

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 20TH JUNE, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, A Maloney,
A McCluskey, S Ali, L Cunningham,
L Farley, K Haigh, M Iqbal, J Heselwood
and R Jones

1 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusals of inspection of documents.

2 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no items excluded from the public domain.

3 Late Items

There were no late items.

4 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

5 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Cllr Norma Harrington, Cllr Abdul Hannan and Cllr Zara Hussain.

Cllr Raymond Jones attended as a substitute for Cllr Zara Hussain.

Cllr Jules Heselwood attended as a substitute for Cllr Abdul Hannan.

Cllr Mary Harland asked that her apologies be noted for Item 7 (Performance Report).

6 Minutes - 21 March 2024

The Chair invited the Principal Scrutiny Advisor to provide an update on issues relating to the minutes of 21 March 2024.

Minute 99 & 100: Further updates about the Community Committee Review and Green Spaces Play Strategy have been included in the draft 2024/25 work schedule as requested by members of the 2023/24 Scrutiny Board. The draft work programme is due for discussion elsewhere in the meeting.

Minute 101: Members were informed that the approved End of Year Statement has now been published on the committee webpage and it was confirmed that the Annual Report 2023/24 will also be published on that page following consideration by Council on 10 July.

RESOLVED: The 21 March 2024 minutes were approved as a correct record.

7 Terms of Reference

The accompanying report sets out the Board's Terms of Reference as agreed by Council at its AGM on 23 May 2024.

It was noted that the agenda pack 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. The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Inclusive Growth) is allocated special responsibility for crime and disorder.
- Appendix 3: sets out the Scrutiny Board alignment with officer Delegated Functions and Executive portfolios 2024/25.

Members were asked to note the following changes that affect the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities)

- Responsibility for the contact centre now sits with James Rogers (Director, Communities, Housing & Environment) and is within Cllr Mary Harland's Executive Portfolio. The contact centre has therefore also been transferred to sit within the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities).
- The Scrutiny Board will have responsibility for equalities so far as they relate to communities and service provision during 2024/25. The Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) will retain responsibility for equalities so far as it relates to human resources within the Council.

RESOLVED: Members noted the report and the changes to the remit of the Scrutiny Board.

8 Co-Opted Members

Members noted the general provision made within the Council's Constitution regarding the co-option of members to individual Scrutiny Boards.

Members were advised that there are no specific legislative requirements for the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) to co-opt external representatives.

In previous years the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) has determined not to co-opt external individuals to the Board. Instead, expert witnesses have attended meetings for specific items of business as required. This is in part due to the breadth of subjects within the Board's remit.

It was recommended that this approach does not change unless or until members reach a point where they determine co-option would add specific value.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted. Members determined not to co-opt any external members at this point.

9 Performance Report

Those in attendance for this item were:

- Cllr D Coupar (Executive Member Resources)
- Cllr J Lennox (Executive Member Housing)
- Cllr M Rafique (Executive Member Climate, Energy, Environment & Green Space)
- Cllr F Venner (Executive Member Equality, Health and Wellbeing)
- James Rogers (Director 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)
- Adam Crampton (Head of Property Management)
- Mandy Sawyer (Head of Housing, Neighbourhood Services)
- Ian Strickland (Business Development Manager)

Ian Strickland was invited to provide an overview of how the performance report had been compiled.

Ian noted that wherever possible year-end figures for 2023/24 had been included for each of the indicators and that information had been categorised according to the three pillars of the Best City Ambition.

Following a request in January 2024 for updates relating to each of the transformation projects within the directorate plan, Ian also highlighted where separate updates have been or will be provided to the Board.

Members were advised that the report also provided an update on Office for Local Government (OFLOG) indicators which fall within the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities).

It was noted that performance data for the contact centre had been included following changes to the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Board, agreed at the Annual General Meeting in May 2024.

It was agreed that consideration would be given to the presentation of performance information for future meetings, to ensure members can easily identify significant changes in outcomes.

In response to a query from the Chair about the percentage of residents who say they feel safe in their local area, Paul Money confirmed that the outcome of the 2024 WYCA survey of West Yorkshire residents is anticipated imminently. He advised the Board that he would expect trends to be very stable across the five West Yorkshire districts.

Further information was requested in relation to development of a new ASB Problem Solving Team and the Capable Guardian Service. Members requested clarity about the funding secured to provide these services and the way in which impact will be measured.

Paul Money confirmed that funding has been secured through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and WYCA. He noted that the capable guardianship scheme will involve uniformed patrols by officers from Safer, Stronger Communities in priority wards.

Cllr Golton requested more information about the evaluation criteria for WYCA funding.

In response to Board member queries Paul Money outlined work being undertaken to tackle the misuse of motor vehicles in communities across the city. He reiterated the importance of community intelligence to identify local perpetrators, with a view to enabling early intervention and targeted preventative activity.

