

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 24TH JANUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors S Burke, P Carlill, D Chapman,
S Firth, B Flynn, S Hamilton, J Heselwood,
J McKenna and S Seary

39 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

40 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

41 Late Items

There were no late items.

42 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations.

43 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

44 Minutes - 29 November 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

45 Matters arising from the Minutes

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser gave the following updates:

Minute 34 – Future Waste Strategy Inquiry – Finance, Contracts and Recycling

A summary of evidence was being produced and it was hoped to bring this to a Board meeting before the end of the municipal year.

Minute 36 – Agency Staffing and Overtime – Update Report

There had been ongoing discussions with colleagues in Human Resource and additional information on that will be circulated along with the possibility that the issue could return to the Board in the next municipal year.

Reference was also made to the Working Group meeting on the budget.

46 Staff Inclusion Update: Improving the experience and outcomes of Disabled / Carer colleagues at Leeds City Council and Feedback from Staff Networks

The report of the Director of Resources provided the Board with an update on the joint commitment from Corporate Leadership Team and the Disability and Wellbeing/Carers Staff Networks and Healthy Minds peer support group to improve the work life experience and outcomes for colleagues within the Council. It also provided an update on issues relating to the BAME staff network following consideration at meetings in February and September 2021.

Appendices to the report included the Disability and Carers Action Plan, the BAME staff network/CLT Race Equality Action Plan and statements from the Carers; DAWN; BAME and Healthy Minds Networks.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Terry Pycroft, HR/Chair of DAWN Network
- Paul Leahy, HR Business Partner
- Rebecca Cooke, Chair BAME Network
- Carol Gentles, BAME Network
- Hayley Lloyd-Henry, BAME Network
- Helen Saunders, Healthy Minds
- Colin Hirst, Dawn Network
- Mej Chaudhry, Senior HR Adviser, Carers Network
- Councillor M Harland, Executive Member Communities
- Councillor D Coupar, Executive Member Resources

The Board heard from the network representatives. Issues highlighted included the following:

- The Disability and Carers Action Plan was currently in draft form and to be approved by CLT.
- Support provided to staff during the pandemic including delivery of equipment and occupational health support.
- Staff surveys – currently there were 6% of staff who were disabled and 9% were carers. The surveys specifically sought information with regard to disability and care responsibilities.
- The surveys indicated the need for more training and awareness for managers and supervisors, the need for inclusion training and reverse mentoring amongst other things.
- The pressures and challenges for carers during the pandemic – there were a number of policies and initiatives in place to support carers including the Carers Staff Network and social media pages.
- Guides to support managers had been devised and access to training had been flagged. There had also been the implementation of a carers passport which would aid employees throughout their career and highlight any support that they may need.

- Partnership work with Carers Leeds.
- Some staff who were carers had benefitted during the pandemic due to not having to travel or attend the workplace.
- Pre-pandemic work carried out by the DAWN network to try and reach out to front line staff who may not get communications via email or the staff intranet.
- Support for disabled staff to work from home including the provision of specialist equipment.
- It was proposed to create and launch a Disability Passport for staff. This would help to support an individual's way of working.
- The need to provide inclusivity for all including suitable and accessible locations and venues.
- Strengthening understanding across services for disabled people and providing further training for managers.
- The BAME Network had identified the following four priorities:
 - The development and implementation of a zero-tolerance policy to racism across the Council.
 - Representation of BAME colleagues across all levels and inclusive recruitment.
 - Managers who are able to address BAME issues.
 - A fit for purpose grievance policy.
- The evolving role and growth of the BAME network to try and engage as many staff as possible.
- Key asks of the BAME network which included the following:
 - A review of the grievance policy and a change in approach that would see racist incidents dealt with under the zero-tolerance policy as oppose to grievance procedures.
 - Support for Managers with regard to racial discrimination and equality.
 - Recruitment initiatives including diverse panels and increased accountability to candidates.
 - Urgent progress on the zero-tolerance policy.
 - A Corporate commitment to mandatory training for all staff.
 - More support for network representatives.
 - Support for front line colleagues.
- The role of the Healthy Minds Network in the provision of peer to peer support for mental health issues.

