205k voters used the service. Members were advised that this was the largest number of postal voters in a single local authority in England. Following the May elections, the number of postal voters reduced due to the removal of applications made for these elections specifically, and a small number of cancellation requests. It was acknowledged that postal voters now stand at 195k.
- With regards to the Election Bill and the proposal for voter ID, the Board were advised that the Elections Team were still awaiting further information from Government.

Responding to questions from Members, the Board were informed of the following:

- The number of rejected votes was the same as usual. Information on the number of rejected votes can be provided and can be broken down to wards.
- It was acknowledged that there had been no use of portacabins at the May elections due to Covid. Polling stations had been assessed prior to the elections to ensure that they were accessible to all. It was recognised that portacabins were not always accessible to all and there were cost implication in getting the portacabins and arranging for them to be ramped. It was not yet known if there would be any changes to polling stations at future elections. There is a planned review of the polling districts, through the Polling District Review which may have potential implications to polling stations.
- It was noted that polling districts are reviewed every 5 years. The Board was informed that proposals would be sent to all Members for their views and comments. The review would also take account of the views submitted by the public.
- The 2021 Election count had been carried over to the following morning as the verification process of all ballot papers had not finished until 3am on the Friday morning. This was due to postal votes arriving at polling stations on election day. Members requested to know how many postal votes had been handed in to polling stations. It was noted that this information was available.
- Guidance and instructions are provided to staff and voters. All staff at polling stations receive training, Polling staff are also able to contact Electoral Service to ask advice.
- Should voter ID become part of the election system the Government would cover the costs, there would be no cost to the voter.

Members also discussed the following:

- The importance of using portacabins as polling stations for certain areas for ease of access to vote.
- The importance of linking voting to the school curriculum.
- Instructions for voting to be simplified.

The Board was advised that there was a cross party electoral working group which was well attended by all parties. The working group would be involved in the Polling District Review and any potential changes to voting.

The Elections Team were thanked for all the work that had been undertaken prior to, during and after the election.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report and for the Head of Electoral Services to provide a further update to the Scrutiny Board once a timeline for implementation of the Elections Bill has been published.

10 **IDS - Vision, Project and Programme Management - Third Report**

The report of the Chief Digital Information Officer expanded on the overall vision and plans reported at the Scrutiny Board, Strategy and Resources at the June and July meetings.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Debra Coupar – Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Jason Tutin – Digital and Learning Development Manager
- Bev Fisher – Deputy Head Integrated Digital Services

Members were advised that this was the third report and provided further details on the following:

- Citizen digital skills
- Council staff digital leadership and skills
- Service desk calls and performance improvement

The presenting officers informed the Board of the following points:

- One of the Councils priorities is to ensure that everyone in the city has access to digital inclusion. It was recognised that this would have financial implications in respect of delivering savings by providing skills that could potentially reduce the volume of contacts with the Council.
- Need to build skills within the Council's workforce. It was acknowledged that when services are designed, they should be designed around a user perspective. IDS have signed up to the Government Digital Standards, which looks to provide appropriate training. IDS are also looking at agile working methods, that involves clear understanding of roles and working collaboratively with the business and citizens within short two-week periods known as 'sprints'. IDS are currently looking at training for this collaborative style of working.
- In terms of skills for staff IDS are looking at more training around the Government Digital Standards, on the role of agile, online training through Bubo and Union Learn which provides skills for life not just for working for the Council. It was recognised that technology is constantly changing and that this will become the 'business norm'.
- The service desk has had significant challenges over the last eighteen months in meeting service targets. This had been a combination of capacity of people to answer the phones, and the number of people who have left the organisation. It was acknowledged that during Covid calls had increased, but there had also been the implementation of a number of changes which had also generated more calls. The Leadership Team have put in place several actions to address the issue, including recruitment, improved technology that the service could use and also looking at how calls are responded to and recorded.