Further information was provided about the additional powers available via the various public spaces protection orders that in place in Leeds, including through the vehicular nuisance PSPO.

It was noted that while a PSPO provides additional powers to tackle antisocial behaviour, they are part of a suite of tools available and officers will look to deliver a positive outcome via the most efficient route available to them.

Concern was raised about procurement challenges which have prevented councillors in Rothwell buying electric bikes for use by local police officers, despite funding being in place.

Clarity was sought about the use of drone footage to collect community intelligence. It was noted that this is an evolving operational tool, which is available in West Yorkshire.

Cllr Heselwood outlined the success of PSPO action days in her ward and welcomed engagement from different Council services and partners.

Members raised concern about under reporting in relation to hate crime and noted reports of heightened tensions following an increase in tensions in the Middle East. Paul also confirmed that there has been an increase in both anti-Muslim prejudice and antisemitism.

Clarity was sought about how 'high risk environments' for hate crime had been identified.

Paul Money highlighted that partners acknowledge there is underreporting of hate crime. The use of third-party reporting in schools and strengthened hate crime reporting in community-based settings, education establishments and businesses is designed to encourage the reporting of incidents.

Paul further advised the Scrutiny Board that further information about the role of the Strategic Hate Crime Board will be provided at the dedicated hate crime session in December.

The Scrutiny Board noted that there has not been a reduction in the faith strand of hate crime.

Cllr Coupar reflected on the work of the Council to help facilitate positive inter-faith events.

Cllr Iqbal highlighted first-hand experience of underreporting of hate crime incidents and agreed that there is need to give people the confidence to report such crimes.

The Scrutiny Board will be exploring matters associated with hate crime in greater detail later in the year.

Members explored performance in relation to housing repairs completed within target timescales and sought clarity about comparative performance between Mears and LBS. It was confirmed that last month there was a variance in performance of around 2%.

Adam Crampton responded to member queries about the future of the existing contract with Mears and confirmed that the contract runs until September 2026.

Members sought further information about the level of void properties in the city and the turnaround time for re-letting. Adam confirmed that post-covid backlogs have been reduced and voids are now operating within the 1% target.

Cllr Lennox welcomed the reduction in voids, highlighting the significant additional rental income achieved through having fewer void properties. She

also outlined the importance of maintaining some voids within the system to meet new urgent housing need.

Scrutiny Board members highlighted the increasing demand for housing from constituents and welcomed the reduction in void properties.

In response to member queries, Cllr Lennox confirmed there are around 26,000 people currently on the housing waiting list with approximately 7,000 applications in Band A and B. She raised concern about increasing numbers of section 21 no fault evictions noting renters without adequate protections are consequentially presenting as homeless and placing further demand on local housing stocks. In addition, she reminded members that 'right to buy' results in around 600 properties a year being removed from the Council's housing stock. Many of these properties subsequently become private rental properties.

Members asked that consideration be given to ways in which tenant satisfaction can be captured for residents in properties let through housing associations or registered providers.

Cllr Lennox reassured members that the Council has strong relationships at a West Yorkshire level with a range of housing providers. Mandy Sawyer noted that approximately 800 nominations into housing association homes are achieved each year.

Members explored regional activity to tackle homelessness and strengthen the arrangements for nominations. The Board also noted that a review of the Council's letting policy is underway which has involved public consultation. The outcome of the consultation will inform proposals that will be developed in the autumn, which will aim to set out how the Council can best meet the most urgent housing need in the city.

In response to queries regarding comparative tenant satisfaction, it was noted that all social landlords will have to report on the same Tenant Satisfaction Measures and that data will be published nationally.

Mandy Sawyer noted that she anticipates stronger relationships developing between LASBT and housing providers due to strengthened requirements in the regulatory framework for collaboration between social landlords and local authority anti-social behaviour teams.

In considering performance indicators relating to waste services, members welcomed the position regarding the overall number of bins collected. However, concern was raised about areas that experience repeat missed collections.

John Woolmer set out the current approach to collecting bins that have been missed. He acknowledged there are regular challenges in some areas of the city, often linked to problems with access due to parked cars.

Concern was raised about the potential obstruction of pavements where bins need to be left out following missed collections. It was suggested that this could cause difficulty for those with mobility challenges.

John Woolmer noted the importance of reporting missed bins via the member inbox to ensure cases are tracked within the system.

Members were updated about plans to create capacity in the team to focus on frequently missed bins. John intends that work to take a ward-based approach to problem solve in areas of concern.

Cllr Heselwood welcomed enhanced enforcement activity, delivered in partnership with the Neighbourhood Policing Team in Headingley and Weetwood, which aimed to tackle obstructions caused by parked cars.

Members commented that they would welcome an update on recovery where missed bins have been reported. John confirmed there is an ambition to include recoveries in the end of day report.

Cllr Jones highlighted the excellent service in his ward where there has been a need to tackle issues relating to difficult properties.

