



SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

Meeting to be held in Civic Hall, Leeds, LS1 1UR on
Thursday, 15th September, 2022 at 10.30 am

(A pre-meeting will take place for ALL Members of the Board at 10.00 a.m.)

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors

- B Anderson (Chair) - Adel and Wharfedale;
- J Akhtar - Little London and Woodhouse;
- K Brooks - Little London and Woodhouse;
- E Carlisle - Hunslet and Riverside;
- L Cunningham - Armley;
- R Finnigan - Morley North;
- P Grahame - Cross Gates and Whinmoor;
- A Khan - Burmantofts and Richmond Hill;
- S Lay - Otley and Yeadon;
- A Maloney - Beeston and Holbeck;
- T Smith - Pudsey;
- J Tudor - Killingbeck and Seacroft;
- P Wadsworth - Guiseley and Rawdon;
- N Walshaw - Headingley and Hyde Park;

To Note: Please do not attend the meeting in person if you have symptoms of Covid-19 and please follow current public health advice to avoid passing the virus onto other people.

Note to observers of the meeting: To remotely observe this meeting, please click on the 'View the Meeting Recording' link which will feature on the meeting's webpage (linked below) ahead of the meeting. The webcast will become available at the commencement of the meeting.

<https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1091&MId=11929>

Principal Scrutiny Adviser:
Angela Brogden
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A G E N D A

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|---------|--------------------------|---------------|---|---------|
| 1 | | | <p>APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS</p> <p>To consider any appeals in accordance with Procedure Rule 25* of the Access to Information Procedure Rules (in the event of an Appeal the press and public will be excluded).</p> <p>(* In accordance with Procedure Rule 25, notice of an appeal must be received in writing by the Head of Governance Services at least 24 hours before the meeting).</p> | |
| 2 | | | <p>EXEMPT INFORMATION - POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To highlight reports or appendices which officers have identified as containing exempt information, and where officers consider that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, for the reasons outlined in the report. 2. To consider whether or not to accept the officers recommendation in respect of the above information. 3. If so, to formally pass the following resolution:- <p>RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following parts of the agenda designated as containing exempt information on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information, as follows:</p> <p>No exempt items have been identified.</p> | |

3

LATE ITEMS

To identify items which have been admitted to the agenda by the Chair for consideration.

(The special circumstances shall be specified in the minutes.)

4

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

To disclose or draw attention to any interests in accordance with Leeds City Council's 'Councillor Code of Conduct'.

5

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

To receive any apologies for absence and notification of substitutes.

6

MINUTES - 21ST JULY 2022

5 - 10

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2022.

7

REDUCING POVERTY AND IMPROVING FINANCIAL INCLUSION

11 - 30

To receive a report from the Chief Officer Customer Access and Welfare on the approach being taken in respect to reducing poverty and improving financial inclusion in the city, with consideration as to the emerging cost of living crisis.

8

LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT SCHEME REVIEW UPDATE

31 - 48

To receive a report from the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment which provides details on the review of the Leeds City Council Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS); setting out the progress since the last update to Scrutiny and proposing a revised policy document and next steps.

WORK SCHEDULE

To consider the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2022/23 municipal year.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Monday, 17th October 2022 at 10.00 am (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am)

THIRD PARTY RECORDING

Recording of this meeting is allowed to enable those not present to see or hear the proceedings either as they take place (or later) and to enable the reporting of those proceedings. A copy of the recording protocol is available from the contacts on the front of this agenda.

Use of Recordings by Third Parties – code of practice

- a) Any published recording should be accompanied by a statement of when and where the recording was made, the context of the discussion that took place, and a clear identification of the main speakers and their role or title.
- b) Those making recordings must not edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or comments made by attendees. In particular there should be no internal editing of published extracts; recordings may start at any point and end at any point but the material between those points must be complete.

Webcasting

Please note – the publicly accessible parts of this meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the City Council's website. At the start of the meeting, the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is to be filmed.

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 21ST JULY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, K Brooks, E Carlisle,
L Cunningham, P Grahame, C Hart-
Brooke, A Khan, A Maloney, T Smith,
J Tudor, P Wadsworth and N Walshaw

13 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

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

14 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

15 Late Items

There were no late items.

16 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

17 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lay, with Councillor Hart-Brooke attending as substitute.

18 Minutes - 23rd June 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

19 Matters Arising

Minute No: 7 Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference

The Board was informed that the functions of the Director of Resources that relate to Civic Enterprise Leeds and Community Infrastructure Levy are to be removed from the remit of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board. The functions that relate to Civic Enterprise Leeds will now be included within the remit of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board and the functions that relate to the Community Infrastructure Levy will be

included within the remit of the Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board.

20 West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 - Update

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which highlighted the Scrutiny Board's commitment to maintain a watching brief surrounding the delivery of the new West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan 2021 – 2024. The Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime had provided a written update for the Scrutiny Board, which was appended to the report along with a copy of the published West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Councillor Garthwaite, Leeds representative and Chair of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel
- Councillor Amanda Carter, Leeds representative and Vice Chair of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel
- Julie Reid, Head of Policing and Crime, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- James Rogers, Director of Communities, Housing and Environment
- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- Nadeem Siddique, Head of Community Relations and Cohesion
- Claire Smith, Head of Safer Neighbourhoods and ASB Services
- Chief Inspector Pete Hall, Leeds District Police
- Gerry Shevlin, Domestic Violence Programme Manager
- Simon Hodgson, Head of Community Safety Services

The Chair welcomed the attendance of the Head of Policing and Crime who explained that the Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime was unable to attend today's meeting. The Head of Policing and Crime then gave a brief introduction to the update report provided to the Board.

The Chair also welcomed the attendance of Councillor Garthwaite and Councillor Amanda Carter in their capacity as Chair and Vice Chair of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel. Both gave a brief introduction to the role of the Police and Crime Panel, as well as highlighting key areas of priority for the Panel this year.

The following areas were also raised during the Board's discussion:

- *Consultation on the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan* – the Board discussed the engagement methods used as part of the consultation across West Yorkshire and while acknowledging that response levels had been relatively low, the Head of Policing and Crime explained that consultation will be continuing linked to the supporting strategies that are being developed to support the delivery of the Plan. Reference was also

made to the appointment of the Mayor's Inclusivity Champion to increase the focus on engagement in services from lesser heard communities.

