

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 20TH JULY, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, J Akhtar,
P Grahame, A Maloney, A McCluskey,
A Rontree, S Seary, Stables, A Khan and
E Thomson

14 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

15 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

16 Late Items

There were no late items.

17 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

18 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Hannan, Tudor and Harrington. Cllr Thompson attended as substitute for Cllr Hannan.

It was also noted that Cllr Rafique as Executive Member would not be attending for Item 7 – Future of Waste Services.

19 Minutes - 22 June 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

20 Matters arising

Minute 10 – Performance Report

Members requested that future performance reports include core city comparisons for recycling rates. In the interim the 2021/22 data as published by Defra was provided by John Woolmer and circulated to members on 18 July.

21 Future of Waste Services

The report of the Chief Officer Environmental Services provided the Scrutiny Board with an update on the Waste Strategy and the future design of waste services.

In attendance for this item were:

Minutes approved at the meeting
held on Thursday, 14th September, 2023

- James Rogers - Director, Communities, Housing & Environment
- John Woolmer - Chief Officer, Environmental Services

The Chief Officer presented the report:

- This update followed previous updates to the Board received in 2021/22 and 22/23.
- It outlined some of the challenges around national timelines for legislative changes and some of the potential financial implications of those challenges.
- The report also provided an update on the refuse route review and a proposed kerbside glass collection trial.

In response to questions from Members the Chief Officer provided the following information:

- The report had tried to capture the most likely options for future kerbside collections to meet new national requirements. It was acknowledged that there was not a 'one size fits all' and the service were looking at options for the different areas of the city. The challenges presented in areas of high density, terraced housing with little garden/drive space was given as an example of how alternatives to providing more bins would probably be needed.
- The Board was advised that the route review will move more properties to alternate weekly bin collections (AWC) in those areas of the city that still do not have this service, subject to consultation with local ward members to ensure local support.
- The Chief Officer suggested he meet with Ward Members, where alternate bin collections were not happening. The areas listed were Headingley, Hyde Park, Burley, Kirkstall, Woodhouse and Armley.
- Members would shortly be receiving an email inviting them to look at maps of the proposed routes during August and September, with a view that the new routes would be implemented in Autumn. Information would be provided to ward members that highlighted which streets have been moved to AWC and included on "hard to access" routes, together with details on route future proofing for planned housing developments in the ward.
- In response to a concern raised about the quality of wheely bins, it was explained that the contractor is appointed through a vigorous procurement process which shows their bins meet and usually exceed the industry standard required. It was noted that where bins do become broken there is a procedure for supplying new, replacement bins. Green bins are replaced free of charge, an admin fee is charged to supply and deliver replacement black and brown bins Members were advised that where a black or brown bin was broken during the process of emptying it there would be no charge to the resident.
- It was acknowledged that the end of day reports had improved significantly in terms of the information provided. However, the service recognised that there were still improvements to be made in terms of all missed streets being recorded/reported and this was an ongoing priority for the service. It was the view that with the current investment

in upgraded technology in all cabs the issue of missed bins and completion of end of day reports would be improved.

- The service is aware that when there are particularly strong winds bins can be blown over, sometimes causing contents to spill. The service has investigated industry solutions for this with no practical, safe solution found. It was noted that positive feedback had been received from a local resident's group in Guiseley the service had supported in developing a "storm warning" advisory bin sticker that encouraged the 'huddling' or sheltering together of bins when stormy weather is forecast in a localised places prone to high winds,
- With reference to Appendix B that provided high level financial modelling for possible future collection options, the Chief Officer offered to provide a further breakdown of the disposal costs in relation to food and garden waste.
- The service is still working on its communication strategy ahead of implementing new routes and welcomed suggestions from Members. It was noted that the service has a legal responsibility to write to all residents in relation to changes collection dates. Information will be provided to those whose first language is not English in line with corporate guidance and advice.
- Work was ongoing to train crews on issues such as ensuring pathways etc are not obstructed and bins are returned to the safest place. Objectives have been set through staff appraisals and work is being progressed to produce staff training and public awareness videos with the involvement of stakeholders in its creation.
- It was explained that due to the variations of bin collection days between waste streams and withing local areas, it is not usually possible to coordinate street cleaning activity to follow bin collection day. However, where it was possible, the benefit was clear and local resources allowed this did happen, with the Burmantofts and Harehills areas provided as an example. The Chief Officer explained that another key objective of the refuse service/route review was to better align routes to the community committee boundaries. This is to improve relationships and accountabilities to Members, and to better geographically align refuse and cleaner neighbourhood team responsibilities around clean streets and improved recycling. It was noted that when glass collection is implemented, crews would ensure that any broken glass was cleared and removed from roads and footpaths.
- The timescale for the commencement of the glass collection pilot is still 2023. However, the specific details of where the pilot will be rolled out in the four identified wards have yet to be finalised and ward members will be full involved those decisions. It was explained how there is very little nationally to learn from, particularly in helping with route modelling assumptions for customer take up and presentation rates. The Chief Officer stated that he wanted to make sure the trial was as prepared as possible before it started, but by the very nature of being a trial there would be some learning as it went along. The point that participation in the trial would be completely optional to households in the trial areas was made. The service was keen to provide a good evaluation of the

glass collection pilot to inform future service planning and, by example, work has already been undertaken to gather good quality baseline information on current glass presentation levels in black and green bins.

