

SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

WEDNESDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor P Truswell in the Chair

Councillors N Buckley, L Cunningham,
N Dawson, K Dye, J Goddard, A Hussain,
K Maqsood, M Shahzad, J Taylor and
P Wadsworth

67 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals.

68 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

69 Late Items

There were no late items.

70 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations.

71 Minutes - 20 January 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

72 Inclusive Growth Update

The report of the Director of City Development provided an update on the Council's commitment and progress on delivering Inclusive Growth. It set out the background information on the coronavirus pandemic since the report to the Board in July 2020, including the Leeds Economy Recovery Framework and what is happening at a local level to continue to deliver Inclusive Growth.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Martin Farrington – Director, City Development
- Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer, Economic Development
- Fiona Bolam, Head of Economic Policy
- Martyn Long – Head of Employment and Skills

Members were given a presentation which gave an overview of the Inclusive Growth Update Report. In response to questions, the following was discussed:

- Work on local centres – as part of the work on city and local centres, information on usage and people’s plans was being sought.
- Expenditure on measures to promote social distancing and whether this was necessary in light of restrictions possibly being lifted in the future. It was still not known whether some of the measures would become permanent.
- The level of recovery expected in the City Centre including the return of office staff and the associated impact on spending and public transport. Also how this may impact on local centres.
- Preparations for re-opening after the lockdown and how to support businesses and provide confidence.
- Travel and transport into and around the city.
- Digital inclusion for young people – there was pro-active work across the city and in schools to ensure young people had opportunities for training and employment. Reference was also made to funding that had been received for projects for young people.
- Covering the three main strands of Economic Development, Social and Environment within the Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- Support for asset-based approach to community development.
- Woodland creation and tree planting and the need for consultation with Ward Councillors and local residents.
- Areas of Inclusive Growth that the Board may wish to scrutinise in further detail.
- How jobs can be filled by Leeds citizens and work with skills providers to meet demand and requirements.
- City centre shop vacancies – many of these were down to national chains of shops closing. Support had been given to the independent retail and hospitality group.

RESOLVED – That the approach being taken to continue to deliver Inclusive Growth across the city within the Leeds Economy Recovery Framework be noted.

73 Best Council Plan Performance Report

The report of the Director of City Development provided a performance update to the Board which included a summary of the Best Council Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that related to the Inclusive Growth priority. The report was based on the most recent performance results submitted to City Development Leadership Team and the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team in November 2020.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Martin Farrington – Director, City Development

- Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer, Economic Development
- Fiona Bolam, Head of Economic Policy
- Martyn Long – Head of Employment and Skills
- Jonathon Carr – Head of Development Management
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Reference was made to the recession that had occurred due to the pandemic issues that had arisen following such as business closures, increased redundancies, furlough, rise in Universal Credit claimants and reduced footfall in the City Centre. Members were informed that much of the information in the report was pre-pandemic. Issues highlighted included the following:

- There had been a marginal increase in jobs during 2019.
- New business start-ups – between January and September 2020 there had been 2,780 which was a 19% reduction on the previous year.
- The 5 year business survival rate in Leeds was the best of the core cities.
- Visitor economy – prior to the pandemic this had grown by 4.3 % in the previous year.
- Housing growth – targets had been exceeded in 2019/20. There had been a very low increase in the first quarter of 2020/21 but this had improved during the second quarter.
- Delivery of affordable housing – The annual target had been met for 2019/20. There was still a backlog to address.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Legislation had allowed for permitted development to convert office spaces into homes. There was concern as to how to ensure the quality of these kinds of conversions. It was hoped to improve the standard of provision with the introduction of new standards.
- Work was ongoing regarding the challenge to address the previous shortfall in the provision of affordable housing. Reference was made to forthcoming schemes.
- There would be change to the delivery of housing growth through new legislation relating to brownfield development and this would increase the provision required.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the performance information and the issues highlighted be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that the 'measurable' impact of Covid-19 is yet to fully flow into the data analysed.

74 Referral To Scrutiny: Cllr John Illingworth

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented details of a referral that fell within the remit of the Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth).

The following were in attendance for this item:

Minutes approved at the meeting
held on Monday, 1st March, 2021

- Councillor Andrew Scopes – Chair, Corporate Governance & Audit Committee
- Councillor John Illingworth, Corporate Governance & Audit Committee
- Adam Harvatt, Group Manager, Policy & Planning
- Anup Sharma, Senior Planner
- Jonathon Carr, Head of Development Management
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The request for referral had been made by the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee with regard to the cumulative impact of planning applications for housing developments that did not provide or fund greenspace requirements and how this could be prevented so that a wider area would not suffer from a negative impact. Issues highlighted in relation to the referral included the following:

- Was there a need to review policy as greenspace was not always delivered and there needed to be ways of improving this?
- The importance of greenspace for mental and cardiovascular health.
- Some greenspaces needed to be larger sites and linked together to provide activities and continuing spaces for activities such as running. These spaces were difficult to find in inner city areas.
- The need to reserve land for greenspace in developments and how the Council should be able to influence developers.
- Concern that enforcement was not effective.

In response to officer comments and questions from the Board, the following was discussed:

- Frustration on restrictions for spending of Section 106 monies.
- Access to greenspace – not all people had the means to travel.
- Difficulties to carry out some of the tasks to provide connected greenspace under planning guidance.
- The potential use of pooled Section 106 resources.
- Review of policy – it was suggested that further monitoring was required following lockdown to fully understand the effectiveness of existing policy.
- Viability issues – viability concerns were taken account of where raised and the District Valuer consulted.
- Constraints on spending of Section 106 funds.
- The emerging Local Plan Update and the potential implications of that for the delivery of green infrastructure. The Board noted that there would be future opportunities for formal consultation on the update as it progresses.

In summary, there was still concern regarding smaller developments not getting a greenspace allocation/benefit and also concern regarding viability and enforcement issues.

RESOLVED – That Development Plan Panel be requested to consider two specific issues as part of discussions about the Local Plan Update:

- (1) Whether a more explicit use of a ‘land assembly’ approach could be adopted to link individual smaller parcels of greenspace with a view to enhancing and maximising their combined benefits for local communities.
- (2) Whether within this approach greater provision should be available to pool Section 106 contributions to assist in delivering improved local green infrastructure.

75 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services asked Members to consider the Board’s Work Schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

The work schedule was appended to the report.

RESOLVED – That the report and Work Schedule be noted.

76 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 7 April 2021 at 10.30 a.m. Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.15 a.m.