- *Public trust and confidence in policing* – the Board discussed the importance of community engagement in terms of helping to instil public trust and confidence in policing.
- *Police representation from BAME communities* – the Board was interested to learn what proportion of the West Yorkshire Police force represents BAME communities. The Head of Policing and Crime agreed to provide further information on this, including a breakdown of senior management level posts too. Linked to the Mayor's pledge to increase police officer and police staff numbers, it was highlighted that particular importance had also been placed on doing more to attract, recruit, support and promote talented individuals who represent the diverse communities across West Yorkshire.
- *The West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)* – the Board discussed the valuable work undertaken by the VRU in terms of addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The Board also welcomed the longer-term funding commitment by the Home Office in terms of awarding a 3-year settlement of £15 million.
- *Mayor's Safer Communities Fund* – The Board noted that over £208k in grants of up to £6k had been awarded to voluntary and community groups across West Yorkshire and discussed how such grants are awarded and also evaluated in terms of impact. The Head of Policing and Crime agreed to provide further information in terms of the groups that had received grants.
- *Motorcycle/quad bike related anti-social behaviour (ASB)* – Reference was made to the persistent problems of motorbikes and quad bikes being ridden anti-socially. As well as applying for additional funding towards tackling this matter, the Board noted that Leeds District Police has appointed a Sergeant to better co-ordinate the work of the current Off Road Bike Team as well as looking to add dedicated PCSOs to the team, stingers, drone capability and covert bikes.
- *Improving communication links with the public and Elected Members* – It was acknowledged that more could be done to communicate the positive impacts of Policing initiatives with the public as well as better utilising the role of Elected Members in helping to disseminate key information across local communities too.
- *Responding to 101 and 999 calls* – Following a request made by the Board, the Head of Policing and Crime agreed to provide further details surrounding 101 and 999 call handling data.

RESOLVED –

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday, 15th September, 2022

- (a) That the report and the accompanying appended information be noted.
- (b) That the additional information requested by the Board, as referenced above, be circulated to Board Members once available.

21 Safer Stronger Communities - Annual Update

The Chief Officer Safer, Stronger Communities submitted a report which explained that, having previously maintained a watching brief surrounding the development and delivery of the Safer Leeds Strategy 2018-21, the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board was consulted last year on the new Safer Stronger Communities City Plan 2021-24.

This report therefore presented an update position in relation to the priorities set out within the new Plan. Also appended to the report was a briefing paper by Leeds District Police which provided a short overview of the current efforts, successes and challenges associated with Leeds District's Neighbourhood and Partnerships work to support community safety in the city.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Councillor Garthwaite, Leeds representative and Chair of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel
- Councillor Amanda Carter, Leeds representative and Vice Chair of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel
- Julie Reid, Head of Policing and Crime, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- James Rogers, Director of Communities, Housing and Environment
- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- Nadeem Siddique, Head of Community Relations and Cohesion
- Claire Smith, Head of Safer Neighbourhoods and ASB Services
- Chief Inspector Pete Hall, Leeds District Police
- Gerry Shevlin, Domestic Violence Programme Manager
- Simon Hodgson, Head of Community Safety Services

The Chair invited the Chief Officer Safer, Stronger Communities and Chief Inspector Peter Hall to give a brief introduction before inviting any comments and questions from Board Members.

The following areas were raised during the Board's discussion:

- *Changes to recording anti-social behaviour (ASB) data* – The Board was informed that ASB is no longer recorded as one category and is now broken down into numerous categories, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.
- *Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO)* – Linked to comments made by the Board during the earlier agenda item, the public consultation

surrounding a proposed city-wide Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) relating to vehicle nuisance was very much welcomed by Board Members.

- *Leedswatch* – The Board was informed that the service continues to consolidate after the implementation of the Leedswatch review on 1st September 2021 and that the control room is responsible for a number of functions across CCTV, the City Centre Vehicle Access Scheme, Out of Hours repairs, alarm response, security patrols and the Out of Hours Noise. Linked to this, the Chair reminded Members that a Board visit to Leedswatch is expected to take place in September.
- *Tackling Youth Violence* – The Board was informed of the involvement of Leeds District Police in the developing Youth Violence tasking group work and other proposed measures to strengthen coordination and response to youth violence concerns. Linked to this, a Youth Crime Prevention officer took up post in the Spring as work continues to support the Youth Justice Partnership. The Executive Member for Resources also highlighted the vital role of the Youth Service in terms of working to divert young people away from the Criminal Justice System.
- *Neighbourhood Policing Teams* – The Board discussed the role and allocation of NPTs while also acknowledging their own positive experiences and relationships with local NPTs.
- *Tackling illicit drugs and substance use* – It was acknowledged that over the past year, custody-based drugs testing had dramatically increased. In the past six months 1375 tests were conducted, versus 742 in the six months prior to that (an 85% increase). 52% of these tests were positive for cocaine / opiates and resulted in referrals and requirements for the individuals. The Executive Member for Resources also made reference to the excellent work that was being undertaken by Forward Leeds around tackling drug addiction and highlighted that the Safer Leeds Executive had also recently set up a Task and Finish Group to look at this matter in greater detail.
- *Community Payback* – The Board sought further information surrounding the current position on Community Payback schemes.
- *Sharing information on key contacts with Elected Members* – Board Members again emphasised the benefits of sharing key contact information with Elected Members in terms of also helping to disseminate this across local communities.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and valuable contribution to the Board's discussions.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and the accompanying appended information be noted.

(b) That the additional information requested by the Board, as referenced above, be circulated to Board Members once available.

22 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented the Board's latest work schedule for the forthcoming municipal year.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser reminded Board Members that a number of key areas of interest were raised during the Board's last meeting, as well as proposed approaches for incorporating these into the work schedule. These had therefore been reflected in the updated work schedule set out in Appendix 1 for the Board's consideration.

It was also noted that Board Members will be consulted on potential dates linked to the proposed working group meetings and site visits reflected in the work schedule.

However, with regard to the proposed scrutiny visit to Newmarket House and the RERF, it was noted that the service is in the process of organising a couple of events during September for any new Elected Members to attend Newmarket House and be briefed on the work of the service, as well as visiting the RERF too. As such, it was considered appropriate for Members of the Scrutiny Board to also join these planned events in terms of avoiding duplication of effort.

RESOLVED – That, subject the change reflected above, the Board's work schedule be approved.

23 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 15th September 2022 at 10.30 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 10.00 am)

Reducing Poverty and Improving Financial Inclusion

Date: 15th September 2022

Report of: Chief Officer Customer Access and Welfare

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

A full and detailed account of the cost of living crisis, as well as the local approach and activity undertaken over the past year was provided to Executive Board in July 2022. (Report attached as Appendix A)

As requested by the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board, this report provides a local partner update since July 2022, in terms of poverty and financial inclusion, with particular focus on the impact of the cost of living crisis. The report also provides an update on Universal Credit in the City.

Recommendations

- a) To examine the content of this report and the attached Executive Board report on the Cost-of-Living Crisis
- b) To review the evidence and approach being taken in respect to reducing poverty, and improving financial inclusion in the city, with consideration as to the emerging cost of living crisis.

What is this report about?

1. In January 2022, The Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board received an annual update on the work undertaken by Leeds City Council and partners to reduce poverty and improve financial inclusion in the city.
2. In response to the emerging national 'cost of living crisis', a report was provided to the Executive Board in July 2022, further setting out the national and the local approaches to addressing the crisis. Executive Board agreed steps to embed tackling poverty and inequality through the three pillars of the Best City Ambition and its performance framework as well as a cross-sector breakthrough priority.
3. Given the significance of the cost-of-living crisis and the evolving situation, it was considered appropriate for a further report to be submitted to The Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board for September 2022, to provide an update on poverty and financial inclusion in the city, including new national measures implemented, local key actions, programmes and partner updates.

