

Public Document Pack

Unanswered Questions to the Mayor of West Yorkshire

This page is intentionally left blank

Written Answers to Leeds City Council Questions from the Mayor of West Yorkshire.

25 July 2023

Councillor Robinson - Question 17: Will the Mayor take this opportunity to rule out the introduction of a ULEZ in West Yorkshire?

Answer:

There are currently no plans to introduce a ULEZ in West Yorkshire. Air Quality is currently the statutory responsibility of our West Yorkshire district partners and we will continue to support the work they do to improve air quality for everyone who lives and works in West Yorkshire.

This includes working with Leeds City Council alongside the other four West Yorkshire district partner councils to develop a West Yorkshire air quality strategy as part of our ongoing climate and environment work to reduce emissions to support health and environmental improvements.

Councillor Golton - Question 18: Would the Mayor support the re-introduction of jointly funding with Leeds City Council the provision of ward-based PCSOs?

The reduction in the police budget since 2010 has affected many areas of policing and the current number of PCSO's reflects this. We are clear that the current cohort of PCSO's are distributed across all the local authority areas, and I will do everything I can do increase numbers.

I have agreed to fund an additional 15 PCSOs plus 1 sergeant through the Bus Service Improvement Plan. This is a fantastic way to improve safety on our Bus network and enables them to link directly with West Yorkshire police in an area.

Councillor Dixon - Question 19: Would the West Yorkshire Mayor commit to visiting residents in Middleton Park ward to discuss the frustrations of residents in terms of the lack of policing?

I agreed to visit the ward in my answer to question 3.

Councillor Alderson - Question 20: In light of the 6.78% increase to the policing precept added to Council Tax bills this year, what action is being taken by the Mayor to tackle the serious issue of 'balaclava biker and quad gangs' terrorising our neighbourhoods?

Without this support from the police precept, West Yorkshire Police would have faced even more severe pressures, forcing them to cut costs across its policing operations including the neighbourhood policing teams which work in this area.

In order to deal with Anti-Social behaviour, we asked local authorities for their sticky problems where extra funding would help. Leeds highlighted the anti-social use of Motorcycles as one of their problems and we were able to provide funding for

1. Middleton Park Access Change £37,500 which is target hardening by use of various exit entry gates. This is managed and operated by Leeds City Parks team.
2. Motorbike Outreach Project £10,000 This is managed and operated by a registered Charity Seacroft On Top (SCOT)
3. WY Wide ASB campaign £18,000 - Motorcycle ASB Comms Campaign. This is managed and being delivered by Safer stronger communities team.
- 4.

This work is scrutinised on a regular basis by the commissioning team at the office and they ensure the best value for money for these projects.

This is on top of the work that West Yorkshire Police are already engaged with and this is regularly reported to both the Police and Crime Panel and to the Community Outcome Meeting

Councillor Dixon - Question 21: After the recent First Bus driver strike, how will the West Yorkshire Mayor reduce Leeds' reliance on buses?

Buses are an essential public service and rather than reduce reliance on them, we want to develop a bus network that makes buses the first choice for travel for people in West Yorkshire - because they are an affordable and convenient alternative to the private car, along with being a more environmentally friendly way of getting about the city.

That is why we've secured almost £70m of government money to improve the network through our Bus Service Improvement Plan. The aims of which at least three quarters of people who responded to my Big Bus Chat survey said they agreed would help achieve a network that is quicker, more environmentally friendly and has improved customer service, payment methods and connectivity.

Operators are responsible for providing buses and drivers and we are working closely with them to ensure a viable bus network is run.

However, we are keen to address the significant under investment in transport in other ways too. We have a vision for an integrated and inclusive transport system that connects people across the entire region. By 2040 mass transit will form a part of this.

We have also invested heavily in active travel infrastructure, so people can walk or cycle safely to the places they want to go to. In January, we, and our five district partners, have been confirmed as one of the 'Top Tier' authorities in the country by Active Travel England.

The reality is that bus is currently the most used form of public transport in our region, and we are going to work hard to improve it, not reduce reliance on it.

Councillor Robinson - Question 22: Residents of West Yorkshire are genuinely concerned over the prevalence of ‘grooming gangs’ as highlighted in the media and on social media. Does the Mayor agree with me that more needs to be done to tackle these gangs and reassure the public this issue is being taken seriously?

I share the concerns and accept there is always more that can be done to protect those who may be most vulnerable to grooming gangs including those who operate in person and online using different platforms to groom different types of young people including those who may be described as additionally vulnerable.

This is taken incredibly seriously and is something my Violence reduction unit is specifically concerned about. There are also specific objectives and outcomes regarding the reduction of Serious Organised Crime contained within my Police and Crime Plan’s performance framework.