In response to questions from Members, the following was discussed:

- Carers – people did not always identify their role as a carer and there was still a need to raise awareness. Similarly with hidden disabilities and it was hoped that the roll out of the Carers and Disability Passports could address this.
- Working from home had been of benefit for some people with care responsibilities but not for others who preferred to attend the workplace for some respite. The need for adjustment and flexibility for people with care responsibilities to enable them to remain in employment.

- The Disability Passport would be under the ownership of the individual concerned and they would decide who could see the information.
- The grievance policy for issues involving racism is used in order to ensure that any subsequent tribunal procedures will not be rejected on the grounds that internal policies had not been fully utilised. The Chair was keen for a clear view on this from Legal Services and undertook to initiate this discussion and involve Cllr Harland as the Executive Board Member with responsibility for Equalities. It was also suggested that the Board makes a recommendation for the Executive Member to further investigate the development of a Zero Tolerance Policy.
- The role of ambassadors would include the provision of support and information and the feedback of any BAME related issues.
- Having a Zero Tolerance Policy could help guide managers particularly where incidents may be more subtle.
- The use of the term 'BAME'. The network would eventually be re-named in consultation with members but the network was currently concentrating on other higher priority issues.
- Relationships between the different networks.
- There were over 800 Mental Health First Aiders in the Council who were available as a first point of contact. Ongoing training and support was provided to these. The role was there as a point of first contact and could signpost those with needs to the appropriate support.
- The use of social media and the possibility of using the Facebook Workplace application. All the networks had access to Facebook groups and also had meetings via Teams. There were ongoing challenges to provide information to people without IT.
- There was a monthly meeting of the networks where best practice was shared and this helped to avoid any duplication.
- Support for the networks was provided by HR. There was ongoing discussion regarding the level of support for the networks and the need for a specific budget, with positive progress made on this in recent weeks.
- Changes in the way of working to support people with disabilities.
- There was good activity from the networks but there was no overarching strategy to draw the work together and measure the effectiveness of them as a whole. In addition, the Board noted that there was a need to develop a consistent approach to the networks across the Council in terms of support and where appropriate budgetary support around issues such as facility time.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Disability and Carers Action Plan 2021-23 and the council wide activity to support this work be noted.
- (3) That further updates and reports as this important work progresses be received.

- (4) That actions in relation to Grievance Policy and Zero-Tolerance Policy on racism would be taken forward with Cllr Harland and Legal Services.
- (5) That wider inclusion updates in future from across the networks and various characteristics be received.

47 Initial Budget Proposals for 2022/23

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the Executive Board's initial budget proposals for 2022/23 for consideration, review and comment on matters and proposals relating to service areas that fell within the Board's remit. A copy of the Proposed Budget for 2022/23 and Provisional Budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as considered at Executive Board in December 2021 were appended to the report.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Victoria Bradhsaw, Chief Finance Officer

The Board was given a presentation on the proposed budget and latest financial position. The following was highlighted:

- 2021/22 latest financial position – there was a current £900k overspend.
- Proposed 2022/23 budget.
- There was a projected gap of £127m in the budget over the next three years.
- The figures may change when the pay award had been agreed.
- Saving proposals across the directorates.
- Proposed increases to Council Tax.
- Increases in rents, service charges and district heating – these would be capped at £5 a week,
- Key risks and Next Steps.

In response to questions from the Board, the following was discussed:

- Settlement figures from Government had not been finalised but any differences were only expected to be marginal.
- Concern that budget cuts could lead to a reduction in the quality of services, particularly in Health and Social Care which would affect the more vulnerable people in society. Members were informed of business efficiencies that could be made and reference was made to the scale of any cuts which were comparatively small when the size of the budget was considered.
- There would be no contribution to the reserve funds this year but as part of the medium term strategy there would be over the next two years.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Board considers the relevant information provided within the report on the initial budget proposals for 2022/23 and identifies any specific comments and/or recommendations for consideration by Executive Board as it prepares its final proposals for consideration by Full Council on 23 February 2022.