4. **Background information**

5. Poverty and financial exclusion have been deep-rooted challenges for many years, but key factors affecting the current financial climate in 2022 have further escalated the situation, leading to what is now being described as the 'cost-of-living crisis'.
6. The Cost-of-Living Executive Board report provides a comprehensive overview of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact that this is having on households living on the lowest incomes in Leeds. The report also highlights wider economic forces exacerbating the crisis and details the local approach to welfare support and tackling poverty.

7. **Main Issues**

8. Since the Cost-of-Living report was submitted in July 2022, the situation has further intensified.
9. Inflation reached 10.1% in July, however according to the Resolution Foundation, households on the lowest incomes are already experiencing inflation of 10.9%.
10. Rising food prices accounted for the largest upward contribution to the change in both the CPIH and CPI annual inflation rates between June and July 2022.
11. Predictions now suggest inflation will reach 13.3% by October 2022.
12. In August 2022, Ofgem announced that the energy price cap would be updated every three months rather than every six months. The current energy price cap will increase to £3,549 per year for dual fuel for an average household from 1 October 2022. Further analysis from Cornwall Insight, predicts this will increase again to £4,266 in January 2023.
13. By the end of July 2022, Citizens Advice nationally had already supported over 120,000 people with access to food banks and other support - more than numbers seen in 2019 and 2020 combined. In addition, clients presenting with negative budgets have increased from 38% in 2021 to 46% in 2022.
14. Data from organisations including Child Poverty Action Group, suggests groups already identified as vulnerable - large families with children, lone-parent families and pensioner couples will be most likely to fall into fuel poverty by January 2023 as a result of energy cap increases.
15. **National support updates since July**
16. Over 7.2 million payments of £326 have been made through the government's Cost of Living support. The first payments were made on 14 July 2022, with the second instalment of £324 due later this year.
17. July 2022 saw the introduction of the DWP Cost of Living Stakeholder Toolkit - a range of materials for employers and partners to use, promoting all areas of support available.
18. All domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £400 grant to help with the cost of their energy bills through the Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS). Although welcomed, it is unlikely to be enough to mitigate the combined impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly for households on the lowest incomes, and households without a domestic energy supply contract.
19. The EBSS consultation report from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy states: "Evidence suggests up to 400,000 would not receive EBSS support due to these circumstances compared with approximately 29 million that will."
20. Concerns have also been raised with respect to tenants with energy bills included in their rent or service charge. Such tenants are unable to claim the energy bills discount directly but there is currently no legal obligation for landlords to pass on the equivalent EBSS discount.

21. In addition, although the Government have advised no household should be asked for bank details to access the energy bills discount, concerns remain that customers may still be impacted by scams or fraud associated with Government measures, as seen during the pandemic.
22. Help for Households retail Campaign - Deals with large businesses including supermarkets, designed to reduce costs, provide entertainment and ensure access to necessary services for families over the summer holidays, back to school, Autumn pressures and Christmas retail periods. All deals are hosted on the new GOV 'Help for Households' website
23. Although the cost-of-living crisis is impacting most households in the UK, specific concerns in relation to poverty and financial exclusion include the risk of more households falling into poverty, and the direct impact on those already experiencing low income, poverty and destitution. Despite calls for further national support measures to be implemented in response to the cost-of-living crisis the government have confirmed no further help on energy bills will be announced until a new Prime Minister is in place.
24. **Local Support Updates**
25. Leeds City Council and partners across the city have been recognised for the work undertaken to reduce poverty and tackle inequality for many years. Throughout ten years of austerity and reduced public sector budgets and resources, Leeds has employed a highly effective collaborative and co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty.
26. **Full details on the current picture of welfare support being provided in Leeds, via Council services; Leeds Benefit Service (i.e. Council Tax Support, Free School Meals and Discretionary Housing Payments), Healthy Holidays and Household Support Fund, as well as financial inclusion activities such as the Money Information Centre Resources are provided in the attached Executive Board Report on the Cost of Living Crisis.**
27. In addition, full details of the Local Welfare Support Scheme can be found in the September 2022 Scrutiny Board Report 'Local Welfare Support Scheme Review Update Report'
28. This report provides updates from key partners in the city, including DWP, Welfare Rights, and other advice services in order to compliment the Cost of Living, Executive Board Report.
29. **Universal Credit- update from DWP, Housing Leeds and Citizens Advice**
30. As of July 2022, there were 71,344 people claiming Universal Credit in Leeds – a small reduction since July 2021 (72,988 UC customers).
31. **Housing Leeds**
32. At the end of July 2022 16,042 Housing Leeds tenants were claiming UC full service. 44.3% of these claims have a Managed Payment to Landlord (MPTL) in place (The Housing Cost element of UC is paid directly to the UC claimant by default, but a direct to landlord payment can be made where the tenant has more than 2 months arrears or where circumstances, as defined by DWP, make this appropriate to support the tenant)
33. **DWP**
34. Managed Migration – Plans have yet to be announced for the expected roll out of managed migration in Leeds. Nationally, from May 2022, DWP implemented a 'phased approach' to Managed Migration. This has resulted in customers in a small number of specific locations being informed of the need to move to Universal Credit if they are on an existing legacy benefit (JSA - income based, ESA - income based, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credits and Child Tax Credit).
35. July 2022 saw the introduction of local Jobcentres being able to verify the identification of children for UC customers, reducing the waiting time of parents receiving the Child Element payment within their UC claim.