- Further information on actions and ambitions to increase 'reuse and reduce' in Leeds can be brought to a future meeting of the Board.
- It is anticipated that there will be increased national demand for plant, vehicles, equipment and LGV drivers once the Government issues further detail about its specific expectations for new collections required under environmental legislation. The Chief Officer outlined the current lead times for the procurement of new vehicles, including the unique complexities involved in procuring and ensuring sufficient charging capacities for electric vehicles in what is still a developing market and technology. Members were assured these concerns have been raised directly with DEFRA and through routes including the LGA and LARAC. In light of these challenges, the Chief Officer's view was a phased approach to implementing new requirements would be required across the country.

Members wished to express their gratitude for the work of staff in the service on behalf of those living and working in the city. Particular thanks were expressed for the work undertaken during the recent student changeover period.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED - To comment on and note:

- a) The updated national position in relation to implementing the national Resource and Waste Strategy and requirements set out in the Environment Act (2021), and how that affects the options available to deliver changes to how household waste is managed in Leeds;
- b) The current national dates for the implementation of the new requirements on councils set out in the Environment Act (2021) and that could translate into options and a timeline for Leeds;
- c) The proposed glass collection pilot;
- d) The additional resources required to meet the recent changes made/announced in relation to how Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) waste is treated and plans to remove the ability for councils to charge for household "DIY" waste.
- e) The update provided on the current refuse route review

22 Community Committee Review

The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment presented a report which sought the support of the Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board for the implementation of the Community Committee Review, which was agreed at Executive Board on the 21st June 2023. The report set out proposals to review the Community Committees and work aligned to the committees from September 2023.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Mary Harland - Executive Member for Communities
- Paul Money - Chief Officer, Safer, Stronger Communities
- Liz Jarmin - Head of Locality Partnerships

The Chief Officer presented the report highlighting the following points:

- In June 2023 the Executive Board supported a recommendation to undertake a full review of the Community Committee structure, involving all 99 Councillors and Scrutiny function.
- It had been agreed in the last municipal year, that all five Scrutiny Boards would take forward the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review related to the remits of the Scrutiny Boards
- The review of the Community Committees would be in consultation with all Councillors, officers in the Localities Teams and other key stakeholders.
- Officers set out proposals for a member working group including representation from all scrutiny boards, to be chaired by the Executive Member.
- It was proposed that updates on the outcome of the series of wider member working groups should be brought to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board during 2023/24.

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

- It was acknowledged that the boundaries for the Community Committees were not included in this review. It was suggested that they should be considered due to the changes in the parliamentary boundaries. It was noted that the boundaries could be considered.
- It was the view that 2 member workshops will have been completed by Christmas 2023, and that emerging thoughts on improvements to the community committee arrangements could be brought to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board towards the end of the year.
- It was suggested that this was an opportunity to reshape the Community Committees to increase community engagement and deliver more benefits for residents.
- Members recommended that scrutiny nominees to the member working group chaired by the Executive Member, should not prioritise Community Committee chairs to ensure as wide a range of representation on the group as possible.
- Its proposed, that the member workshops would be held on the morning of full Council to engage with as many of the 99 Councillors as possible.

RESOLVED - To note the content of the report and:

- a) Provide feedback on the scope and timescales for the review.
- b) Support the review of Community Committees and their constitutional role in helping to shape and influence place.

c) Note the proposal to establish a cross scrutiny Member Working Group, Chaired by the Executive Member for Communities, to support and guide the review process.

23 Referral to Scrutiny - Impact of Radon Gas on Social Housing Tenants

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented details of a referral to scrutiny that falls within the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities). Cllr Wayne Dixon had requested that members consider a request to schedule detailed future scrutiny of issues relating to the impact of radon gas on the health of social housing tenants.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Lennox - Executive Member for Housing
- Cllr Wayne Dixon – Referrer
- Gerard Tinsdale - Chief Officer Housing
- Adam Crampton - Head of Property Management
- Dawn Bailey - Chief Officer Public Health

Cllr Dixon attended the Scrutiny Board as the referrer of this item to raise his concerns in relation to radon gas and its effects on residents of Leeds particularly in social housing in Middleton Park, Belle Isle, Morley and Rothwell.