48 Financial Health Monitoring - Month 7

The report of the Head of Democratic Services asked the Board to consider the Financial Health Monitoring report in the context of wider discussions about the initial budget proposals and performance against strategic priorities that fell within the remit of the Board.

The following were in attendance for this item

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Victoria Bradshaw, Chief Finance Office

Members had received an update on the current financial health position during the previous item.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Board considers the relevant information within the attached Executive Board report and provides comment in relation to those areas that fall within its remit.

49 Performance Reporting: Culture and An Efficient, Enterprising and Healthy Organisation

The report of the Directors of Resources and City Development provided a summary of performance information against the strategic priorities for the council and city which related to the Board's remit.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Tim Rollett, Intelligence & Policy Manager

The report presented a bi-annual check of Key Performance Indicators relating to the Best Council Plan. There was a mixed picture due to the ongoing effect of the pandemic. There would be opportunity to refresh the indicators following the introduction of the Best City Ambition which would replace the Best Council Plan.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Recruitment of apprenticeships – only half the target had been recruited. The Board was informed of staffing challenges during the pandemic which had seen significant changes and a higher turnover of staff than usual.
- Collection of business rates.
- ICT Service Desk – there had been an additional amount put into the budget for next year and there will be extra recruitment. There had been significant recruitment issues in the digital sector. In response to further queries, it was reported that colleagues from IDS will be in attendance at the February meeting to present a report on the Help Desk..
- Diversity of the workforce and how it compares to people living in the city.
- Staff sickness – concern with the levels of absence due to mental health issues and it being significantly higher than coronavirus. It was reported that there had been a trend over the past decade for mental health to be a predominant reason for staff illness. The Council was continually finding ways in how to reduce this and mental health was a matter of focus and priority for the council. With regard to coronavirus, figures may not give a true picture as staff were still working from home who were affected.
- Figures for absence due to mental health illness in previous years were requested.

RESOLVED – That the performance information in Appendices 1 and 2 and the issues highlighted be noted.

50 Best City Ambition

The report of the Head of Democratic Services informed the Board that the initial Best City Ambition proposals had been referred to Scrutiny in accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework.

The Best City Ambition – initial proposals had been considered at Executive Board in December 2021 and a copy of the report was appended to the agenda.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Neil Evans, Director of Resources
- Simon Foy, Head of Intelligence & Policy

The following was highlighted:

- A report had been submitted to Executive Board in December 2021. The period of public consultation had just closed.
- There would be further consideration by Executive Board and Full Council in February 2022.
- Feedback from the consultation had been overwhelmingly positive.

- The three pillars of Wellbeing, Inclusive Growth and Climate Change had been well supported.
- Support for community engagement and third sector involvement.
- A need to pick up more on disability and the relationship between housing and health.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following were discussed:

- Concern that there had only been 280 responses and how this had been supplemented in local communities with a particular reference to parish councils and other local forums. Consultation on the Best City Ambition had been taken to Community Committees and various groups across the city.
- The need to raise awareness of the Best City Ambition to the public and also town and parish councils.
- The challenge to engage people.
- Feedback from the consultation could be forwarded to Members.
- It was proposed for further consultation with Community Committees.
- There would be interface with the Best City Ambition and other reviews, plans and strategies.
- There would be economic indicators within the ambition.
- Whether data could be broken down more locally than ward level to pick up more detail.
- ***The Board noted and welcomed that the development of the Best City Ambition is an ongoing process and look forward to further opportunities to provide representations as the next steps are taken and the various work streams develop.***

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

51 Work Programme

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the remainder of the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

The Board's work schedule and recent Executive Board minutes were appended to the report.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

52 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 14th February 2022 at 10.00 a.m. (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45 a.m.)