Responding to questions from Members, the Board were informed of the following points:

- Pre pandemic there were motivation barriers to digital inclusion. Covid showed that there was a need to use technology. It was recognised

that there were still issues in getting digital inclusion for all. The IDS team are working with other organisations to bring a voice to those who have no digital access and how to improve the service.

- It was noted that more up to date performance information could be provided to Board Members.
- The Service appreciated that it had been frustrating for all those using the service desk over the last eighteen months, but they were sure that they would be able to provide a good service once they were back at full capacity, and that the use of web chats and automated services, such as 'bots', would improve service to customers.
- Discussions were ongoing in relation to the removal of the drop-in centre in Civic Hall to Apex and whether this would be reinstated.
- The performance information is provided in a standard format, linked to industry standards, and it has been reviewed previously.
- It was noted that IDS were working with a number of partner organisations including neighbourhood networks and social prescribing teams. It was recognised that face to face contact as well as digital inclusion were both important. Members were of the view that there was a need for the services to be integrated and joined together.
- The Library Service have been a part of the service including face to face and providing access to digital services. They were able to provide assistance with digital skills and offer a lending scheme for equipment to residents.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Note the existing actions underway around Citizen digital skills through the 100% Digital Leeds programme and that work is already underway on this through the Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board
- b) Note the need for and proposed actions around increasing digital skills of our staff and leaders
- c) Note the Service Desk performance and improvement action plan.

Cllr Flynn joined the meeting at 11:57 during discussions on this item.

11 Future Working Arrangements, agile working and estate realisation

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented a scrutiny statement following four evidence sessions and a summary of evidence report all looking at future working arrangements, agile working and estate realisation at Leeds City Council. Feedback from a further session held in July at the Board's consultative meeting was appended to the report at Appendix 1.

In attendance for this item were:

- Councillor Coupar – Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Graham Sephton – Human Resources

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

- The last staff survey had been held in May 2021. The survey had shown that 30% were not happy about returning to the office. Some of the reasons provided had been anxiety due to covid and transport to and from offices, it was recognised that some of those who had shown anxiety about returning were classed as clinically vulnerable. Most staff wanted to come back into offices to work in a team environment. It was noted that taster days were being used to support staff back into the office environment throughout the Summer and in September.
- It was recognised that whilst the report focussed on staff, service delivery must always come first. Services would consider a mix of office and home working, but it will be with an emphasis on what is best for the service. It was noted that there was no shortage of office space for staff and that a plan going forward for service delivery would be in place by the end of September.
- It was noted that the next Wellbeing survey was due to be sent to all staff and that the outcomes of the survey would be available for the Board to discuss in November.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report and discuss again at the November meeting.

12 Work Programme 2021/22

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which detailed the Boards work programme for this municipal year. This was appended to the report.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report.

Members were advised of a joint scrutiny inquiry with the Environment, Housing and Communities Board into recycling with the focus of Strategy and Resources to be tightly focused on funding and costs. The Chair said that he and Cllr Chapman would be attending the Environment, Housing and Communities Board at the invitation of Cllr Anderson, the Chair of that Board. He extended the invite to other Members should they wish to be included and requested that they inform him of their intention to join the forthcoming meeting.

Board Members had noted that the Polling Districts were due to be reviewed and requested that this item be scheduled for a forthcoming meeting later in the municipal year. Members also wished to consider the potential impact of voter ID for future elections.

It was acknowledged that the Board had previously considered Devolution and Board Members requested that an update be brought for consideration to include how the Board might engage with the WYCA Mayor. It was recognised that the Mayoral role was in the early stages. The Chair would consider when it was best to bring this item back to the Board.

The Board was informed that Leeds 2023 would form part of the agenda for the next meeting along with possible links to digital inclusion through the wider Leeds 2023 programme.

Members requested that the future work programme should include all the items that had been discussed at this meeting.

RESOLVED -To note the content of the report and the work programme updated to reflect discussions of today's meeting.

13 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – That the next meeting of the Board to be on Monday 18th October 2021, at 10:30am with a pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10:00am.

The meeting concluded at 13:10