

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 23RD JUNE, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, K Brooks, E Carlisle,
A Garthwaite, P Grahame, A Khan, S Lay,
A Maloney, T Smith, J Tudor, P Wadsworth
and N Walshaw

1 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

2 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

3 Late Items

There were no late items.

4 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cunningham, with Councillor Garthwaite attending as substitute.

6 Minutes - 31 March 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 31st March 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

7 Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented the Board's terms of reference for information.

It was noted that functions relating to Civic Enterprise Leeds and CIL, which currently sit within the remit of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board, may be transferred to another Scrutiny Board. Members were advised that confirmation of any changes made to the Board's terms of reference would be reported back in due course.

RESOLVED – That the Board’s terms of reference be noted.

8 Co-opted Members

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which sought the Board’s consideration for the appointment of co-opted members.

It was noted that the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board has historically considered the appointment of co-opted members on an ad-hoc basis where it has been deemed appropriate.

RESOLVED – The Board agreed to consider the appointment of co-opted members on an ad-hoc basis, where deemed appropriate.

9 Sources of work for the Scrutiny Board

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report on potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Board’s terms of reference.

The following information was appended to the report:

- The Best City Ambition
- A summary of the Council’s 2022/23 budget proposals relevant to the remit of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor S Arif, Executive Member for Public Health and Active Lifestyles
- Councillor M Harland, Executive Member for Communities
- Councillor H Hayden, Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate
- Councillor M Rafique, Executive Member for Environment and Housing
- Polly Cook, Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Air Quality
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support
- Sean Flesher, Chief Officer Parks and Countryside
- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- John Mulcahy, Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory
- John Woolmer, Chief Officer Environmental Services
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Housing and Homelessness
- Adam Crampton, Head of Property Management
- Tim Rollett, Intelligence and Policy Manager

The Chair invited views from the Executive Members, officers and Board Members around potential areas of work for the Scrutiny Board to undertake this year. In summary, the following key areas were highlighted:

- *Parks and Countryside* – Linked to the Board’s commitment to track progress against the new Parks and Green Space Strategy 2022-2032 (provisionally scheduled for the Board’s February 2023 meeting), it was

suggested that the Board explores further opportunities to help raise the profile and use of local parks. Linked to this, the Board particularly highlighted the value of voluntary Friends groups and requested that the current list of known Friends and In Bloom groups be provided for information.

- *Cemeteries and Crematoria* – It was proposed that the Board receives an update on the current Cemeteries and Crematoria Strategy. Linked to this, Members raised a particular interest around provisions for natural burials.
- *Safer and Stronger Communities* – It was noted that the Board would be receiving a general Safer Leeds update at its July meeting. It was suggested that this update could reflect matters of particular interest around policing recruitment and training needs and the potential impacts on Neighbourhood Policing Teams, as well as the impact/benefits of the existing PACT meetings. It was also suggested that the Board may wish to maintain an overview of progress relating to the LASBT services following changes made in early 2020 and progress with the new LeedsWatch model. It was felt that new Board Members would also find it particularly insightful to visit the CCTV control centre.
- *Migration* – Having previously maintained a watching brief of the strategic approach to migration in Leeds, it was suggested that the Board considers the current position with a particular focus around the support being provided to Ukrainian and Afghan refugee families. In undertaking this piece of work, Members acknowledged the value of inviting representation from across other Scrutiny Boards too.
- *Sustainable Energy and Air Quality* – While acknowledging that a broader Climate Emergency update had already been provisionally scheduled for the Board's March 2023 meeting, it was suggested that the Board also undertakes a focused piece of work around air quality that could be linked to the annual review of the 2021-2030 Air Quality Strategy Action Plan.
- *Housing* - It was noted that plans had provisionally been put in place for the Board to utilise its February 2023 meeting to consider housing activity matters. Linked to this, it was suggested that the Board explores the pressures surrounding affordable housing and to also continue monitoring progress in relation to the de-carbonisation of social housing stock. The Chair highlighted that a separate briefing session would also be arranged primarily to assist new Board Members to better understand the role and responsibilities of the Housing Service.
- *Environmental Services* – Linked to the Board's earlier inquiry work around the future of waste services, it was noted that the service would be in a position in early Autumn to update the Board surrounding the development of the Waste Strategy. In the meantime, the Chair proposed that Board Members undertake a visit to the new premises at Newmarket House and also the RERF.

