

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, A Blackburn,
D Collins, A Gabriel, P Grahame, K Brooks,
T Smith, C Howley, K Ritchie,
R Charlwood, M Midgley and D Ragan

26 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

27 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

28 Late Items

There were no late items.

29 Declaration of Interests

In relation to Agenda Item 7 Referral Request: Tree Maintenance, Councillor T Smith informed the Board that she was the Shadow Member for Parks and Countryside and was also a co-signatory on the letter that requested the referral.

30 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor R Finnigan.

31 Minutes - 21 October 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

32 Referral request: Tree Maintenance

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented details of a referral that fell within the Board's remit. The letter requesting that the Board undertook a review of the Council's Tree Management Policy was appended to the report

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor P Wadsworth
- Councillor L Richards
- Councillor S Arif, Executive Member
- Sean Flesher, Chief Officer for Parks and Countryside

Councillors Wadsworth and Richards were in attendance to support the referral that had been submitted by themselves and colleagues. The following issues were highlighted:

- The tree canopy of the city needs to be increased.
- Concern regarding the urban tree stock including those in parks, along the highways or in private ownership.
- Concern regarding delays to trees being removed or pruned where they are causing damage to properties and this work being sub-contracted out.
- Concern that trees on private land which are covered by Tree Protection Orders (TPOs) but causing damage will not be removed by the Council.
- Damage to footpaths caused by tree roots.
- The need to manage trees more effectively in urban areas.
- The need to work with local residents.
- The need to plant the right types of tree in the right places.

The Executive Member and Chief Officer for Parks and Countryside responded. The following was highlighted:

- It was recognised that the right trees needed to be planted in the right places and a rigorous process had been implemented to ensure that this would happen and there would be no longer term issues with current trees being planted.
- There were systems in place for tree management based on a risk assessment approach.
- Funds had been allocated from the Housing Revenue Account to assist council tenants who had encountered problems with trees.
- There was a dedicated contact for Elected Members for tree related issues.
- The Council was only responsible for trees on Council land or where there were genuine safety issues caused by trees on private owned land.
- The importance of trees in improving air quality and providing shade.
- Initiatives for increased tree planting along highways and the White Rose Forest Project.

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

- The need for a more strategic approach to the maintenance and planting of trees and the need to do more consultation with local residents.

- Concern regarding the planting of whips which had been subsequently removed by residents.
- Concern with trees on highways causing problems for residents which included problems with blocking sunlight and root damage.
- Concern regarding the need to manage self seeded trees and the lack of funding and staff to do this.
- Whether it would be more appropriate to have an update or further briefing on Tree Maintenance rather than a full scrutiny inquiry.
- Concern regarding the loss of mature trees for cycle lane which were replaced with whips.

RESOLVED – That Board members would like to consider this issue in further detail outside of the meeting. The Chair and Executive Member agreed to agree the appropriate next steps in relation to the request for referral and communicate that to the Board.

33 Housing Strategy Review

The report of the Head of Housing and Homelessness informed the Board of the review of the Housing Strategy.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor M Rafique, Executive Member
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Housing & Homelessness.

Members were updated on the proposed approach to the Housing Strategy Review and agreement was sought to consult the Board in detail in February 2022.

The following was highlighted:

- The current strategy had been in place since 2016. This set out the long-term plans for providing good quality housing that met the needs of the population.
- The strategy needed to support the three pillars of the Best Council Plan:
 - Inclusive Growth
 - Improving Health and Well Being
 - Tackling Climate Change
- It was proposed to structure the new strategy around six themes:
 - Affordable Housing Growth
 - Improving Housing Quality
 - Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
 - Creating Sustainable Communities
 - Improving Health through Housing
 - Age Friendly Housing
- Consultation workshops have already taken place with partners.

- It was proposed to hold a further workshop with the Scrutiny Board in February 2021 to focus on the following themes:
 - Improving Housing Quality
 - Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
 - Age Friendly Housing
- It was hoped to submit the revised Housing Strategy to Executive Board in April 2021.

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

- The need for emergency housing for victims of domestic violence. It was noted that there had been a report to Executive Board which included a supported accommodation strategy for this.
- Age friendly housing – making houses suitable for a lifetime and the need to engage with tenants regarding this.
- Support for tenants wishing to transfer.
- An Affordable Housing Plan for the City would be brought to Development Plans Panel.
- The need to be able to influence key partners – planners, developers, housing associations and private landlords.
- Citizen engagement – there would be a website for feedback and also opportunity for face-to-face consultation.
- It was suggested that Housing Advisory Panel Chairs should be included in any consultation.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the proposed approach to reviewing the Housing Strategy be noted.
- (2) That a workshop with the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) to consult in detail on key themes of the strategy be held in February 2022.

34 Locality Working and Priority Neighbourhoods

The report of the Director of Environment, Housing and Communities provided an update on the work that had taken place so far on the City's new Locality Working Model and the next stage of its development.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Money, Chief Officer, Safer and Stronger Communities
- Liz Jarmin, Head of Locality Partnerships
- Alison Szustakowski, Localities Programme Manager
- Councillor Mary Harland, Executive Member
- James Rogers, Director of Environment, Housing and Communities

The Board received a presentation – Tackling Inequality and Disadvantage in Communities: Locality Working. The presentation highlighted the following:

- Locality Working 2018-21
- Challenges, Learning and Next Steps
- Locality Working Strategic Approach – New Approach
- Priority Neighbourhoods and Wards
- Role of the Neighbourhood Improvement Board
- Locality Working Partnership Infrastructure – Core Teams
- Consultation and Engagement.

