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SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 25TH JANUARY, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors P Stables, B Anderson,
J Akhtar, P Grahame, A Maloney, J Tudor,
A Hannan, A Rontree, S Seary, A Khan,
N Harrington and J Heselwood

70 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

71 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

72 Late Items

There were no late items.

73 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

74 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Cllr A McCluskey.

Cllr J Heselwood attended as a substitute.

75 Minutes - 7 December 2023

The minutes of 7 December 2023 were approved.

76 Budget Proposals

The Chair noted that the Executive Board's budget proposals were referred to Scrutiny for consideration and comment on 13 December 2023.

Initial working groups took place in December 2023 to enable scrutiny members to discuss the budget proposals so far as they related to the remits of their respective boards.

There is further opportunity for members to consider the proposals at the January cycle of public Scrutiny Board meetings.

The comments and conclusions of all the Scrutiny Boards will be summarised in a joint report that will be submitted to the Executive Board in February.

When the Executive Board refers the final budget proposals to Council, its members will need to report how they have taken account of any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Boards.

Those in attendance for this item were:

- **Cllr M Harland** (Executive Member, Communities)
- **Cllr M Rafique** (Executive Member, Energy, Environment & Green Spaces)
- **Cllr J Lennox** (Executive Member, Housing)
- **Cllr D Coupar** (Executive Member, Resources)
- **James Rogers** (Director, Communities, Housing & Environment)
- **Paul Money** (Chief Officer, Safer, Stronger Communities)
- **Lee Hemsworth** (Chief Officer, Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support)
- **John Woolmer** (Chief Officer, Environmental Services)
- **John Mulcahy** (Chief Officer, Elections and Regulatory)
- **David McNutt** (Senior Finance Business Partner)
- **Gerard Tinsdale** (Chief officer, Housing)
- **Adam Crampton** (Head of Property Management)

The Chair summarised the comments, conclusions and recommendations of members of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) at their working group in December 2023.

He noted that the following matters had been discussed and would therefore be reflected in the joint Scrutiny report:

- Expansion of district parking charges and the service review proposal relating to new charges at Middleton, Roundhay and Temple Newsam.
- The introduction of car parking charges at Golden Acre and Otley Chevin Parks (categorised as a 'business as usual' saving with further comment scheduled under the following item).
- Trade Union engagement with proposals to reduce staffing numbers.
- The distribution of Welcome Spaces for winter 2024.
- Continued publication of both Business as Usual and Service Review proposals.
- Assurances were sought regarding attracting new users to community centres to generate income, reductions in 3rd sector funding, opportunities

to improve insulation in community buildings and the likelihood of increased fly tipping due to bulky waste charges.

- Members requested that community committees receive information about costs for services carried out by the cleaner neighbourhoods' teams - to inform local decisions about future service prioritisation.
- Members recommended that officers explore opportunities to deliver savings by reducing the temperature of community buildings.
- Members requested that the Scrutiny Board is engaged in early consultation about a future waste strategy including plans for glass recycling.
- The Board recognised the decision in relation to HAP budgets was taken in the context of wider risk to the Housing Revenue Account. Members welcomed the retention of environmental works budgets held by local housing offices.

James Rogers provided a brief update on the consultations that are taking place in relation to various budget proposals. It was noted that these are at different stages and the responses will be analysed.

Cllr Coupar reassured members of the Scrutiny Board that Trade Union engagement with the budget proposals is being undertaken.

Further information was requested in relation to the consultation about library services.

Members sought reassurance about the potential impact on front line services of changes to operational arrangements at some community centres.

RESOLVED –

- a) Members noted the content of the report and its appendices.
- b) A summary of the deliberations of all five Scrutiny Boards during the period of consultation on the initial budget proposals will be submitted for consideration by Executive Board on 7 February 2024.

77 Car Park Charges Golden Acre and Otley Chevin

The Chair introduced this item, noting that concern had been raised at the Scrutiny Board's budget working group in December 2023 about the introduction of car parking charges at Golden Acre and Otley Chevin Forest Parks.

