

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 22ND JUNE, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, P Grahame,
A Maloney, A Hannan, Harrington,
A McCluskey, J McKenna, A Rontree,
S Seary and Stables

CHAIRS OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the municipal year.

He introduced himself and as a new Chair of the Board he provided a brief background of himself. He invited Members to introduce themselves and also provide a brief background of themselves.

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

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

5 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Cllrs Akhtar, Tudor and Harland and also Gerard Tinsdale (Chief Officer Housing).

It was noted that Cllr Coupar would be attending from 11:15am.

6 Minutes - 2 March 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2nd March 2023, be approved as a correct record.

7 Matters arising

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser informed the Board of the following:

Minute 71: End of Year Statement

The End of Year Statement had now been published on the committee webpage. The Annual Report 2022/23 will also be published on that page following consideration by Council on 12 July.

Minute 72: Work Schedule

The response to the 2022/23 Scrutiny Board's recommendations regarding reducing gambling harm, was considered by the Executive Board on Wednesday 21st June. The Executive Board was supportive of the recommendations made by the Board.

8 Terms of Reference

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities).

Appendices attached to the submitted report included:

- Appendix 1 - General Terms of Reference applicable to all Scrutiny Boards
- Appendix 2 - Article 6 of the constitution, which outlines Scrutiny Board remits and any special responsibilities. It was noted that legal colleagues are in the process of updating this document post Annual Council and there may be further updates to the version in front of members.
- Appendix 3 - The Scrutiny Board alignment with officer Delegated Functions and Executive portfolios 2023/24.

It was noted the main changes for this Scrutiny Board were:

- Cllr Jess Lennox is now the Executive Member for Housing
- Functions including the delivery of locality youth services now fall within the remit of this Board. The remaining aspects of youth services remain with the Children and Families Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED – That the Board's terms of reference be noted.

9 Co-Opted Members

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which sought the Board's consideration for the appointment of co-opted members.

It was noted that the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board has not historically co-opted external individuals. It was proposed that this approach is adopted in 2023/24 unless or until the Scrutiny Board determines co-option would add material value.

RESOLVED – It was agreed that no external individuals will be co-opted to the Scrutiny Board unless or until members determined co-option would add material value.

10 Performance Report

The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment submitted a report which provided a summary of performance information relating to the strategic priorities for the council and city and other performance areas relevant to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr M Rafique - Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space
- Cllr Debra Coupar - Executive Member for Resources
- Councillor J Lennox – Executive Member for Housing
- James Rogers - Director of Communities, Housing & Environment
- Lee Hemsworth – Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support
- Emma Kamillo-Price – Senior Intelligence and Policy Officer
- Paul Money – Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- John Woolmer – Chief Officer Environmental Services
- Mandy Sawyer - Head of Housing & Neighbourhoods
- Ian Strickland - Business Development Manager
- Rob Goor – Head of Property Development
- Kevin Brighton – Development and Improvement Manager

The Business Development Manager presented the report informing the Members that the report included several priority areas identified following consultation with the 2022/23 Scrutiny Board. Following member requests in January 2023 additional information had been provided in relation to rough sleepers and waste management.

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

Rent Collection and Arrears

- A due process is followed in relation to rent arrears and officers confirmed that the service does not write off current tenants' arrears unless there are exceptional debt or legislative circumstances. In terms of former tenants' arrears, due process is followed, and the service has a good rate of recovery. It was noted that the report highlights that £800,000 had been recovered during the year ended March 2023 with a write off of £1.09m.
- Insulation is only carried out through the Planned Investment Programme and not as standard during the 'turn around' of void properties being prepared for re-let. Insulation would only be added on void properties if extensive work was required.

Void Properties

- Current re-let time for void properties is 116 days, which is down from the 141 days detailed in the report from the end of March 2023. It was noted there were currently 800 void properties within the Council's housing stock and this number is continuing to reduce. The Board was

advised that all areas of the city had targets to reduce void properties and performance is improving.

Annual Tenancy Check-ins

- It was acknowledged that the language used in relation to this KPI requires revision – as while the report refers to Annual Tenancy Checks, in practice for most tenants these are carried out every three years. However, the Board was advised that annual visits do take place for more vulnerable tenants. A member suggested that more regular checks, especially where new heating systems had been installed, may be needed in some cases to ensure that these were being used in an efficient way and maximising the opportunities to prevent damp and mould.

Homelessness Prevention

- It was noted that a report on the new Homelessness Strategy is due to go to Executive Board in July but could be brought to Scrutiny Board for Members comments. Members agreed that the strategy should be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Board for information and consideration.

Private Rented Sector

- The Board was informed that all private rented sector properties are checked to ensure they meet the needs of a tenant. Members were updated about the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing in relation to customer focused complaints. It was confirmed that in future a complaints related question will be included within the wider reporting of a suite of 'Tenant Satisfaction measures.'
- It was noted that if Members had concerns about private rented sector properties, they could contact the Head of Private Rented Sector and should copy in the Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support

Housing Customer Complaints

- There are no specific targets in relation to complaints relating to mould and damp. However, members were advised that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities recently announced amendments to social housing regulations that will include damp and mould. This will be known as 'Awaab's Law' and it is expected there will be a requirement for landlords to fix reported health hazards within a specified time period. It was agreed that such data would be shared with the Scrutiny Board as part of future performance reporting.
- Members were advised there had been a backlog in relation to Housing Office and Housing Options referrals which had caused delays in responses. Work had been carried out to reduce the response times.