36. The 'Way to Work' campaign, (January-30th June 2022), focused on getting 'job-ready' people off Universal Credit and into work, filling vacancies which are at a record high. Nationally 513,109 UC customers moved into work. West Yorkshire's figures were 21,930, of which 7449 were from Leeds.
37. In April - June 2022, over 300 employers attended recruitment events in Leeds Jobcentres. The SWAP (Sector-based Work Academy Programme) worked well within Leeds, with 893 customers starting a SWAP, nearly double the expected number of 450.
38. As COVID-19 Restrictions eased during 2022, DWP have resumed a 'business as normal' approach. Re-deployed staff have returned to their original roles and some Fixed Term Contracts have ended, seeing a reduced headcount amongst the Leeds Jobcentres.
39. Regular onsite delivery of face-to-face appointments with customers has been reinstated, with partners and providers, such as Citizens Advice and Leeds Employment Hub returning to Jobcentres to deliver support. Co-location arrangements with Housing Leeds have also resumed, providing advice, guidance & support in relation to social housing applications.
40. To support the increase in Universal Claims during the pandemic, three temporary sites were opened in Seacroft, Kirkstall and the city centre. There are no current plans to close these sites, however Eastgate Jobcentre will be closed by March 2023, with an objective to move colleagues and services to alternative sites that offer improved facilities for colleagues and customers. Current Eastgate staff will be relocated to Park Place.
41. The Social Justice Team continues to be a key element of local delivery, supporting some of the most vulnerable customers in Leeds in the community. Alongside key partners, the Social Justice Team also supports Leeds Afghanistan Resettlement customers; completing claims for Universal Credit and supporting individuals and families to move closer and into the Labour Market. As customers have been re-housed and numbers have reduced, this support is now managed from one hotel and at Southern House Jobcentre to further the integration within the community.
42. The Youth Employability Coach (YEC) role works alongside the Social Justice team in Leeds - mirroring the offer and working with a range of partners and organisations to provide a tailored, focused and intensive level of support to youth customers with multiple barriers to work and complex needs, for 6 months depending on individual needs. YEC attends the Youth Hub on Dewsbury Road on a weekly basis, alongside different providers, to reinforce wrap round support available in an informal, relaxed environment. The YEC Team manage a caseload of 470 vulnerable under 24 year olds, including 16/17 -year- olds with no parental support and Care Leavers.
43. Supporting customers through the Cost of Living issues is paramount to Jobcentres. This includes;
 - Promotion of the MIC (Money Information Centre) via the website and promotional flyer materials, available in every Leeds Jobcentre.
 - Working with the Better Leeds Communities organisation DWP have arranged for a regular presence within a jobcentre for Work Coaches to refer customers for support – with a view to extending this offer to further local Jobcentres.
 - Upskilling Work Coaches to ensure customers are aware of all support i.e Flexible Support Fund, the availability of pausing any Advanced Payment re-payments, local Food Bank information and the promotion of any local charity/organisations offering various levels of support.
44. Next steps focus on building on the already established relationships with external partners and providers, procuring new provision relevant to the city's changing demands and working

collaboratively to ensure customers receive not only the correct benefit payments but appropriate upskilling, guidance, advice, and support in moving forward in their daily lives.

45. **Citizens Advice – Help to Claim (H2C) - April-July 2022**

46. The DWP funds a Help to Claim service for Universal Credit claimants. H2C provides support for new claimants up to receipt of their first payment.
47. Up to March 2022 the H2C service provided advice through face to face, telephone and digital channels and was delivered by local Citizens Advice offices in their areas.
48. Since April 2022, following a procurement exercise, the H2C service is delivered through national telephone and digital channels only. Citizens Advice Leeds is one of the local offices delivering the service, answering enquiries from across England and Wales.
49. From April to July 2022, CAL responded to 24,074 UC enquiries through the H2C service. They responded to a further 10,318 UC enquiries from local residents not eligible for the H2C service (i.e. they had already received their first UC payment). Total UC enquiries (34,392) represented 40% of all the organisation's enquiries.
50. Data from the Help to Claim Service also shows;
- 3279 unique clients advised in relation to UC.
 - 42% of those clients identify as being disabled or having a long term health condition.
 - 35% of UC clients rent their home from the Local Authority or a Housing Association and 27% rent from a private landlord.
 - 24% of those advised were from BAME communities.
 - 60% of clients were female and 40% male.
 - 70% of UC clients have been advised via the telephone, 24% via webchat and 6% via email

51. **Advice services including LCC Welfare Rights (April – July 22 data)**

52. Key themes from advice partners in the city include:

- Claims to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) remain a significant and challenging area of work both in terms of new claims and appeals. New PIP claimants are waiting an average of 5 months to receive an award – causing distress, uncertainty and hardship for claimants. In addition, tribunal appeal representation services are vital to counter poor quality decision making, which results in high numbers of nil awards. (National figures show 61% of PIP decisions are changed following tribunal appeal)
- Despite the warm summer, 'winter level' demand for fuel vouchers is already being seen. Further increases in fuel and utility enquiries on top of the current (elevated) demand are also predicted in line with Energy Price Cap changes. Affordability and self-disconnection are likely to be key issues.
- The citywide, multi-agency approach ensures that where services are fully booked, customers are able to access support via partners including Money Buddies/EGAC, Better Leeds Communities, Citizens Advice and St Vincent's, coordinated via Leeds and West Yorkshire Debt Advice Network (chaired by EGAC).
- Uncertainty around the Money and Pension Service debt advice contracts continues to cause challenges for recruitment and retention of debt advisors across the city.
- Demand for debt advice is rising and becoming more complex, along with high levels of associated safeguarding and mental health concerns, including suicidality.

53. **Citizens Advice Leeds (CAL) & Chapeltown Citizens Advice (CCA)**

54. Of all benefit enquiries, the largest issue continues to be UC followed by enquiries relating to Personal Independence Payments. With respect to UC, the largest proportion (48%) of

enquiries relates to the initial claim, followed by the Housing Element and Calculation of income, earnings & capital which each equate to 10% respectively.

55. Employment enquiries have increased slightly in 2022, and although overall there has been a slight fall in debt enquiries, this does not necessarily reflect a fall in demand – advisers are spending more time on individual complex cases, reducing the number of clients they are able to help. In addition, some local callers are now assisted via the CA national debt line (established 2021).
56. Fuel debts and Council Tax arrears continue to be the largest debt enquiry areas. Fuel debt and utilities enquiries increased significantly, attributable to the first price cap increase in April 2022.
57. In terms of client demographic, 36% of clients were from households with dependent children, 87% were from working age clients, 49% had a long term health condition or disability and 39% of clients were from BAME communities.
58. **Ebor Gardens Advice Centre/Money Buddies**
59. Money Buddies and Ebor Gardens advice centre provide face to face services from 23 centres in Leeds, including St James and LGI hospitals. This is set to increase to over 30 centres by the end of the year.
60. From September 2022, Trussell Trust have commissioned Money Buddies for a minimum of 2 years to provide support to their foodbank users across 12 sites in Leeds. This will include a Debt adviser on one site a day.
61. The service is already close to meeting MaPs annual targets (set to January 2023) in terms of people advised by the debt team.
62. Increasing numbers of enquiries are now being received from public and private sector businesses, seeking support for staff, in addition to requests for staff training and approaches from National and Local media for advice, guidance and commentary.
63. The service is becoming increasingly reliant on volunteers to meet high levels of need, impacting training and budget capacity.
64. The Money Buddy Energy Plus Project is scheduled to end 31st October 22, however further funding options are being explored.
65. **Welfare Rights Unit (WRU)**
66. WRU assisted 9,748 clients compared with 9,223 in the same period in 2021, reflecting the steady increase in work areas to pre pandemic levels.
67. The biggest area of work continues to be disability benefits, particularly Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Latest DWP figures show for the quarter ending April 2022, the number of new claims reached the highest level since PIP was introduced in 2013. Of awarded claims, 77% were for less than 2 years, giving little long-term stability for disabled claimants and increased pressure on WRU and other advice services.
68. It is vital that WRU are able to support customers with PIP applications in order to have the best chance of success with an award, however a comprehensive representation service for tribunal appeals is also essential. In the first 6 months of 2022, 146 requests for help with tribunals were received. With high numbers of new claims being made, high refusal rates and the length of time waiting for a decision, it is expected this number will continue to increase over the next year.
69. At present the service is also providing daily face to face support for Ukrainian families arriving in Leeds at Reginald Hub. As of 31st July 2022, 341 families have been assisted with such enquiries.