Both I and the DMPC regularly discuss this issue with the Chief Constable in all our Governance Meetings. On 11 July 2023 in my Community Outcomes meeting, I discussed the current WY position and looked in detail at exactly what WYP are doing to tackle this threat.

The Chief Constable provides a regular update to me on Tackling Criminal Exploitation of Children and Other Vulnerable People which is available on the Combined Authority’s website.

I can also offer some reassurance regarding the huge number of ongoing initiatives and preventative work being delivered by ourselves which includes the work of the Violence Reduction Unit and our Partnership work through the Mayors Safer Communities fund which includes the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector– again details are on our website.

Councillor Dixon - Question 23: Does the West Yorkshire Mayor think refuges should be single sex (biological sex) only?

The safety of all women and girls is a main priority for me as mayor and is at the heart of my plan for a safe, just and inclusive West Yorkshire.

Refuges are an incredibly important resource that protect women fleeing domestic violence and abuse and must remain safe and accessible spaces to everyone who needs them. Leeds has an incredibly proud history of providing gendered refuge and support services, with Leeds Women’s Aid opening the first refuge outside of London in 1973. They are expert in delivering women centred services in a truly inclusive way in safe and appropriate environments, meeting the diverse needs of all women.

The Equality Act rightly allows for single-sex exemptions for certain services, and I support the use of this exemption wherever it is appropriate.

Councillor Firth - Question 24: While hundreds more West Yorkshire Police officers have been funded by the Government since September 2019, does the Mayor of West Yorkshire support Leeds City Council's withdrawal of funding for a guaranteed 37 additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) for Leeds, in addition to the administration's refusal to explore options to restore this vital resource since 2021?

The reduction in the police budget since 2010 has affected many areas of policing and the current number of PCSO's reflects this. We are clear that the current cohort of PCSO's are distributed across all the local authority areas, and I will do everything I can do increase numbers.

I have agreed to fund an additional 15 PCSOs plus 1 sergeant through the Bus Service Improvement Plan. This is a fantastic way to improve safety on our Bus network and enables them to link directly with West Yorkshire police in an area.

The Community Safety Fund is passported from my office to the Community Safety Partnerships across West Yorkshire. Rather than specify in what areas this money should be spent, we leave it to each authority to understand their particular circumstances and decide where this should be allocated. We understand the current pressures on local authority budgets also but this is one avenue for possible funding.

Councillor Dixon - Question 25: Does the West Yorkshire Mayor believe Leeds bus gates are a success?

Yes. Leeds city centre has had bus gates and bus lanes for many decades, and the recent investment in the city centre has extended their use as a way of delivering resilience for the bus network as well as benefits for walking, cycling and public realm. The wider footways along the Headrow, York Street, Duncan Street, Kirkgate and Park Row as well as new public spaces at the Corn Exchange, Cookridge Street and on Meadow Lane have only been possible due to the changes in traffic circulation and reduction in traffic levels in certain areas. These improvements have really added value to Leeds city centre as a destination, and when City Square works are completed, there will be another step change in quality spaces with a traffic free arrival experience at Leeds station, thanks to new bus gates and bus lanes.

Despite the recent pressures within the bus industry caused by the aftermath of the covid situation, buses remain a key part of the Leeds Transport Strategy relied upon by many residents and visitors. Buses are now wheelchair accessible and passengers presently benefit from capped maximum fares. The Council's decision to implement the additions to our existing network of bus gates and bus lanes has been assessed from a disability perspective. The bus gates in the city centre have been carefully designed to maintain essential access and access to public car parks and blue badge parking areas; it is just that some drivers have to take a different route. We have also increased provision of on-street blue badge parking in the city centre.

It is appreciated that significant ongoing roadworks by National Highways or the Council on the M1, M621, Crown Point Road and Armley Gyratory have disproportionately affected trips into the city centre especially from the south, but given the speed of investment it is a testament to scheme planning and delivery that disruption has been kept to a minimum on the local road network. Comms messaging is encouraging drivers to 'Plan Ahead' and allow more time for their journeys. When these roadworks have been completed, more capacity will be available on the M621 and through Armley Gyratory, which will alleviate some existing congestion.

The bus gates in the city centre are already proving beneficial for bus services including the popular park and rides, by reducing congestion on key bus routes and thereby reducing bus journey times. They are also helpful in enabling roadspace to be allocated to cycling along with the launch of the electric bike hire scheme, which is expected to be popular. The Council is supporting the work being undertaken by the West Yorkshire Combine Authority on delivering a Mass Transit to serve Leeds city centre as soon as possible, subject to funding. The network of bus gates will be a helpful step in delivering Mass Transit as they are already preparing the city centre for delivery of the scheme by reducing unnecessary through traffic, which will be helpful during construction and operation.