Members sought more information about the recent expansion of alternate weekly collections for another 10,000 properties and the advice provided to residents about what materials can be recycled.

John Woolmer and Cllr Luke Farley agreed to have further discussions about resident communications associated with new green bins outside of the meeting.

Cllr Rafique confirmed that issues linked to street cleansing should be reported via community committees.

Members requested further information about the introduction of glass collections when the waste strategy is discussed in September. Members raised concern about the capacity of waste vehicles given the additional material anticipated in recycling collections.

Clarity was sought regarding the categories of calls reported in the performance information relating the contact centre.

Lee Hemsworth outlined the way in which the IVR system works and the capacity to re-direct callers to online forms. He also highlighted the introduction of automatic call-back options where there are more than 10 people in the queue or the call queue is 5 minutes or more.

Cllr Farley left the meeting at 12pm.

Cllr Coupar welcomed the significant improvements in caller wait times in the contact centre in recent years – the average wait has reduced from 11

minutes to 6 minutes. Digital transformation is providing more routes for customers to interact with the Council thereby reducing demand for in person calls.

The Chair sought reassurance that in-person support can be accessed with ease where a customer experiences difficulties with digital options.

Members of the Scrutiny Board noted the demand for digital access and expressed an interest in exploring customer experiences of the digital offer.

The Scrutiny Board received an overview of woodland creation.

Members of the Scrutiny Board discussed the approach to relaxed mowing and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the future approach in more detail in October.

RESOLVED: Members noted the latest performance information contained in Appendix 1 of the report and noted several areas of interest for exploration in future reports scheduled within the Scrutiny Board work programme.

10 Radon Testing

Adam Crampton was invited to update the Scrutiny Board on the outcome of the initial programme of physical testing, which is designed to provide assurance about the level of risk from radon gas in Housing Leeds homes.

Individuals in attendance for this item were:

- Cllr J Lennox (Executive Member Housing)
- Adam Crampton (Head of Property Management)
- Dawn Bailey (Chief Officer Public Health)

Adam noted that data available from the UKHSA identified that several areas in Leeds were potentially at risk of exceeding the action level for radon. As such in October 2022 Housing Leeds commissioned UKHSA to undertake an Advanced Postcode List Radon Gas Risk Assessment of homes under its management.

In response to a subsequent request to Scrutiny from Cllr Wayne Dixon, officers presented at report to the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) in July 2023 detailing the outcome of the Advanced Postcode List Radon Gas Risk Assessment and proposals for a programme of physical testing.

Members requested an update on the initial phase of testing at the start of the 2024/25 municipal year. Adam outlined the initial outcome of the testing programme and the steps taken to engage with residents.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that there has been a reluctance amongst tenants to take part in the testing programme despite extensive communication activities.

335 homes have been contacted to seek participation in the testing programme. As at May 2024 109 homes have been tested or are in the testing phase. No homes have returned levels above the action level. Two tests have been returned above the target level but below the action level – these have been submitted for retesting.

Leeds City Council is working with other local authorities to share best practice.

Members sought assurances about the geography and sample size for the testing programme. Adam confirmed that the geography was based on the risk assessment and the sample size is judge proportionate to the level of potential risk in Leeds. Should concerns be highlighted in the remaining testing programme the sample size would be increased accordingly.

Cllr Lennox recorded her thanks to Adam, Dawn and the team conducting the testing. She noted that the testing programme is providing reassurance, which is important given the public attention on the potential link between other building materials such as concrete and risks to health.

Given the level of take up, member queried whether there was consistency in the testing that has taken place across the different postcodes. Adam confirmed that take was broadly consistent across targeted areas.

Members sought further information about funding arrangements for the testing programme and were advised that funding is being provided via the HRA.

Members requested a further update in July 2025 following the completion of phase 1 testing. If testing highlights any matters that are statistically outstanding in comparison to the results to date members requested a further interim update.

RESOLVED: Members noted the outcome of the physical testing programme to date and requested that a further update is provided in July 2025 after the completion of phase one testing.

11 Sources of Work & Work Schedule

Members were advised of potential sources of work for the Scrutiny Board to help shape consideration of the work programme.

Members were reminded that the work schedule is a live document and there will be opportunity for members to review it at every formal Scrutiny Board meeting.

The draft schedule collates requests from members of the 2023/24 Scrutiny Board and known items of business such as budget consultation and performance monitoring.

The Chair highlighted several additional items for the Scrutiny Board's consideration:

- Ground Maintenance Contract
- Future of the Clean Neighbourhood Teams
- Proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Policy
- Proposed expansion of Selective Licensing
- Adaptions & access to adapted homes
- Consumer Standards update (2025/26)

RESOLVED: Members noted the report and the draft work programme. The Scrutiny Board supported the Chair's recommendations regarding additional items of interest and requested that the Principal Scrutiny Advisor updates the draft schedule as required.

12 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: Members noted that the next public meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on **18 July 2023** at **10.30am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at **10.00am**.