

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 12TH DECEMBER, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors G Almass, S Burke, P Carlill,
D Chapman, S Firth, B Flynn, M France-
Mir, C Gruen and K Ritchie

59 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

60 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

61 Late Items

There were no late items.

62 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

63 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Coupar.

64 Minutes - 7 November 2022

RESOLVED – To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November 2022 as a correct record.

65 Matters arising

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser highlighted the following actions from the previous minutes:

Minute 54 – Leeds 2023 Update

Further information on community engagement had been circulated to Members in the form of more detail on the dashboards there were discussed. In addition, details on neighbourhood hosts and grant funding had also been circulated along with details of additional Member engagement planned for January 2023.

Minute 55 – Shared Prosperity Fund – Scrutiny Board Update

Additional information on revenue/capital breakdown and overall funding amounts had been shared with Board Members.

Minute 56 – Financial Health Monitoring, Impact of Inflation and Medium Term Financial Strategy

Members were reminded about the Budget Working Group scheduled for 15 December 2022, at 10.30am.

66 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update - Staff Networks

The report of the Director of Resources provided the Board with a further update on corporate Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) activity in the current year and included contributions from the LGBT+, Women's Voice and Early Careers staff networks.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Leader of Council
- Cllr Mary Harland – Executive Member for Communities
- Tom Riordan – Chief Executive
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- John Ebo – Head of HR Projects EDI
- Vic Clarke – Women's Voice Staff Network
- Kat Denvir – Chair, LGBT+ Network
- Sasha Walton – Chair, Early Careers Network
- Vanessa Wenham – Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

The Chair started by saying that this item followed on from a previous item heard in January 2022, when the Board had received items on the Race Equality Action Plan, Disability Equality Action Plan as well as attendance from four staff networks. He said that this was an issue that the Council takes very seriously, and it was the remit of the Scrutiny Board to challenge inequality in the Council.

The Chief Executive said it was good to attend this meeting as equality was something he was passionate about and one of the reasons he wanted to come to Leeds City Council, and to Leeds as it had a good reputation for equality. He was of the view that the pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement had raised the profile of these issues and created a need to reflect on them and one of the things that came out of this period was hearing more from the lived experiences of staff. He said that for those in positions of authority it was sometimes a hard message to hear. Although, the Council was doing really good work to address these issues, the Council was committed to do more as some of the issues experienced by colleagues highlighted areas where practice had not good enough. The staff networks, along with the Trade Unions who play a more formal and statutory role, are at the centre of giving a voice to people and take account of the full range of protected characteristics and are therefore at the heart of our consultation processes. It was his view that the staff networks were there to challenge the Council and they had done this effectively and progress had been made. It was the sign of a positive culture where people can be open to challenge and accept that we cannot always get things right.

The Head of HR Projects EDI thanked the Scrutiny Board for having this item. He said that EDI was important and something that we must do in a legal context, but also in our day to day actions to increase productivity and efficiency and because we want to do it as part of our values where EDI is central to the Council and its work.

He explained that he had moved to his position from another Directorate to assist in moving this agenda forward, he was pleased that the organisation had allowed him to do this without fear or favour, which was an important point to make. He said it was important to note where the organisation has come from, where we are at present and where the Council wants to progress to with the EDI agenda. He gave a brief update on the work over the last twelve months which included strong leadership through communication on this agenda, recent launch of mandatory EDI training for all 2,200 managers, with 1,400 managers already receiving the first step of the training, Members were advised that there are five steps to the training, and this would be disseminated to teams. The broader vision for EDI was to cover the workforce element, how we interact with communities, and how we deliver our services.

Members were informed of the five key workforce themes:

- Recruitment and initial welcome
- Progression
- Training for staff and managers
- Speaking up and zero tolerance
- Data and monitoring

In July 2022, Leeds City Council became the first council in the UK to appoint a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. This was in line with the council values of being open, honest and trusted as well as treating people fairly. The role of the Guardian is to enable all council employees to raise their voice, and have their voice heard. The Guardian works independently and impartially across the Council and has regular meetings with the Chief Executive to discuss general themes and lessons learned from speaking to people, they also have links to Elected Members whose portfolio covers equality in the workplace.

