

SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

WEDNESDAY, 28TH JUNE, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A Marshall-Katung in the Chair

Councillors P Alderson, N Buckley,
M Foster, J Garvani, S Hamilton, C Hart-
Brooke, A Hussain, M Millar, M Shahzad,
N Sharpe and I Wilson

1 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals.

2 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair expressed thanks on behalf of former Councillor Paul Truswell who had chaired the Board for the previous ten years stating that his experience would missed.

Councillor M Millar was also welcomed to his first meeting of the Board.

3 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

4 Late Items

There were no late items.

5 Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations.

6 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor S Lay.
Councillor C Hart-Brooke was in attendance as substitute.

7 Minutes - 5 April 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

8 Matters arising from the Minutes.

Minute 85 – End of Year Statement

Members were informed that the approved End of Year Statement had now been published on the Council website. The Annual Report would be published following consideration at Full Council on 12 July.

9 Terms of Reference

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment & Inclusive Growth).

The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 – General Terms of Reference applicable to all Scrutiny Boards
- Appendix 2 – Article 6 of the Constitution -This outlined Scrutiny Board remits and any special responsibilities. A revised version of Article 6 was anticipated following changes agreed at the Annual Council meeting.
- Appendix 3 – Scrutiny Board alignment with Officer Delegated Functions and Executive portfolios 2023/24.

Members were informed that Councillor Lennox had been appointed as Executive Member for Housing.

RESOLVED – That the Board’s Terms of Reference be noted.

10 Co-Opted Members

The report of the Head of Democratic Services informed the Board of the provision to appoint Co-opted Members.

The Board had previously relied on expert witnesses to support the Board rather than Co-opting Members. The Scrutiny Board agreed to continue to adopt this approach unless or until members reach a point where they determine co-option would add specific value.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the Scrutiny Board will not appoint co-opted members unless or until members reach a point where they determine co-option would add specific value.

11 Performance Report

The report of the Director of City Development and Director of Children and Families provided a summary of performance against the strategic priorities for the council and city and other performance areas relevant to the Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment & Inclusive Growth).

The report covered quarter 4/ year end 2022/23 Performance Information (or latest available where quarter 4 data was not available).

Performance was previously reported to the Board in January 2023 (quarter 2 2022/23)

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Member
- Councillor Jonathon Pryor, Executive Member
- Councillor Jessica Lennox, Executive Member
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member
- Martin Farrington, Director – City Development
- Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer, Culture & Economy
- Martin Elliot, Head of Strategic Planning
- Gary Bartlett, Chief Officer – Highways & Transportation
- Angela Barnicle, Chief Officer – Asset Management & Regeneration.
- Emma Kamillo-Price – Senior Intelligence Officer

Emma Kamillo-Price introduced the report and explained the methods behind gathering the data for the performance indicators.

Martin Farrington, Director of City Development introduced each Key Performance Indicator that fell within the Board's remit.

Discussion included the following:

- Planning Applications:

Performance in relation to the percentage of planning applications determined on time had improved in 2022/23 after a fall in 2021/22, which was largely a consequence of the pandemic.

Recruitment and retention of planning staff remains challenging. This is partly attributable to competition from the private sector and solutions are constrained by the Council's current budget challenges. Further workforce issues discussed included the training of apprentices, workplace environment and flexibility regarding remuneration levels.

The Director of City Development updated the Scrutiny Board on the Government's current technical consultation regarding increasing planning fees to reduce the funding shortfall for the planning application service.

During the pandemic there was an increase in minor household planning applications. This has reduced during the last year but demands on the service remain high due to the increased complexity in major applications. The Scrutiny Board discussed the increasing range of issues that must be considered in relation to planning applications

such as biodiversity and carbon reduction, along with increased burdens on design. Significant work is undertaken pre-application with developers to ensure that applications are acceptable when submitted.

Information was requested on the current level of staffing compared to the planned budget level.

Leeds had received 4,500 planning applications in March 2023, which was the third highest in England.

Members were pleased with the performance information presented to the Board and expressed thanks to all involved.

- Unemployment in Leeds

There had been a significant decrease in unemployment from 5.6% to 2.5%. The average across core cities was 4.6% and Leeds was in a better position than other West Yorkshire authorities. The Scrutiny Board was informed that there has been a small upward trend reported since the publication of the figures and a rise in the number of Universal Credit claimants.