70. The service has noted an increase in ‘cost of living’ enquiries; with greater demand for benefit checks, help with council tax and information about cost of living schemes. Given current financial forecasts, it is anticipated this will increase.
71. **What next**
72. As outlined fully in the Cost of Living Report, submitted to Executive Board in July 2022, poverty and financial exclusion have been deep-rooted challenges for many years, but key factors affecting the current financial climate in 2022 have further escalated the situation, leading to the ‘cost-of-living crisis’.
73. Low income households and those already facing poverty and destitution are being disproportionately, and the most severely impacted. There is also a recognised risk of more households falling into poverty, and as well as a concern that welfare support services – both statutory and third sector may become unable to meet demand.
74. Leeds has employed a highly effective collaborative and co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty for many years, although ultimately it has not been enough to prevent increasing numbers of households falling into poverty and low income.
75. Work is currently underway to establish a breakthrough Welfare Group with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”.

76. **What impact will this proposal have?**

77. The proposal will ensure that there is a strategic, coordinated and collaborative response to tackling poverty and ensuring financial inclusion in Leeds.
78. The focus of this report is on poverty and inequality which is protected equality characteristic. It sets out the impact of the cost-of-living crisis will have on households living on the lowest incomes in the city, the actions currently being undertaken to mitigate the impact and the proposed citywide approach. Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening will be undertaken as appropriate for each future measure.

79. **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

80. The work of the Council’s Financial Inclusion and Welfare and Benefits teams contributes to achieving Leeds Best City Ambition, which sets at its heart the mission to tackle poverty and inequality and improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Leeds home.

81. The cost-of-living crisis will impact all key pillars of the Best City Ambition

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

| |
|---|
| Wards affected: |
| Have ward members been consulted? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

82. Partner organisations referred to in this report have been consulted to provide relevant and up to date information about the projects, initiatives and services referenced.

What are the resource implications?

83. All of the projects and services referred to in this report are being undertaken within current budgets, there are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

84. A corporate risk has been identified on Escalating Poverty. Further details of the risk can be seen in the Annual Corporate Risk Report, as presented at Executive Board Meeting – July 2022

What are the legal implications?

85. There are no specific legal implications or access to information issues with this report.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

86. No other options have been considered.

How will success be measured?

87. Success will be measured via update reports

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

88. Implementation is immediate and ongoing.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Report of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment to the Executive Board on understanding and addressing the cost-of-living crisis (27th July 2022)

Background papers

- There are no background papers to this report

Understanding and addressing the cost-of-living crisis

Date: 27th July 2022

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

The report provides an overview of the current cost-of-living crisis and sets the economic context in which over the past decade poverty and inequality have increased.

The key measures being undertaken nationally to address the cost-of-living crisis are outlined. However, the focus of the report is on the local approach from a welfare and financial inclusion perspective, with key actions and programmes highlighted.

It is recognised that current local action alone may not be enough to mitigate the impact, and that a greater focus will be required across all three pillars of the Best City Ambition in sustainably addressing deep rooted poverty and inequality within the city.

Recommendations

Members of Executive Board are recommended to;

- a) Note the content of this report and endorse the approach being adopted.
- b) Endorse the next steps set out fully in paragraphs 94- 99 to accelerate progress towards the mission set out in the Best City Ambition through:
 - Ensuring the three pillars of the Best City Ambition strongly and consistently reflect the challenges of tackling poverty and inequality.
 - Transitioning to a new performance framework for the Best City Ambition to reinforce and embed linkages between the three pillars in tackling poverty and inequality.
 - Establishing a breakthrough priority with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”.
- c) Note that the Chief Officer for Community Hubs, Welfare and Business Support will be responsible for overseeing and implementing the actions and recommendations in this report.

What is this report about?

- 1 The report provides an overview of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact that this is having on households living on the lowest incomes in Leeds. The report highlights, in headline terms, the wider economic forces which are exacerbating the crisis, and which have been at the root of entrenched poverty and inequality over many years. While the detail of this report focuses on efforts to mitigate the worst impacts, it also brings into focus how our Best City Ambition to tackle poverty and inequality requires renewed energy to target the root causes of poverty, making the best use of our available resources with this mission in mind.
- 2 The report focusses on the Council's response from a welfare perspective and provides an update on the work undertaken by Leeds City Council and partners to tackle poverty and improve financial inclusion.
- 3 Responding to the cost-of-living crisis has also been identified as one of Team Leeds' breakthrough priorities. This recognises that we need to work together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and mitigate where we can against the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

4 **Background Information**

- 5 22% of the Leeds' population is living in relative poverty after housing costs are deducted from income. This equates to approximately 174,000 people.
- 6 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the combined impact of austerity with sustained public sector funding reductions, welfare reform, and an increase in low paid and insecure employment have all contributed to increasing and deepening levels of poverty in Leeds and across the UK. Research undertaken in Leeds concluded that in 2018 residents were less resilient and worse prepared for an external shock or crisis than in 2004, with significantly lower propensity to save and higher likelihood of being in debt.
- 7 The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 proved to be such a crisis, increasing pressures on low-income households and the most vulnerable in society, as well as pushing many additional households to experience financial uncertainty and hardship for the first time.
- 8 Numerous supportive measures were implemented at both national and local levels during the pandemic (e.g. benefit up rates and conditionality easements, furlough, self-employed income support scheme, ban on evictions and various short term-funding initiatives for local authorities), providing temporary relief to many households. However, these measures were not enough to lift households out of poverty, or to prevent more households from falling into financial hardship.
- 9 Many vulnerable groups including low-income households were disproportionately affected by issues such as reductions in income due to job losses, and the later removal of national support measures/schemes such as furlough, and removal of the £20 Universal Credit (UC) uplift, all occurring alongside increasing household costs due to rising bills, energy usage and supply challenges.
- 10 In addition, as outlined in the 'Living with Covid- What does living with Covid mean for Leeds?' Executive Board report the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has widened health inequalities across the city, the UK, and internationally.
- 11 Citizens Advice estimated that 6 million people fell behind with at least one payment directly due to the pandemic. In addition, Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 87% of low-income households now in debt, having not been so before the onset of the pandemic.
- 12 In 2022, the financial pressure on households has only intensified. Inflation and the cost of living continues to rise, with the prices of food, fuel and energy being particularly affected, all of

which disproportionately impact low-income households. The immediate concern is winter 2022, which coupled with the rising prices are also likely to see impacts of winter illnesses including flu and covid. This will further contribute to health and income inequalities.

13 The overall situation is leading to rising numbers of people facing financial hardship and falling into debt, as well as claiming benefits, seeking advice, support and access to food aid and other crisis support services.

14 **Main issues**

15 Although poverty and financial exclusion have been deep-rooted challenges for many years, key factors affecting the current financial climate in 2022 have further escalated the situation, leading to what is now being described as a 'cost-of-living crisis'.