He reiterated that these charges are not part of a new service proposal but were instead categorised as a 'Business As Usual' saving in the budget papers submitted to Executive Board.

The Chair informed colleagues that he had received communication from two other Scrutiny Board Chairs on this issue. Concerns had been raised by members of the Adults, Health & Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board about the potential impact of introducing charges on support for active lifestyles. The Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board had highlighted concern about the consultation process in their budget discussions.

The Chair highlighted that a report had been published on 2 January 2024 outlining a response to proposals to introduce charges at Golden Acre Park and Otley Chevin Forest Park, following public consultation.

As a Board member, Cllr B Anderson requested that this was brought to the Scrutiny Board for further discussion ahead of comments on the budget proposals being submitted to the Executive Board.

Given the comments on this matter across three Scrutiny Boards, and the timeframes for submitting the joint scrutiny report on the budget to Executive Board, the Chair confirmed that he had agreed to the request to include the report on the agenda for the meeting.

Those in attendance for this item were:

- **Cllr M Rafique** (Executive Member, Energy, Environment & Green Space)
- **Cllr D Coupar** (Executive member, Resources)
- **James Rogers** (Director, Communities, Housing & Environment)
- **Polly Cook** (Chief Officer, Climate, Environment & Green Spaces)

The Chair invited Cllr B Anderson to outline his concerns about the proposals and asked the Director to clarify the distinction between 'Business As Usual' savings and Service Review proposals.

Cllr Anderson informed colleagues that, while he acknowledged the very challenging circumstances relating to the Council's budget, he had a several concerns about the proposal to introduce charges at these parks. Those concerns included:

- Facilities for making cash payments.
- The availability of an equality impact assessment to enable members to understand how such considerations had informed the proposals.
- The potential impact of new charges on the Council's wider ambitions relating to improving the health and well-being of residents.
- The volume of respondents to the consultation that oppose the charges and the extent to which consideration had been given to those responses.
- The times during which charges would apply.
- The nature of the questions posed within the consultation.
- Displacement of cars onto surrounding roads.

James Rogers provided clarification about the categorisation of savings as either Business As Usual or Service Reviews within the budget papers.

He reassured members that regardless of the categorisation of savings in the budget papers, the same procedures would be followed in relation to consultation and any associated statutory processes.

James informed the Scrutiny Board that it had been agreed in 2023 that the introduction of parking charges at these two sites would be progressed.

He reiterated that the report published on 2 January 2024 is not a key decision. Instead, it is a special operational decision that sets out support in principle for the introduction of charges based on the outcome of previous work. Should there be a further decision to implement charges that would require a key decision.

Provision has been made to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), should they be required to manage displaced parking on surrounding roads.

James noted that the Council faces a significant financial challenge and money raised through parking charges would provide a means through which improvements could be delivered in the car parks. Without charging there is unlikely to be funding available to improve these sites.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that other Core Cities already have charges in place at some parks.

It was noted that the consultation asked respondents what they might recommend as an alternative to the charging proposals. Respondents generally suggested costs should be met through efficiencies elsewhere or from existing Council budgets. Analysis has not yet been completed on the responses to the main budget consultation.

Some of the detail being sought by members about the operation of proposed charging schedules cannot yet be provided as further analysis needs to be completed.

Members sought reassurance about the accessibility of the consultation for current park users and were informed that a paper option had been available from the café at Golden Acre Park and local libraries, alongside the online consultation.

Concern was raised about a lack of contextualisation of the questions in the consultation. For example, it was suggested that to fully understand the potential impact on the accessibility and safety of parks, decision makers would need to understand why people use particular modes of transport to visit them.

The Scrutiny Board was assured that there would be an EDI assessment as part of final decision-making process. James highlighted that the approach to equalities in Leeds is highly regarded.

Polly Cook confirmed that the consultation did ask questions about requirements for disabled parking facilities. It was confirmed that 'Blue Badge' holders would be exempt from paying car park charges.