A review of the grievance procedure had been undertaken in April 2022, it was noted that a detailed report had been produced setting out 17 executive summary findings and 15 recommendations around four themes which were:

- Timeliness – acting quicker and earlier to resolve conflict and reduce time taken to complete the process.
- Accountability – actively demonstrate, evidence and report on positive change.
- Behaviours – managers to provide stronger leadership at service and local levels to tackle behaviours in a timely manner.
- Consistency of approach – ensuring consistency across the organisation in discharging our duty of care as well as ensuring due process.

The Chair of the Early Careers Staff Network explained that this is a professional network set up and run for the Council's junior workforce. The network aims to encourage members to flourish by building on and learning new skills to make themselves more employable. The network allows members to meet peers from different areas of the council to create relationships which can grow and continue throughout their careers. Board Members were advised that age is a protected characteristic for this network as it is intended for younger and junior members of the workforce. However,

the network is open to all those who feel they would benefit from being in a professional network focussing on early career issues.

The Early Careers network offers help, advice and support to staff on application writing, interview practice and addresses the digital divide across the council.

Members were advised that during the pandemic the steering group had lost a lot of members due to increased workloads and staff leaving the authority. The priority for the network this year was 'Burn Out and Preventing It' and the leads for the network have been supporting staff in offering advice and signposting to further support. There is a drive to recruit to the network to allow more to be offered going into 2023.

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

- It had been noted that the network group was trying to increase the membership and would welcome any support offered.
- In relation to interview practice it was asked if this could be widened to include Elected Member involvement. Cllr Burke volunteered to assist with this.
- In relation to 'on boarding' Members heard how many staff had been taken on during the pandemic and the effect that working from home had on them. It was noted that from conversations there were not many issues in relation to working from home. However, it was the view that newer staff had missed out on office conversation and learning the language used in the workplace and shadowing colleagues. It was the view that 'on boarding' was not the same across all the services in the organisation and HR were discussing how to make this better.
- It was suggested that communication was required with officers across the service who could provide case studies as to how they had reached their positions. It was noted that this was something to be worked on and needed to show clear routes for progression.

The Chair of Women's Voice provided an overview of how the women's staff network had begun in 2017, with a small number of women who had been involved with the network for some time, managing it through email communication which had excluded a number of women in the council. A new chair and a steering group was established made up of senior women from across the directorates to drive forward the newly named Women's Voice. A wo-manifesto was developed by holding focus groups with women especially those who were not digitally connected, worked in remote locations and were more likely to be part-time and low paid. The feedback from the focus groups provided the five pledges for the manifesto which was launched in 2018. It was noted that in 2018 there was a new Chair and during 2018 and 2019 there had been lots of activity with many successes, including a Women's Voice Facebook page which has over 1,000 members.

The issues facing women were highlighted as:

- Work life balance – most women looking after children.

- Gender gap – uniforms were not designed for women.
- Menopause – menopause café's set up to share experiences and offer support and assistance
- Careers and progression routes

The pandemic had greatly affected women who were trying to balance work with looking after and home-schooling children. It was noted that many women whilst working from home had worked evenings and weekends to ensure that their work was kept up to date. Many women work in care settings and retail and were going out to work every day, with a greater risk of catching the virus and they raised concerns that they might bring home the virus to their families.

During the pandemic the network had not been as active and in 2021 the Chair had left the Council and there was a reluctance to take on this role. However, this had been a good year for the network with events taking place and there was now some interest in taking on the role of Chair and in becoming ambassadors for Women's Voice. The network is looking to improve events for International Women's Day which is held in March and want it to be on the lines of the Pride event with a march through the city, if possible.