The Scrutiny Board queried whether further information could be provided to illustrate the quality of employment – for example, the prevalence of zero hours contracts - reflected in the figures and the geographical breakdown of the data. It was reported that there were skill shortages in some sectors, particularly areas of growth and city partners are seeking to deliver interventions to ensure people have the necessary skills to access those jobs.

There has been an increase in the number of people who are economically inactive. The Scrutiny Board was advised that proactive work is taking place to support those who might have additional needs to access local employment. This included the recent SEND Next Choices event for young people at the Leeds Arena.

While welcoming a drop in unemployment, the Scrutiny board expressed concern that members could not ascertain the numbers of people who had moved from Universal Credit or who were in employment and claiming benefit. It was recognised that there were areas where data is not available.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that work is underway with Open Innovations to assess how economic data could be used differently to develop more current indicators of activity in the local economy. However, without postcode data from employers determining who gets jobs, this is challenging. Scrutiny Board members have requested that further information is brought back to the Board as part of the Future Talent update in September.

A breakdown of employment figures by ward is sent to Elected Members. Officers in employment and skills focus their efforts on the wards with the highest unemployment levels.

- Business Start Ups, Business Scale Ups and Business Survival Rate

Additional information was presented about the change in funding arrangements for business support schemes following the UK's exit from the European Union. Members were advised that schemes previously funded by European grants were now seeking to access funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and gainshare. It was noted that this change had resulted in a reduction in the funding available to support business.

There had been an increase in the number of business start-ups and a decrease in the number of business scale ups. There had also been a fall in the business survival rate but this was only marginally lower than the national rate.

Members noted that it would be useful to understand what kinds of businesses are scaling up. Officers advised members that this is a known challenge and SIC codes are out of date and not relevant for many modern sector definitions. Economic Policy and WYCA may be able to provide some enhanced data in September.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that the Chamber of Commerce provides a quarterly survey with regards to business confidence and this could be circulated to Members.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the impact of Brexit on businesses including the manufacturing and cultural sectors.

There are significant challenges in the hospitality and leisure sectors, partly attributable to rising costs and the need to service high levels of debt taken on during the pandemic. There is still growth in sectors including digital, financial and professional services. There is reported optimism in the manufacturing sector across the city.

- Growth in New Homes

It was confirmed that the adopted core strategy target is 3,247 new homes annually. There is expected to be a short fall in the delivery of new homes this year. However, there is expected to be a strong delivery in the coming year as properties on high volume sites are released.

There are currently over 15,000 homes that have been granted planning permission and 7,000 in construction. Officers noted the "healthy pipeline" of sites which will contribute to delivery in the coming years.

Leeds compares well nationally with regard to the delivery of new homes.

- Number of Affordable Homes Delivered

There has been an increase in the delivery of affordable homes in comparison to the previous year. Members sought comparative information relating to statistical neighbours.

Clarification was provided with regard to the annual in-year target for affordable homes and the additional requirements associated with historic under provision. Further detail was requested on the total number of units required to clear the historic under provision in affordable home delivery.

Quarterly monitoring suggests some onsite delays in construction, which could see homes delivered later than anticipated.

Affordable housing is predominantly developed on brownfield sites and the Council continues to work closely with West Yorkshire Combined Authority to support strategic housing ambitions by using the regional Brownfield Housing Fund.

Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that housing is delivered in a way that is consistent with the Council's ambitions around environmental impact and sustainability.

Information was provided about large schemes such as that being delivered by the Guinness Partnership, which will deliver a "step change" in the levels of affordable housing provided in the city.

It was noted that the Leeds Affordable Housing Growth Partnership Action Plan & Leeds Local Plan 2040 are due to come back to the Board later in the municipal year.

Members highlighted concerns about the impact of 'right to buy' on the Council's housing stock.

- Residential developments built to required accessible and adaptable standards.

There had been positive results in meeting targets and the council may wish to extend the target following the next review.

- Progress 8 score for Leeds at the end of Key Stage 4

Leeds is performing well against all comparator groups and was in the top quartile.