16 Inflation has risen steeply in 2022 due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, global supply issues, significant rises in gas and oil prices, and the war in Ukraine. UK inflation currently stands at 9.1%, the highest level for 40 years. Inflation is forecast to continue to rise to over 10% later this year, with the poorest households most hardest hit, as essential goods and services are likely to be most severely affected.

17 In addition, broader household costs have been rising steadily with increases in National Insurance and utility bills, meaning a real term cut in take-home earnings for many before the recent spike in inflation impacted. Benefit levels, although uprated in April 2022 by 3.1%, have also failed to keep up with rising household expenditure.

18 **Energy**

19 In April, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54%, resulting in an annual rise of almost £700 for those who pay by direct debit. Those on default tariffs have seen increases of £693 from £1,277 to up to £1,971 per year, while prepayment customers (predominantly those on lower incomes) have seen an increase of £708 from £1,309 to up to £2,017.

20 The energy cap is set to increase again by a further 20% in October 2022, however in May 2022, further plans were announced to allow the price cap to change every three months, meaning prices could rise even further in the interim.

21 Under normal circumstances, customers facing increases in energy costs would be able to compare prices and/or switch supplier to save money, however in the current market, this is no longer achievable.

22 **Food**

23 According to market analysts Kantar, food prices rose at their fastest pace in more than eight years during February 2022, hitting 4.3%, representing the steepest rise since September 2013.

24 The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) have also forecast that food price inflation is likely to peak at up to 15% in summer and will remain at high levels into 2023.

25 In April 2022, a study by the Food Foundation found 7.3 million adults live in households that said they had gone without food or could not physically get food in the past month, which includes 2.6 million children. This is compared with 4.7 million adults in January and equates to a 57% increase.

26 National statistics show food is the largest item of household expenditure for low-income households after housing, fuel, and power costs. Rises in food prices are more difficult for low-income households to cope with because they must spend a greater proportion of their income on food, leaving less money available to spend elsewhere.

27 Some communities are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. For example, research has shown BAME communities consistently encountered higher levels of food insecurity during

the pandemic, while adults with disabilities have also been more acutely affected compared with those without disabilities.

28 Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 64,636 food parcels in Leeds were given out via Community Care Hubs and Emergency Food Provisions. Although citywide emergency food processes have largely reduced in line with the removal of lockdown and shielding measures, local organisations involved with food aid in the city are reporting that demand has continued above pre-pandemic levels, and a significant level of need remains. This is in relation to both emergency provisions such as food parcels, as well as affordable food schemes such as local pantry's and social supermarkets.

29 **Welfare**

30 In February 2020 (pre-pandemic), 33,715 people were claiming UC in Leeds, by March 2021 this had increased to a high of 74,515. The latest available data shows in May 2022, that figure has now reduced to 70,722 UC claimants, however this remains more than double the pre-pandemic level.

31 Universal Credit continues to present challenges which have been raised both nationally and by local support organisations and partners, including:

- Risks for vulnerable claimants and their capacity to access benefits and support
- The initial 5 week wait for payment
- Deductions policies (including debts and sanctions)
- The quality of decision-making
- Immigration related challenges

32 The changes and easements to Universal Credit implemented during the pandemic have now ended and despite positive welfare changes announced as part of recent budgets, the changes announced are only beneficial to some working UC households. The Resolution Foundation identified that 'three quarters of households on UC would still be worse off as a result of the removal of the £20 uplift alone despite the reduction in the taper rate and increase to work allowances'.

33 Citizens Advice Leeds estimate that the removal of the £20 resulted in £66 million in lost income (per annum) to UC claimants in Leeds alone.

34 The issue of benefits levels not accurately reflecting the cost of living, has been continuously highlighted at both national and local levels.

35 In April 2022, benefit levels were updated by 3.1 per cent, well below the March inflation level of 7%.

36 Current forecasts suggest the rate of inflation in September 2022 could result in benefits and state pension increasing by almost 10% in April 2023, however many organisations including Citizens Advice, are calling for this increase to be brought forward, in order to help alleviate the pressure on low income households in 2022.

37 **What is being done to address the need?**

38 **National measures**

39 In recent months the Government has made a series of announcements and interventions aimed at easing the inflationary burden on households. These include;

- Fuel Duty cut: From 23rd March 2022, petrol and diesel fuel duty was cut by 5 pence per litre for a period of 12 months.

- Energy Bill Support Scheme: All domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £400 grant to help with the cost of their energy bills through the Energy Bill Support Scheme.
- Council Tax Rebate: Households liable for Council Tax in Bands A-D in Great Britain will receive a £150 Council Tax Rebate to help with the rising cost of bills. A total of £144 million in discretionary funding has also been provided to local authorities to support households who are not eligible for the Council Tax reduction.
- DWP - Cost of Living Payments: One-off cost of living payments will be administered by the DWP. Eligible households will get a payment of £650 paid in two lump sums of £326 and £324 if they're entitled to any of the following:
 - Universal Credit
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Income Support
 - Pension Credit

Households who do not qualify for a payment will include those in receipt of Housing Benefit who do not receive one of the above benefits. Households in receipt of New Style Employment and Support Allowance, contributory Employment and Support Allowance, or New Style Jobseeker's Allowance will also not qualify unless they are also in receipt of Universal Credit. Further payments for claimants in vulnerable groups will also be made as follows;

- Pensioner cost of living payment - £300 for all pensioner households aged 66 or above paid alongside the Winter Fuel Payment.
- Disability cost of living payment - £150 for Claimants who receive eligible disability benefits.

40 There have been further calls for the Government to do more, for example by increasing benefits to the most vulnerable, tackling the costs of childcare and protecting frontline public services.

41 **Local response**

- 42 Leeds City Council and partners have been working to address financial inclusion in Leeds since 2003. The work has focused on building knowledge, research, and a strong collaborative partnership to develop innovative and sustainable actions for the residents of Leeds. The Leeds Financial Inclusion Steering group has met regularly since 2005 and is a forum for sharing work, ideas, and best practice.
- 43 The successful partnership based approach has been recognised through national awards and most recently when the "End High Cost Credit Alliance" which was founded by actor and activist Michael Sheen named Leeds the first "Fair Credit for All City."
- 44 The depth of experience and the strength of the partnership, developed over many years will continue to be central to the city's response and approach to tackling poverty and inequality. This way of working is even more important now as both national and local COVID-19 response and recovery measures, including funding allocated to the local authority, have ultimately not been enough to prevent increasing numbers of households falling into poverty and hardship during and since the pandemic.
- 45 A key focus of the current partnership activity in the city is managing the short-term government funding programmes that have been put in place to help mitigate the impact of increasing poverty. Details of the key areas of activities are highlighted below;

46 **Department for Education Holiday Activity and Food Funding- Healthy Holidays**