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

- It was recognised that the digital divide was not specific to women. However, it was decided that to communicate with women and get messages out to them social media was a good communication tool and has proved to be successful.
- It was acknowledged that there was less progression to senior roles for women as most roles required the position to be full-time. Many women work part-time and take time off for maternity leave making progression slower. It was suggested that female Elected Members would be happy to attend the steering group to offer support and assistance where needed.
- Members recognised that the work of the staff networks was important and that members of staff groups should not only be given time to attend meetings but also recognition that the work of the networks can sometime stake priority over other tasks. It was hoped that with addition training for managers this would be progressed as it was important for the EDI agenda moving forward.
- Members noted that there was a good working relationship with all the staff networks which has developed over the past few years with the focus on equality. It was noted that the Chairs of the networks meet up to discuss issues and how to progress the EDI agenda.
- The board were interested in the composition of the Council's workforce and requested data in relation to this.
- Members had noted that Women's Voice had been made up of senior women from the organisation and it was explained this was because they were able to make decisions and push budgets forward. Focus

groups had been used to get the views of women at all grades across the Council to ensure that all issues and challenges were addressed.

- Work had been undertaken with HR on recruitment of women and best practice from across all the services looked at.

The Chair of the LGBT+ Network provided an organisational context at the beginning of her report and said it was recognised that the LGBT+ agenda was highly publicised and heavily politicised. However, it was important to note the staff numbers across the organisation in terms of the number of staff who are 'out' in the workplace. What concerned the Chair was there was not a good representation across the council which seemed to be an issue for many of the staff networks. She said that she was one of the most senior members of staff who was openly 'out' and that there were none, to her knowledge, at what might be classed as senior staff leadership. It was her view that this said a lot about representation and role modelling across the organisation which could limit staff with protected characteristics who might not see a path for progression and being 'your whole self' in senior staff roles. There was a question about the digital divide with not all staff being able to get messages and a concern about comeback about being 'out' in the workplace. She said that although the organisation is keen to understand about protected characteristics, there is a hesitancy about getting it wrong and this created paralysis which ends up causing harm as we are not understanding the complexities behind peoples lived experiences, the idea of being able to 'get something wrong' provided lessons are learned was also noted.

The issue of intersectionality was also discussed. It was the view that people should not have to choose which protected characteristic they align with, it should be dealt with wholistically.

In conclusion it was noted that being the Chair of the LGBT+ network had been one of the great joys of her career and good to see the appetite and momentum behind this work now. The staff network partnership has really worked and was of the view that there should be a centralised EDI team for the organisation to facilitate training, to provide support and be a contact for staff lived experiences.

Members noted that whilst some staff did get time off from work to attend or do work on behalf of the staff network, they were still working above and beyond their contracted hours.

Member's discussions included:

- The role of the staff survey.
- Learning and the confidence to get it wrong and learn from this to make it better.
- Training
- The importance of having open and transparent conversations and to challenge discrimination
- Cultural differences in challenging behaviours towards certain protected characteristics.

The Chair thanked all who had attended for the item especially the officers from the staff networks. He said that all the points made would be minuted and part of public record. He realised that there had not been time to respond to all points but said that further contact would be made with the Head of HR Projects EDI and a response on behalf of the Board would be sent to the staff networks.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Note the content of the report and appendices and to highlight any future areas of scrutiny work from discussion during this item, particularly the possibility of returning to this subject through a working group to enable more time on the subject.
- b) Consider the next steps for this work having received reports on EDI related issues since early 2021 and heard direct contributions from the Council's staff networks. One option is to produce a scrutiny statement that would enable initial findings to be made whilst also continuing to consider EDI related agenda items in the future.

67 Devolution Update

The report of the Director of Resources provided a devolution update for the Scrutiny Board since the delivery of the Devolution Deal and the first mayoral elections in May 2021. It highlighted the key achievements delivered through devolved structures and partnership activities and their impact on Leeds, as well as key challenges and how the Devolution Deal may evolve going forward.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis – Deputy Mayor /Leader of Council
- Tom Riordan – Chief Executive
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Martin Farrington – Director of City Development
- Ben Still – WYCA Managing Director
- Cllr P Truswell – Chair of Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board
- Cllr B Anderson – Chair of Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board
- Cllr A Marshall-Katung – Chair of Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board

The Chair said that the Chairs of other Scrutiny Boards were in attendance for this item because devolution crossed many areas of the Council and therefore potentially the remits of the different scrutiny boards.