Leeds city centre is making an excellent recovery from the economic disruption caused by the covid lockdowns. A thriving economy resulting from creating a vibrant place where people want to live and work, and where business want to invest, is a top priority, also enabling the Council to re-invest income into public services. The recent highways schemes in and around the city centre are helping to deliver forward-looking transformation to the benefit of visitors, residents and businesses.

Councillor N Buckley - Question 26: Given the millions of pounds provided by the government to help bus companies recover from the pandemic in West Yorkshire and beyond, including more than £7m expected over the next two financial years, can the Mayor explain why so many passengers across Leeds are experiencing such poor bus services?

I know the bus network needs improving, not just in Leeds but across West Yorkshire. I know our services need improvement because I listen to what passengers tell me. The last time I engaged with bus passengers on a wide scale, they told me that they were not happy with their local bus services. But three quarters of them also told me that they believed our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will achieve a network that is quicker, more environmentally friendly and has improved customer service, payment methods and connectivity.

Implementing our plan will take a little bit of time, so we've told passengers we will deliver them quick wins initially with short and medium/long term improvements to come.

So far, we have:

- Introduced Mayor's Fares that cap single bus journeys at £2 and day tickets at £4.50,
- Rolled out our network navigation infrastructure across Leeds,
- Published a West Yorkshire Passenger Charter,
- Invested £3.5m in refurbishing Leeds bus station

We will continue to deliver the BSIP and soon passengers will benefit from even more interventions, such as an inclusive and more cohesive bus network with improved frequency and better connectivity.

Councillor Dixon - Question 27: Will the ward of Middleton Park see an increase in policing before the end of the West Yorkshire Mayors term of office?

Funding for policing in our region has been cut by a fifth in a decade, leading cuts to front line police officers, PSCOs and back office staff. We have fewer police officers per head on our streets than in 2010, when the Conservatives first came to power.

The impact on communities has been devastating... there are now 50 crimes per Police Officer in West Yorkshire compared with 33 in 2010 because of a big increase in the number of offences.

It is for these reasons that I committed to recruiting 750 new police officers and staff over the course of my first term as Mayor, and I'm pleased to say that we are well on track to meet that target.

And unsurprisingly, the public agreed with me during our consultation on the policing precept that increasing the number of officers on our streets should be more of a priority than the Government has made it.

We're using money raised from the precept to maintain the just, safe, and inclusive police service that the region needs.

However, I must be clear that the deployment of officers is an operational policing matter and therefore is a matter for the Chief Constable.

Councillor Lamb - Question 28: Would the Mayor agree with me that scrutiny and transparency are fundamental to holding the public's trust?

Yes.

Councillor Robinson - Question 29: How much of the £66m allocated to WYCA from Central Government to bring forward brownfield land for redevelopment in West Yorkshire has been spent?

We are working with Local Authorities and private sector developers, including housing associations to deliver affordable homes, to bring forward new housing on underutilised brownfield land across West Yorkshire.

However, the design of the fund restricts our ability to deliver as effectively as we would like. It does feel as though this is a programme designed in Whitehall and Westminster without a full understanding of the challenges facing schemes outside of London and the South East.

A requirement for each scheme to achieve a BCR above 1 prevents schemes that would deliver new homes from coming forward. In some parts of West Yorkshire, where land values are low, it is incredibly challenging to deliver on such a requirement. I have made representations to the Secretary of State on this, asking him to consider a portfolio approach, where the BCR of all schemes under the programme are considered collectively, rather than individually. Unfortunately, this change has not been forthcoming, and I continue to raise it as a problem at every opportunity I have.

To date we have 10 projects in West Yorkshire that are in contract equating to £21.5m supporting the delivery of 1946 new homes. A further two projects are finalising negotiations equating to a further £2.8m and 147 homes.

Our wider pipeline currently has a further 20 brownfield projects with the capacity for 4862 homes with business cases being developed. The Brownfield Housing Fund is an opportunity to bring forward land for good quality and sustainable housing in our region.

We are doing all we can working with partners to deliver much needed new housing in the region.

Councillor Firth - Question 30: Will the Mayor of West Yorkshire commit to using the £70 million Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding received from Government to ensure the full restoration of the vital 64 bus service between Aberford and Leeds?

Part of the £70m we were awarded to implement our Bus Service Improvement Plan will be to enhance our bus network to build it into a fully inclusive and more cohesive bus network with more frequent services and better connectivity for passengers.

We have also recently received £3.8m of money from central government to protect and reinstate bus services that are under threat due to cuts by private operators.

We cannot yet go into the details of which specific services will benefit from this funding, but we are working in partnership with districts to spend this as efficiently and quickly as possible.