- 47 The Healthy Holidays scheme has been running in Leeds for four years, and has previously been led by Leeds Community Foundation, in partnership with Leeds City Council. In 2021, the Department for Education significantly increased funding and expanded the programme to all Local Authorities, in addition to committing to funding for 2022, 2023, and 2024.
- 48 The programme provides activities and food over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays to children eligible for Free School Meals, and a small number of additional children who are otherwise vulnerable. Leeds City Council now leads the programme, in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation. Despite significant challenges posed by the pandemic and the rapid scheme expansion, Leeds has been able to maintain provisions successfully in all holiday periods permitted by the Department for Education.
- 49 Leeds received funding of £3.5 million for programmes over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2022. Over 120 schools, 50 third sector organisations and over 20 council provisions (consisting of community hubs, Breeze and the youth service) have been funded.
- 50 Easter 2022 provisions reached 6942 children and young people (5514 primary aged children, 1428 secondary aged young people) with 20,000 on site attendances and 35,000 portions of food distributed.
- 51 The summer programme is estimated to reach 8500 children and young people, and the focus is to continue to build and expand the programme over the coming years.
- 52 Whilst the funding from the Department for Education is welcomed, this scheme does have limitations, and it is not the solution to tackling food poverty within holiday periods for all children living in low income households. The funding is insufficient to include all eligible children, and, in addition to this funding limitation, the programme is inherently restricted to 10 of the 13 weeks of annual school holiday.
- 53 The scheme is successful within the constraints and operates as leverage for the promotion of wider partnerships and change throughout Leeds. Examples of this include funding and supporting the backpack scheme through Zarach, the uniform exchange scheme through Zero Waste Leeds, swimming catch up sessions through Active Leeds, upskilling providers in food and nutritional education through Zest/ Foodwise Leeds, and a range of training opportunities for all healthy holidays providers. In addition, the programme has strengthened links between directorates and services within the Council, bringing added value for money for the scheme and more widely. The Leeds City Council provider working group ensures that services across the council are fully aware of each other's offer and are more able to coordinate to enrich and streamline the provision for children and young people.

54 Household Support Fund

- 55 In response to the cost-of-living crisis the government announced a continuation of the Household Support Fund in March 2022. The funding is allocated to all local authorities across the country and is to be used to support low-income families with the costs of food, fuel and essential items. Leeds City Council has received £7.1 million to distribute by the end of September 2022.
- 56 The funding requirements state that at least a third of the funding must go on families with children, at least a third on pensioner households and up to a third on other working age households.
- 57 As a result, the funding is being utilised to provide direct cash awards to 64,000 people in receipt of Council Tax Support totalling. Additionally, the funding is also being provided to council services and third sector organisations, to support the target groups with the costs of food, energy, and essential items.
- 58 Further funding has been announced for October to the end of March 2023, but the details of the remit of this funding are still to be confirmed.

59 **Local Welfare Support Scheme**

- 60 Central Government provided ring-fenced funding to Local Authorities for the provision of Local Welfare Support Schemes (LWS) until 2015/16. At this time, many local authorities either reduced or ceased to operate LWS schemes, however Leeds has been able to maintain its own provision through internal funding, prioritising the most vulnerable groups.
- 61 Leeds' Local Welfare Support Scheme is designed to provide short-term support to residents in crisis, typically consisting of an award made up of one or a number of the following: food hamper/e-voucher, fuel vouchers, white goods, furniture and flooring, all underpinned by advice, guidance and signposting to additional services and partner agencies.
- 62 The Scheme evolved during the pandemic to meet the increasing demand for emergency support and is currently under review, in order to determine how better support can be provided to customers in need, ultimately with an aim of reducing dependency on support services across the city.
- 63 The review is also inclusive of a Cash Grant Pilot (run in partnership with the Food Aid Network and Trussell Trust), which began on 3 October 2021, and provided an opportunity to trial a new approach and new systems, with a view to making it part of the permanent offer, subject to available funding and successful evaluation.
- 64 In the interim, the Council has recently increased fuel awards via the Local Welfare Support Scheme by 54%, in line with the recent energy price cap rise, to provide proportionate support to the most vulnerable residents. The scheme has also further developed existing partnership working arrangements with local community organisations, to ensure fuel awards are complemented by wraparound support.

65 **Food Insecurity**

- 66 For many years there has been a strong partnership approach to tackling food insecurity in Leeds. This includes the Leeds Food Aid Network (which brings together a wide range of food aid organisations), FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink Food and Foodwise, working in collaboration with colleagues from across the council, universities, businesses & the third sector.
- 67 The depth of the experience and the strength of the partnership was crucial in the city's response to the pandemic. The Leeds Food Insecurity Taskforce has been established bringing together a wide range of organisations to build and strengthen the city's approach across all sectors. The aim of the taskforce is to provide a forum to aid the development of long term and sustainable approaches to tackling food insecurity in Leeds which reduces the need for crisis support and food banks.

68 **Money Information and Awareness Raising**

- 69 The [Leeds Money Information Centre \(MIC\)](#) website brings together free, independent and quality marked money and financial support for the city, covering a range of subjects such as benefits, debt, loans and savings, affordable credit, household budgeting and emergency food support. The website is regularly reviewed to ensure that all service delivery information is up to date and accurate.
- 70 Additional resources including digital and hard copy flyers, signposting to where Leeds residents can find advice and support for key issues such as energy and money advice are also available and have been translated into the top 8 community languages. These resources are shared widely across council services and partners organisations. Current versions are attached at appendix one.
- 71 The '**Times are Hard**' campaign has also been launched to promote the services available within the Council Community Hubs and Libraries. This includes signposting and advice on fuel, welfare rights, housing, employment support, local welfare support and debt and money advice,

alongside the engaging activities within the libraries. A mix of communication channels have been used including through social media, improved web content, banners in community hubs and through partners organisations. In addition, all frontline staff have received training on financial support services available in the city.

72 The **Financial Inclusion team** along with partners including advice providers, Welfare Rights, Leeds Credit Union, the Green Doctor and food aid providers regularly provide training and awareness sessions. The aim being to ensure that frontline staff across relevant organisations have a good understanding of the support and advice available within the city. The key message is to ensure that advice and support is sought at the earliest opportunity from trusted and accredited services. Whilst this work is very necessary and valuable, as already highlighted the impact of the years of austerity, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis means that for many low income households incomes are failing to cover basic living costs, which limits the solutions available.

73 The **Leeds Inclusive Anchors** network are also considering how they as the largest employers within the city address the cost-of-living crisis, which could include awareness raising events and literature, an event will be held in the autumn to further develop the approach.

74 **Leeds Advice Contract**

75 Locally, Leeds City Council funds general advice services via the Leeds Advice Service contract. Operating at a local level since 2014 this service provides an independent collective of partner organisations working together to offer free, impartial and confidential advice through a mixed provision of face to face, telephone and digital support to any Leeds resident, covering a range of issues, focusing on benefits, housing, employment and debt. Citizens Advice Leeds successfully delivers this contract in partnership with Chapeltown Citizens Advice and Better Leeds Communities.