The Director of City Development opened the item providing the Board with the following points:

- The report gave an overview of the West Yorkshire Devolution Deal which was announced in the Budget in March 2020 with the final consenting order in January 2021 and mayoral election in May 2021.

- As a devolution deal there was more than £1.8 billion in funding over the next 30 years, including £38 million per year in not inflation linked gainshare funding divided into 25% capital and 75% revenue.
- The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) also took a decision to take on borrowing for non-transport powers through separate legislation. In December 2021 the Government informed WYCA of its intention to lay a draft order in Parliament on this matter in January 2022.
- The report covered the funding position, partnership working the proposals for a single investment fund recognising that some of the funding is ring-fenced, West Yorkshire Investment Strategy and highlighted the key benefits following the devolution deal which included the work of the inward investment authority who work closely with the Council and other authorities. It also provided information on the gainshare funding and how this has been divided up.

Responding to questions from the Chairs of the Scrutiny Boards and the Board Members of Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board the following information was provided:

Funding and Inflation

It was noted that there are variable amounts of autonomy in relation to funding, depending on the nature of the funding coming in on transport. The most autonomy of funding WYCA has is on gainshare, which is still subject to two processes which are the five yearly gateway review with Government that ensures the money is spent according to the good value for money principles and secondly that there is a requirement for the funding to be spent through the Combined Authorities Assurance Framework, which was referenced in the submitted report.

The limits of the funding are around the devolution deal, which are in promoting economic growth and alignment with the economic priorities of the Combined Authority. It is also dependent on whether the funding is capital or revenue. Other funds such as the City Regional Sustainable Transport Fund which is mainly a capital funding programme, is subject to a detailed business case which had been submitted over the last eighteen months. It is constrained as it is intended to be spent on projects which were named and set out in the business case. This is where the funding for mass transit is set out.

The Combined Authority would like more flexibility on funding such as CRSTS, but the benefit is that it is multi-year which provides a degree of freedom with projects and enables better resource planning as compared to previous arrangements.

The funding for Bus Sustainability Improvement Programme is predominantly from revenue, this is subject to a business case and has a specific purpose.

It was the view that the Combined Authority was fairly constrained even though these are devolved funds and there is a case for greater devolution to use the funds more flexibly in their deployment.

In response to questions about the impact of inflation on gain share funding, it was noted that the Combined Authority had estimated that the gainshare over the time period would equate to £1.1 billion but taking account of current inflation projections it would become less than £700 million which would be a major loss. No gainshare amounts have been index linked.

Affordable Housing

Paragraph 39 was highlighted as providing detail in relation to the £89 million funding the Combined Authority had committed to the Brownfield Housing Fund. It was noted that Leeds was in the process of securing approximately £42 million of that fund. Last year Leeds delivered 595 affordable houses which was above the in year need but not the total need of about 1,200 new houses. Using this funding alongside the strategic grant from Homes England and monies from Section 106 would provide a pathway to 750 affordable homes per annum over the next three years. It was recognised that this funding was assisting with more affordable housing but there was a higher need than can be supplied.

The devolution deal secured a housing revenue fund which allowed housing teams from the Local Authorities to look at development sites and bring forward the case where they were in a deliverable position. It was also noted that there were now more sites ready to go which would not have happened without the devolution deal. The Brownfield Housing Fund comes with a degree of constraint in that the projects need to demonstrate a positive value for money BCR. It was acknowledged that these sites were challenging, and this was preventing developers coming forward with more affordable homes.

National Health Service

Greater Manchester had picked up the health service as part of their devolution deal six or seven years ago. Since then, the reforms that have taken place in the health service through the Integrated Care System (ICS) has meant there was a reluctance to go further with devolution of health services.

The Chief Executive said that he had led a peer review on Greater Manchester, and he was of the view that the new arrangements on the ICS do change the dynamics and he endorsed the views of the Leader. It was recognised that it was important to focus on the economy transport skills. He was also of the view there was a need to simplify the funding streams and the more autonomy and flexibility we can get, would lead to better results.