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

- It was pleasing to see areas that had been lifted out of the priority needs areas following the locality approach to working but there was some concern that others may fall into that category.
- The need to target other areas with pockets of deprivation.
- Whether these issues should feature on Community Committee Agendas.
- Members supported the Locality Approach and welcomed the initiatives.

In response to Members comments and questions it was reported that there was a need to continue to build on work already done so that area did not fall back into being priority areas. It was recognised that there were challenging areas that needed support in the more affluent wards of the city.

The Chair introduced Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer, Transformation and Change to the meeting. He thanked the localities teams and Locality Managers for their successful locality working. He also informed the Board that Shaid was leaving the Council and thanked him for all his work for Leeds, noting the changes introduced under his leadership, and drew particular attention to his work during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the Director of Environment, Housing and Communities addressed the Board along with the Executive Member. It was stressed that all areas that had poverty or deprivation in the city had been targeted for extra support and not just priority neighbourhoods. The presentation had focused on the bottom 1% to highlight where there had been a decline in deprivation.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

35 Inquiry response: Tackling the Antisocial Use of Fireworks

The report of the Head of Democratic Service referred to the Board's Inquiry into Tackling the Anti-Social Use of Fireworks. The final inquiry report was appended to the Agenda.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member

- Paul Money, Chief Officer, Safer and Stronger Communities
- Claire Smith, ASB Service Delivery Manager

The Board received a presentation on the 2021 bonfire period. The presentation focussed on the following:

- Partnership response to incidents.
- Diversionary activities for Young People.
- Use of temporary CCTV.
- Out of hours work by Council staff to support Neighbourhood Policing Teams.
- Work carried out prior to the Halloween/Bonfire period.
- Extra police visibility in hotspot areas.
- Test purchases done with Trading Standards.
- There had been an overall reduction in the report of firework related incidents to the police.
- Fires attended by West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- There would be a strategic debrief with partners in December.

Members thanked all those involved for the positive report, reduction in anti-social behaviour and the improvements made including the use of early intervention and diversionary tactics.

In summary, the Executive Member thanked the Board for their involvement. The report of the Head of Democratic Service referred to the Board's Inquiry into Tackling the Anti-Social Use of Fireworks. The final inquiry report was appended to the Agenda.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member
- Paul Money, Chief Officer, Safer and Stronger Communities
- Claire Smith, ASB Service Delivery Manager

The Board received a presentation on the 2021 bonfire period. The presentation focussed on the following:

- Partnership response to incidents.
- Diversionary activities for Young People.
- Use of temporary CCTV.
- Out of hours work by Council staff to support Neighbourhood Policing Teams.
- Work carried out prior to the Halloween/Bonfire period.
- Extra police visibility in hotspot areas.
- Test purchases done with Trading Standards.
- There had been an overall reduction in the report of firework related incidents to the police.
- Fires attended by West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- There would be a strategic debrief with partners in December.

Members thanked all those involved for the positive report, reduction in anti-social behaviour and the improvements made including the use of early intervention and diversionary tactics.

In summary, the Executive Member thanked the Board for their involvement and to Claire and her team. Elected Members had been kept informed of plans over the bonfire period which gave further opportunity for engagement. Reference was also made to the decrease in call outs by West Yorkshire Police. The suggestion to keep Community Committee Champions engaged was supported.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

36 Local Welfare Support Scheme

The report of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment provided details on the existing Leeds City Council Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS); setting out details of what is in place, how the scheme currently runs and overall costs/budget available to run the scheme.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Mary Harland, Executive Member
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer, Community Hubs, Welfare and Business Support
- Nick Hart, Deputy Head, Customer Contact

The Board received a presentation on the Local Welfare Support Service Review. Key issues highlighted included the following:

- The pandemic had highlighted wider issues relating to welfare and the different partners involved.
- The review would focus on how the Local Welfare Support Scheme can contribute and be integrated into wider welfare support across the City.
- The support offered by the scheme to residents in emergency and crisis – this could be vouchers for food or heating or goods such as furniture and white goods.
- There were 3,684 awards over the last 12 months to the total cost of £558,000.
- Main issues and context of the review.
- More households had fallen into financial insecurity and the service had been an essential source of support for residents.
- There was an increased demand for the service.
- There would be consultation with key stakeholders regarding the review and this would include Elected Members.
- It was proposed to bring an update to Scrutiny in 2022.

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

- The scheme provided short term solutions to problems and as part of the review it was hoped to be able to provide longer term support where needed.
- Could feedback be provided from suppliers of services under the scheme to ensure that appropriate support has been given. The review would address this and the transparency of the referral process.
- The need for mental health and health service support to be available. It was reported that Mencap had been involved in designing the scheme but it was recognised there needed to be dedicated mental health representation.
- Cash grants – there was currently a pilot scheme in operation with a view to giving customers more “dignity and choice”.
- Consultation was due to start with key stakeholders across a wide range of partners.
- It had been more difficult to access re-use centres during the pandemic and alternative organisations had been consulted.
- There was a dedicated telephone number for referrals. This would be provided to Members.
- Potential involvement of the Community Committee structure.

In conclusion, the Executive Member spoke of the pride in the success of this scheme and thanked all those involved. Elected Members were encouraged to be involved in the review and it was suggested that the Community Committee Chair’s Forum be consulted.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

37 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services detailed the Board’s Work Schedule for the remainder of the 2021/22 Municipal Year. Recent Executive Board minutes were appended to the report.

Member’s attention was brought to an appendix of the report which detailed discussions held with Parks and Countryside. Members were asked to feed any further comments to the Principal Scrutiny Adviser.

RESOLVED – That the report and work programme be noted.

38 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 20 January 2022 at 10.30 a.m. (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.00 a.m.)