However, members noted that the data beneath the headline figures raises concerns about specific groups of children such as those with special educational needs and disabilities. Further information about performance among different groups of children was requested.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that Progress 8 Scores were not measured during the pandemic as teacher assessed grades were adopted instead, which created more inconsistencies when compared to previous data. The Scrutiny Board discussed the overall impact of the pandemic on children at all stages of their education.

It was agreed that Cllr Marshall-Katung should write to the Chair of the Scrutiny Board (Children's and Families) to request that the Board considers Progress 8 Scores for children with special education needs and disabilities, as part of their wider work on support for children with Education, Health and Care Plans.

- Number of People Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) in road traffic collision.

The Scrutiny Board reiterated its support for the Vision Zero approach at both a city and regional level.

There has been a reduction in the KSI figures in comparison to the previous year but it was noted that figures are once again higher than during the pandemic period.

The Scrutiny Board was reminded that in April 2021 West Yorkshire Police changed the reporting system for road traffic collisions and, as has been the case in other areas where the CRASH reporting system has been rolled out, the number of reported casualties has significantly increased as a result.

Members sought further information about Operation SNAP and the use of photographic evidence gathered via dashcam footage and from cyclists. Members were reassured that this evidence is enabling the police to pursue dangerous drivers and there is a high rate of success from pursuing cases in this way.

KSI figures on a ward basis will be provided to the Board in September when Vision Zero will be examined in detail by the Board.

The Scrutiny Board considered the importance of finding ways in which to influence behaviour change amongst road users as part of the Vision Zero approach.

Members welcomed the introduction of average speed cameras in the city and explored how these would work. The Board noted its thanks for the work of officers that had enabled the technology to be introduced in Leeds.

The Board noted the rise in KSI figures following the pandemic – and referenced anecdotal evidence that alongside increased levels of traffic there was a noticeable drop in driving standards.

An update was provided in relation to the rural speed review and members were advised that there would be a trial reduction in speeds on some rural roads.

A public spaces protection order was due to come into force on 3 July 2023, which included increased powers to tackle the anti-social behaviour use of motor vehicles. It was noted that the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board has recently examined data relating to the misuse of motor vehicles as part of its own performance reporting and will be considering the issue in more detail in September.

- Satisfaction with a range of transport services.

It was noted that bus providers will be invited to a Scrutiny session later in the municipal year and the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy 2022/23 will be discussed in July

- City Centre Footfall

Members were reassured that the city is continuing to recover from the pandemic. While weekday footfall is still 16% down since pre-pandemic levels, there has been a rise in the past year. Weekend footfall has been stronger and was only down by 3% when compared to pre-pandemic levels. It was noted that retailers have reported an increase in 'basket value' despite the reduced footfall which may be an indicator of a longer-term change in trends.

Concern was raised about the impact of working from home on the city centre economy. It was reported that more organisations, including the Council, are looking at retaining some form of flexible working for employees. The Scrutiny Board noted the challenges of recruitment and retention of staff who are looking for flexibility from employers, and the impact of commuting on the climate emergency.

The leisure, culture and hospitality sectors are working hard to attract people into the city centre and have worked in partnership with the Council to encourage visitors to return to the city.

It was noted that data relating to the economic recovery in town and district centres is not as robust as that available for the city centre. The Scrutiny Board requested that a more detailed examination of this issue was scheduled for future scrutiny within the work programme.

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance and contributions.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That further information on the partnership with Open Innovations should be considered by the Scrutiny Board at a future date.
- c) That more detailed examination of the recovery of town and district centres should be scheduled for a future date.

12 Sources of Work

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report on potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Board's terms of reference.

The Best City Ambition was appended to the report for information.

It was noted that the Executive Member for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure has requested that the Scrutiny Board carries out a review of the six-month trial of changes to the Planning Portal. The Scrutiny Board agreed to this request.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report and the suggested areas of work, as set out above, be noted.

13 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which included a draft work programme for the municipal year 2023/24. This collated requests from members of the 2022/23 Board and known items of business such as budget consultation and performance monitoring.

Recent Executive Board minutes were appended to the report.

RESOLVED – That the report and work schedule be noted.

14 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on Wednesday, 19 July at 10.30 a.m. There will be a pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.15 a.m.