Combined Authority Scrutiny Committees

The three Combined Authority Scrutiny Committees all publish full plans, and the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees would be willing to talk to Local Authority Scrutiny Chairs. This could be facilitated by the Combined Authority.

Page 48 Paragraph 10 of the submitted report listed the Combined Authority Scrutiny Committees as:

- Governance and Audit Committee
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Economy Scrutiny Committee
- Transport/ Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee

Page 48 also listed the other decision-making committees at paragraph 9 of the submitted report.

It was noted that the Council was represented on all the Combined Authority committees and there was a link there for the Scrutiny Board Chairs to use if they so wished.

Police and Crime Panel

It was noted that the Managing Director would take the question about how best to work with the Police and Crime Panel away and come back with the information.

Assurance Framework

The major projects and one of the benefits of devolution are that they are considered with the West Yorkshire Assurance Framework which allows WYCA to target the timing of the business case, which is measured in weeks, which provides greater certainty of the time it will take for a project and the resources required. The Assurance Framework is design to answer questions such as what is going to be produced from the project and will it be value for money. The processes are made as efficient and effective as possible. The Assurance Framework is now used by all the partners and provides accountability to Central Government of the money that is spent through the Combined Authority. It was acknowledged that the framework had scored well and was trusted by Government.

Adult Education Budget

The main changes in the first year were about rationalisation, looking at the quality of contracts. This resulted in a reduction of contracts from 100 to approximately 38 with most of these West Yorkshire based, so more about supporting the local economy. The challenge that the AEB face currently is the upward inflationary pressure on intervention rates, how to maintain the number of learners coming out of the system and finding additional funding to increase the number of learners. It was noted that one of the benefits from AEB was that they were able to use some of the flexibilities that come with devolution arrangements.

It was recognised that the Combined Authority do not have links into the communities and communication was best through the local authorities. It was noted that information about how the Combined Authority cascade information would be brought back. It was suggested that Councillors could assist with communicating information into their communities. Members were advised that Leeds City Council had signed an AEB agreement, and the Director of City Development offered to liaise with the Combined Authority on looking at how to communicate information on AEB to the communities.

It was noted that the Leader offered to invite Tracy Brabin the West Yorkshire Mayor to a meeting of Council, where Elected Members could meet her and ask questions in 2023.

RESOLVED – To:

- A) Note the updates contained in the report and agree any appropriate Scrutiny Board actions that may arise from these.
- B) Note that additional information linked to the Police and Crime Panel will be provided to members following the meeting.

68 Core Business Transformation

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided the Board with an update on the progress of the Core Business Transformation programme.

Attending the meeting for this item were:

- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Victoria Bradshaw – Chief Officer Financial Services

Members were informed that phase one of the Core Business Transformation focusses on financial services and replacing the existing FMS system which is now nearing 'end of life' with future phases planned to deal with other functions such as HR and payroll.

Members were advised that external auditors had concerns that the current system could not provide the information that was required.

In response to questions from the Board the following information was provided:

- Capital receipts can be used to fund service transformation under the Government's Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Directive.
- The current system is 20 years old, and technology has moved on, the new system would be able to provide bespoke reports, information for budget holders, provided detailed information and trend analysis.
- The system is CIPFA recommended and used in other authorities.
- Financial Services has recently restructured and the accountants who currently input to the FMS system will be able to focus on other areas of work.
- The new system will be operational by October 2023 with plans to deliver improvements in other services following that.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report and appendices and to highlight any future areas of scrutiny work arising from discussions of this item.

69 Work Programme

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the 2022/23 work programme for the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) and was reflective of board member discussions to date.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser informed the Board that a draft work schedule for the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board was presented at Appendix 1 of the submitted report. Members were asked to note the minutes of Executive Board held on 23rd November which were appended to the report at Appendix 2.

The Chair suggested that he will explore the possibility of a working group to do more work on EDI following today's item.

RESOLVED – To consider, discuss and note the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2022/23 municipal year.

70 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To note the next meeting of the Board will be on 16th January 2023 at 10:00am. There will be a pre-meeting for all Board members at 9:45am