A board member raised concern about the standardisation of EDI information captured as part of Council consultations and whether that could sufficiently capture the 'lived experience' of those using the parks in question.

The extent to which consultation responses influence decision making was debated, with consideration given to public expectation regarding the impact of engagement with Council consultations.

It was agreed that Cllr Golton would raise general concerns about the approach to EDI within Council consultations with the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.

The financial challenge facing the Council was reiterated and members highlighted national concerns about funding for local government.

Members were informed charges would be modest, and it was noted that all of those affected would already be running a car.

Members were assured that the consultation on the expansion of district car parking charges in Wetherby would consider the wider impact of that proposal on the town centre.

RESOLVED –

- a) Members noted the findings of the report published on 2 January 2024.
- b) Comments regarding the introduction of new parking charges will be captured in the joint Scrutiny report on the budget proposals.
- c) Concern about the approach to capturing EDI information within public consultations will be raised with the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board.

78 Performance Monitoring

The Chair noted that the Scrutiny Board receives an update on performance against key performance indicators in June and January each year.

Those in attendance for this item were:

- **Cllr M Harland** (Executive Member, Communities)

- **Cllr M Rafique** (Executive Member, Energy, Environment & Green Spaces)
- **Cllr J Lennox** (Executive Member, Housing)
- **Cllr D Coupar** (Executive Member, Resources)
- **James Rogers** (Director, Communities, Housing & Environment)
- **Ian Strickland** (Business Development Manager)
- **Paul Money** (Chief Officer, Safer, Stronger Communities)
- **Lee Hemsworth** (Chief Officer, Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support)
- **John Woolmer** (Chief Officer, Environmental Services)
- **John Mulcahy** (Chief Officer, Elections and Regulatory)
- **Gerard Tinsdale** (Chief officer, Housing)
- **Adam Crampton** (Head of Property Management)

James Rogers introduced the performance update, setting out the strategic vision for the directorate and noting that the key performance indicators included in the report have been identified as relevant to achieving the ambition of that vision.

Ian Strickland outlined how performance reporting aligns to other reports received by the Board and noted that the indicators are organised according to their contribution to the three pillars of the Best City Ambition – health and well-being, zero carbon and inclusive growth. He highlighted the importance of maximising capacity within the directorate so as to deliver efficient services.

At the request of members in June 2023, the report included information about Tenant Satisfaction Measures and reflected on the experience of residents with disabilities, where applicable and/or appropriate.

It was noted that a substantial item on housing would be considered in February and as such board members agreed to consider issues relating to housing at that meeting.

Cllr Golton highlighted that several aspects of future performance will depend to some degree on digital transformation. However, he noted that the budget proposals include a reduction of FTEs within IDS. Within that context he sought reassurances that there would be capacity within IDS to support the projects the service has identified as priorities.

James Rogers reassured members that the service works closely with IDS and will continue to do so to take forward projects identified as priorities.

Lee Hemsworth added that all projects within the update are already ongoing and identified by IDS as 'priority 1' schemes.

The Scrutiny Board requested that updates on the transformation projects highlighted in the performance update should be incorporated into the work programme of the 2024/25 successor board.

The Scrutiny Board welcomed action to tackle littering and fly tipping. However, it was noted that there is a concern amongst some members that new bulky waste charges could inadvertently create more fly tipping.

John Woolmer reassured members that reducing fly tipping remains a priority for the Council. He welcomed the fact that recent activity has led to a reduction in fly tipping. Government statistics have shown a reduction of 15% in Leeds for fly tipping, compared to 1% nationally. Interventions have included the introduction of a serious environmental crime team for Leeds to focus on enforcement. This has resulted in several successful prosecutions and the crushing of a number of vehicles.

The Council has increased weekend access to Seacroft and Kirkstall waste sites for businesses and is seeking to introduce an accredited waste carrier scheme. That scheme would enable responsible waste carriers to gain accreditation from the Council to which customers will then be able to refer.