Council Tax Support

- Clarification was provided in relation to Council Tax figures and the localised scheme operating in Leeds to offer protection for claimants until they moved to Universal Credit.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- The Members welcomed the extra information which had been provided in relation to anti-social behaviour.
- Concern was expressed by members of the Board about a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour relating to the theft of motor vehicles – including instances where stolen motor vehicles are driven through parks and green spaces causing a hazard for the public. It was noted that the police must consider safety for both the perpetrator(s) and members of the public when determining whether to pursue these vehicles.
- The Scrutiny Board was updated on the delivery of key projects that aim to tackle anti-social behaviour linked to the misuse of motor vehicles – focusing on interventions that remove vehicles, community projects to divert young people away from ASB and progress in introducing a Public Space Protection Order to control vehicle nuisance.
- The Chief Officer set out the additional powers that will be available to partners as a result of the PSPO.
- Members sought clarity on current regulations relating the use of helmets while riding electric vehicles. Members were also informed that funding has been secured to develop a video that can be shown in schools, relating to the dangers of electric scooters and bikes.

Hate Crime

- It was noted there has been an increase in reports of disability hate crime. The Board was advised that substantial work has been carried out to improve support for victims of hate crime and increase the ease of reporting. It was suggested that an increase in reports of disability hate crime indicate victims are beginning to have greater confidence to report hate crimes.
- Members sought clarity about whether reported hate crimes increased where work was carried out to increase accessibility within specific localities.
- Cllr Coupar offered to meet with Cllr Stables ahead of planned works to increase accessibility in areas of Wetherby.
- Work is ongoing across the city in relation to improving Community Cohesion. It was recommended that a further update is provided to the Board in relation to this work later in the municipal year.

Bin Collections and Recycling Performance

- Members were informed that there are ongoing challenges relating to access on some streets, often due to parked vehicles. The service has used Highways TRO's and have written to residents of streets which have had persistent access issues. It was noted that in some instances the police were advised of an issue, as their support was required for enforcement. The use of in cab technology and CCTV for enforcement purposes was discussed.

- It was recognised that some areas of the city do require smaller vehicles to be used for restricted access. However, the Council do not have many small vehicles and there is a cost associated with the increased use of such vehicles.
- Further information was provided in relation to an update of in cab technology and the training of crews on the use of those systems.
- In relation to the completion of end of day reports, the Board was informed that this had improved in recent years.
- The Board discussed the challenges of increasing public awareness of the 48-hour window for the collection of missed bins.
- It was noted that it is policy for the Council to only collect one brown bin per household.
- It was noted that information in relation to collections is provided on the Council's website. Members were advised that where possible recovery of missed bins would be completed within 24 hours.
- In relation to the waste created by the student change over, Members queried whether more information could be provided about the number of items collected by charities for reuse.
- Members noted the positive comparisons to other Core Cities in relation to the amount of waste sent to landfill and requested that Core City comparative figures for the recycling rate are also provided in future performance reports
- Members welcomed the additional information provided in relation to the treatment of household waste and ways of measuring how much waste material is being produced by households. It was requested that this information is provided on an ongoing basis within performance reports.

Members noted the Waste Strategy and information on glass recycling trials will be considered by the Scrutiny Board in July.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.
- b) That the Homelessness Strategy should be brought to a future Scrutiny Board meeting.
- c) That a future update on work relating to Community Cohesion should be brought back to the Scrutiny Board.
- d) That members support the proposal to include additional information about the waste produced by households and the treatment of household waste in future performance reports.

11 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.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr M Rafique - Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space
- Cllr J Lennox – Executive Member for Housing
- Cllr D Coupar – Executive Member for Resources
- James Rogers - Director of Communities, Housing & Environment
- Lee Hemsworth – Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support
- Paul Money – Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- John Woolmer – Chief Officer Environmental Services

Members proposals included:

- Review of the Anti-Graffiti Strategy – It was noted that ‘tagging’ is an increasing issue across the City. Members were advised that further information would be provided as part of the Safer Leeds update, which is due to be brought to the Board in September. The Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities also offered to have conversations with local ward members where they wished to raise specific concerns.
- Licensing of small events in parks. – To look at how arrangements for events in public parks for more than 100 people could be improved, to ensure greater accountability on the part of organisers. It was suggested that this could be looked at as part of the policy for public open spaces, along with relaxed mowing and tree management. It was noted that the Green Spaces Strategy was due to be brought to the Board in February.
- Members requested consideration of the safety of women and girls, especially in relation to walkways connecting to the city centre and proposed exploring projects such as ‘Ask Angela’. It was noted that there was work currently ongoing on this issue along with the West Yorkshire Mayor’s research programme. The Board were further advised of a survey taking place in relation to the safety of women and girls in the city centre.
- As part of this discussion members further requested that time be allocated within the work programme to explore issues linked to safe access to parks and green spaces, particularly where protected characteristics are a further consideration.

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

12 **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.

The Executive Board minutes from the meeting on 19 April are also included at Appendix 2 for reference.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser said the items raised in the meeting would be incorporated into the schedule ahead of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED – To:

a) Consider and discuss the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2023/24 municipal year.

b) Advise the Principal Scrutiny Adviser of any further requests for Scrutiny.

13 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on 20 July 2023 at 10.30am. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at 10.00am.

The meeting concluded at 12:30