Cllr Dixon highlighted the following points:

- Radon is a colourless, odourless radioactive gas which occurs naturally in all rocks and soils.
- The impact of exposure to radon is a risk to health and can cause cancer. Maps had been provided in the submitted report for Members information.
- It was noted that a resident of Kirkstall had highlighted the issue of radon gas to Cllr Dixon after they had done some research following the death of a family member from lung and ovarian cancer. It was noted that testing by Yorkshire Water had highlighted that radiation was above normal in the drinking water to the property.
- It was acknowledged that the Head of Leeds Property Management and the Director of Housing and Environment had sought testing from UKHSA and the British Geological Survey in 2022. It had highlighted that 52,000 social houses across Leeds were affected by radon gas. Morley was one of the worst affected wards and testing had been carried out there.

In response to this referral officers from Housing, Property Management and Public Health attended the meeting to provide the following information for the Board:

- UKHSA has advised that the risk from radon gas in the city is low. However, the Council wanted to take a lead role on confirming this position, and not rely on generic information. Therefore, the Council wanted to carry out further testing.

- It was recognised that Leeds is not the only area to be affected by radon gas, but it affects areas such as South Wales and the South West of the country to a greater degree.
- Clarification was provided on some of the information presented in the report. In the report it had suggested that 52,000 homes were potentially at risk from radon gas. However, 45,000 council homes are in the low banding of less than 1% risk category, which effectively means no risk. 9,136 homes are in the 1-3% and 3-5% risk category.
- The Council had commissioned an assessment through UKHSA which was the information provided in the report and had been in relation to action on a Freedom of Information request.
- The 9,136 properties are the properties being tested. Middleton and Belle Isle are at the top of the list in the 1-3% category and Morley being in the 3-5% category. Although, these are the higher-risk areas in the city, the risks in Leeds are still low.
- In consultation with UKHSA, Leeds have run through a testing methodology and programme, and this has been endorsed by the UKHSA.
- It was noted that testing was not limited to Morley, this was where starting, as this is the highest risk area in terms of radon rating and volume.
- Public Health are working closely with UKHSA and National Radon Cell who are advising on all the steps the Council are taking. It was recognised that radon gas is one of the gases that impact on our health along with other things such as smoking particularly on respiratory health. It was noted that smoking is still one of the biggest causes of lung cancer in this country. It was acknowledged that where people are exposed to high levels of radon for a very long period this can increase the risk of lung cancer.
- The Council are taking this issue seriously and Public Health are working closely with colleagues in Housing and UKHSA. The UKHSA validated that the Council was taking a sensible, measured approach which was proportionate.
- It was noted that more information on radon had been made available in December 2022, which was more detailed than the maps provided as part of the report, and this had assisted the Council to understand where testing needed to be targeted.

The Boards discussions included:

- Research on radon undertaken by other Local Authorities was required for comparison.
- The Board understood the concern caused by the impact of this gas, but members welcomed the fact that the Council had a clear plan and procedures in place to address the concerns raised.
- More information was required to determine 'next steps' with regard to potential further testing.
- That the testing on social housing should be considered as a baseline for other residents of the city.

- It was the view that the report had been useful to assure the Board that investigations into this issue were already taking place.

Members requested a written briefing on the current work being undertaken to establish the extent of the risk in Leeds, and would welcome a further update on the outcome of initial testing, in order to inform a decision on whether detailed future scrutiny of this matter should be carried out by the Board.

Cllr Lennox (Executive Member for Housing) thanked Cllr Dixon for the referral, which had provided an opportunity to explain and respond on the detailed assessments and the Action Plan to mitigate the risks.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) The Chief Officer for Housing and the chief Officer for Public Health to provide a written briefing to Board members setting out the current work that is underway to assess the risks of radon gas to residents in Leeds.
- b) Members agreed to consider whether to conduct detailed scrutiny of this issue once further information had been received.

24 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the draft work schedule for the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) which was presented at Appendix 1 for consideration and discussion. It was noted that reflected in the work schedule are known items of scrutiny activity, such as performance and budget monitoring, identified Budget and Policy Framework items and specific member requests for individual work items.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser informed Members that the work schedule would be updated to reflect suggested future items from this meeting.

Members were advised of a remote working group for members of all Scrutiny Board members with the Chief Officer Financial Services on 21st September 2023.

Members were asked to note that a remote working group would take place on 15 December 2023 to discuss the initial budget proposals so far as they relate to the remit of the Board on 15th December 2023. There will be further opportunity to discuss the proposals in the public meeting on 25 January 2024. Conclusions and recommendations from members of all five scrutiny boards will be captured in a composite report presented to the Executive Board in February 2024.

The Executive Board minutes from the meeting held on 21 June 2023 were appended to the report as Appendix 2.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

25 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the next public meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on 14th September at 10.30am. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at 10.00am.

Meeting concluded at 12:15