- *Communities and Welfare Support* – It was noted that plans had provisionally been put in place for the Board to utilise its September 2022 meeting to receive an update around reducing poverty and improving financial inclusion, along with an update on the revised Local Welfare Support Scheme. Linked to this, Members suggested that relevant external partners, such as Money Buddies and the Citizens Advice Bureau, also be invited to contribute to that meeting.
- *Tackling gambling harm* – The Chair made reference to a recent publication from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in partnership with the Gambling Commission around raising awareness and increased scrutiny into tackling gambling harm. In response, the Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory explained that the council has undertaken a lot of work in this area involving licensing, social inclusion and Public Health. In terms of highlighting this work, it was proposed that a report be taken to the Licensing Committee in the first instance for its consideration, with a view to reporting back to the Scrutiny Board later in the year.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the suggested areas of work, as set out above, be noted.

10 Performance Update

The Director of Communities, Housing & Environment and Director of Resources submitted a joint report which provided a summary of performance against the strategic priorities for the council and city and other performance areas relevant to the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor S Arif, Executive Member for Public Health and Active Lifestyles
- Councillor M Harland, Executive Member for Communities
- Councillor H Hayden, Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate
- Councillor M Rafique, Executive Member for Environment and Housing
- Councillor D Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Polly Cook, Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Air Quality
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support
- Sean Flesher, Chief Officer Parks and Countryside
- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
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- John Woolmer, Chief Officer Environmental Services
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Housing and Homelessness
- Adam Crampton, Head of Property Management
- Tim Rollett, Intelligence and Policy Manager

In consideration of the report, the Board discussed the following issues:

- *Void properties* – With regard to the increased numbers of void properties recorded in 2021/22, Board Members discussed the key issues that had impacted the service’s ability to recover to the pre-covid position as well as anticipated improvements moving forward.
- *Healthy Holidays scheme* – Board Members praised the success of the Healthy Holidays scheme which is run in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation, Active Leeds, Catering Leeds and others.
- *Recycling rates* – The Board discussed current performance in relation to recycling rates and in doing so had requested that actual figures, as well as percentage rates, are reflected in future performance reports.
- *Refuse Service Review* – In anticipation of this review being concluded this summer, it was noted that the Scrutiny Board would be given the opportunity to consider the review findings once available.
- *Woodland Creation* – Board Members discussed tree planting activity linked to the council’s plan to plant 50 hectares each year on council land to help mitigate the effects of climate change, benefit pollinators and wildlife and enabling people to connect with nature. Linked to this, it was suggested that Board Members may wish to visit ‘The Arium’ to see first-hand the positive work being undertaken.
- *Grounds maintenance* – The Board discussed the current initiative to encourage the formation of native wildflower species seed stock within the verge and noted that interpretive signs are being introduced across the city to help communicate the benefits to biodiversity from this approach.

The Board was advised that this would be the last report that presents performance relating to the Best Council Plan priorities. Future reports will be based on the Three Pillars contained in the Best City Ambition.

The Intelligence and Policy Manager explained that a review of performance reporting is currently taking place in light of the recent adoption of the Best City Ambition and that the initial outcomes of this performance review (revised KPIs and proposed changes to the report format) would be discussed with Scrutiny Board Chairs in due course.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted.

11 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented the draft work schedule for the forthcoming municipal year. Reflected in the work schedule were known items of scrutiny activity, such as performance and budget monitoring, as well as other areas of work recommended by the former Scrutiny Board to be pursued in the 2022/23 municipal year.

With regard to the other potential areas of work identified during the Board's discussions, the Chair explained that he would work with the Principal Scrutiny Adviser to consider how best to prioritise and incorporate these into the work schedule with a view to bringing an updated version to the Board's next meeting for consideration and approval.

RESOLVED – That the Chair works with the Principal Scrutiny Adviser to consider how best to prioritise and incorporate the other identified areas of work into the work schedule with a view to bringing an updated version to the Board's next meeting for consideration and approval.

12 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 21st July at 10.30 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 10.00 am)