The Scrutiny Board requested a specific update on hate crime and its prevalence in the city at a future meeting. Paul Money noted that this would fit into wider development of a new hate crime strategy.

Members sought confirmation about whether universities would continue to fund DS1 – a dedicated noise nuisance service in areas with a high concentration of student residents. The work of the service has been welcomed by local residents.

It was noted that a new member visit to Newmarket House had been very informative.

Members sought clarification on the date for the implementation of new bin collection routes in the city. John Woolmer confirmed that it is anticipated that the new routes will be implemented in early March. Final routes are in the process of being signed off and communications prepared for all residents affected by a change in the date of their collections, in line with legal requirements. Once the service has a final implementation date members will be informed.

Further information about the new route review for members will include more detail about the anticipated timescales for the collection of missed bins in the weeks following the implementation of the new schedule.

Members considered the frequency of green bin collections in densely populated areas, advocating a move from monthly green bin collections to fortnightly. Recycling provision for high rise buildings was also explored.

John Woolmer confirmed that the service is working towards alternate weekly collection in more areas of the city. Members noted the challenges around this change – effectively losing a collection each month and the potential for the contamination of green bins if communities are not engaged with recycling.

As part of the route review thousands of properties are moving to alternate weekly collections.

Members welcomed the impact of existing PSPOs and queried whether additional PSPOs might be introduced. Members noted that in combination with TROs these orders have made a significant difference to residents by reducing repeat missed bin collections where access has historically been a problem.

It was agreed that PSPOs can be very effective. However, it was noted that the associated enforcement is also extremely resource intensive.

Consideration was given to whether extra bins can be removed to reduce obstructions on pavements for those with mobility issues. John Woolmer identified some of the logistical challenges in achieving this – such as identifying which properties have multiple bins inappropriately. However, he also informed members that this issue has been raised by bin crews as a concern.

John acknowledged the challenge of obstructed pavements for those with mobility issues. The service is exploring the development of a training video in partnership with a corporate access and equality group, which will be aimed at residents and staff to illustrate the impact of obstructing the pavement for those with mobility issues.

Members asked about the future of food and glass waste collections in light of further information having been provided about the proposed national approach to consistency of collections. Defra has provided more guidance around co-mingling. 2026 has been provided as the deadline for introducing kerbside collections for glass and food waste collections and it is anticipated that further information about revenue funding will be forthcoming shortly. This is in addition to capital funding for new equipment and infrastructure.

Options for glass remain an additional glass collection in a separate bin or co-mingling with other recycling. The second option would require further engagement with current providers.

A Board Member noted that the Neighbourhood Improvement Partnership has been very successful in Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, with a noticeable improvement in licensing arrangements. Members asked that their thanks are passed to partners.

The Scrutiny Board reflected on the number of hectares of woodland created citywide. The Scrutiny Board requested a further briefing so members can understand woodland creation on a ward-by-ward basis. It was noted that inner-city areas often have significantly depleted tree cover and members were particularly keen to understand whether proactive tree planting is improving the situation in these areas.

Members requested information about how many trees have been planted in different wards and the difference in canopy cover that has been created through tree planting schemes in recent years.

Polly Cook confirmed that further information can be provided on a ward basis, with the exception of canopy cover, which would require external measurements and would therefore incur a cost.

RESOLVED –

- a) Members noted the contents of the report and the appendices.
- b) The Principal Scrutiny Officer will liaise with the relevant service leads to schedule updates on the transformation projects within the 2024/25 work programme.
- c) An update on hate crime will be scheduled for a future Scrutiny Board meeting.
- d) Further information was requested in relation to woodland creation, including a breakdown of the number of trees planted in each ward of the city.

79 Work Schedule

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor advised the Scrutiny Board that draft dates for 2024/25 had been circulated and that members should have received invitations to two remote working groups.

RESOLVED –

Members noted the contents of the draft 2023/24 work programme.

80 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next public meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on **22 February 2024 at 10.30am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at **10.00am**.