76 **Leeds Welfare Rights Unit**

77 Leeds City Council's Welfare Rights Unit provides free, confidential, impartial advice and support to Leeds residents for all UK welfare benefits, including; help to complete claim forms, guidance and support when making appeals, benefit entitlement checks and guidance on using benefit systems. Leeds Welfare Rights Unit also provide signposting and referral support to other agencies in the city for clients with wider/additional support needs.

78 Between April 21 and March 22 the service assisted 30,362 clients compared to 23,416 for the period April 20 to March 21.

79 **Council Tax Support (CTS)**

80 CTS is a means-tested discount awarded to residents on low incomes to reduce their Council Tax bill. There are currently 63,692 households in Leeds in receipt of CTS, of which 20,210 are pensioners.

81 Pensioner households can receive a discount of up to 100% but most working-age households are restricted to a maximum discount of 75%. Some of the poorest households in the city are asked to contribute 25% towards their Council Tax bill and as Council Tax charges and fuel prices increase, this can become less affordable.

82 Currently around 16k "protected" working-age households receive CTS covering up to 100% of the Council Tax charge but these protections are lost when residents migrate to Universal Credit.

83 The total cost of CTS awards in Leeds during 2021/22 was £55.4M and this cost is expected to rise to £56.1M in 2022/23.

84 **Housing Benefit (HB)**

- 85 Housing Benefit can help residents to pay their rent if they're unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits. It is being replaced by Universal Credit for most Working-Age residents.
- 86 Residents can only make a new claim for Housing Benefit if either they have reached State Pension age or they live in supported, sheltered or temporary housing.
- 87 There are 34,000 residents claiming HB in Leeds. The HB caseload in Leeds has decreased by 24,960 since Universal Credit was rolled out in October 2018.
- 88 Many low-income households in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Costs element of Universal Credit continue to be impacted by the "Bedroom Tax" and/or the Benefit Cap meaning their housing costs are not covered in full by their benefit.
- 89 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**
- 90 DHP can be awarded to residents, who require financial assistance towards their housing costs because their housing benefit or universal credit housing costs does not fully meet their rental liability. In some cases, DHP can also cover rent in advance and bonds. For an application to be successful, applicants must demonstrate both financial hardship and exceptional circumstances.
- 91 The DWP allocate a DHP grant to each Local Authority. In Leeds for the last 3 years, the Council have topped up the DHP fund by £500k. During 2021/22 the Council received 4238 DHP applications and the full Government contribution of £1,679,527 for 2021/22 was awarded to residents in Leeds. Additionally, a further £483,809 was awarded to residents using the contribution from the Leeds HRA.
- 92 The Government have confirmed Leeds will receive a reduced DHP budget for the 2022/23 financial year. Leeds have received £1.16M, meaning the value of the cut to Leeds is £513,318 or 30.57% compared to last year's funding. Further funding may be available later in the year, however based on the amount available nationally, the value of any further award is not expected to fully cover the cut in funding. This is likely to result in a reduction in the number of DHP awards overall, as well as a reduction in the funds allocated per award.
- 93 What Next?**
- 94 Leeds City Council and partners across the city have been recognised for the work undertaken to reduce poverty and tackle inequality for many years. Throughout ten years of austerity and reduced public sector budgets and resources, Leeds has employed a highly effective collaborative and co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty.
- 95 Despite this, poverty and financial exclusion have continued to worsen in Leeds and across the UK, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (which had already exacerbated poverty and financial hardship), the situation has now been further intensified by the emerging cost of living crisis.
- 96 Barriers including lack of awareness or understanding, individual support needs and digital exclusion are further compounding the situation and are preventing people from reaching services.
- 97 With more households experiencing hardship for the first time, and households already below the poverty line facing destitution and desperation, the significant and wide-ranging citywide support offer must be both maintained and enhanced in order to support Leeds residents.
- 98 Supporting and enhancing the citywide welfare and support offer will not be enough, however, in the face of escalating challenges. The resources available will not be sufficient to meet the scale of the need. As such, re-energising council and citywide efforts to target the root causes of poverty and inequality, providing people with the support and opportunities they need to earn a good living and enjoy a healthy, secure family life, are more important than ever. This is the basis for our Best City Ambition.

99 In light of this, there are three clear but connected ways forward which we propose should now be prioritised:

- a) **Best City Ambition - tackling poverty and inequality** – There is an opportunity with the upcoming reviews of the Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Growth strategies, together with on-going work to strengthen the strategic framework supporting our Zero Carbon ambitions, to more strongly reflect the mission outlined in the Best City Ambition, and specifically to further address the underpinning challenges of tackling poverty and inequality. This work on the three pillars will help to ensure an even sharper focus on targeting efforts and interventions around those people living on low incomes and at greatest risk of experiencing poverty. This might also include some shorter-term objectives on tackling the cost of living explicitly. The establishment of a refreshed performance reporting framework will also support the transition from the Best Council Plan to the Best City Ambition.

- b) **Driving policy and accountability** – through the revised performance framework underpinning the Best City Ambition which is currently being developed and the new Leeds Social Progress Index. Both of these approaches provide an opportunity to strengthen indicators and reporting around the impact of the city’s efforts to tackle poverty and inequality, relative to how other comparable places in the UK are performing. The revised performance framework also provides an opportunity to reinforce and embed linkages between the three pillars in tackling poverty and inequality.

- a) **Taking a breakthrough approach to accelerate progress** – the council has set out a proposal to create a breakthrough priority with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”. Building on both the existing citywide support infrastructure and learning from the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response, it is also proposed that the Financial Inclusion Team will look to establish a strategic, cross cutting welfare group, in order to take a proactive, collaborative approach on key issues relating to food, fuel, housing and digital.

What impact will this proposal have?

100 The proposal will ensure that there is a strategic, coordinated and collaborative response to the cost-of-living crisis. Formation of the proposed cross cutting, strategic group will ensure that further support measures are established with the specific aim of supporting families impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. The focus of the group will be Food, Fuel, Housing and Digital.

101 The focus of this report is on poverty and inequality which is protected equality characteristic. It sets out the impact of the cost-of-living crisis will have on households living on the lowest incomes in the city, the actions currently being undertaken to mitigate the impact and the proposed citywide approach. Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening will be undertaken as appropriate for each future measure.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

102 Please see paragraph 99 above.

103 The work of the Council’s Financial Inclusion and Welfare and Benefits teams contributes to achieving Leeds Best City Ambition, which sets at its heart the mission to tackle poverty and inequality and improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Leeds home.

104 The cost-of-living crisis will impact all three key pillars of the Best City Ambition.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

| |
|---|
| Wards affected: |
| Have ward members been consulted? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

105 Partner organisations referred to in this report have been consulted to provide relevant and up to date information about the projects, initiatives and services referenced.

What are the resource implications?

106 All of the projects and services referred to in this report are being undertaken within current budgets, there are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

107 A corporate risk has been identified on Escalating Poverty. Further details of the risk can be seen in the Annual Corporate Risk Report to be reported at this meeting.

What are the legal implications?

108 There are no specific legal implications or access to information issues with this report.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

109 No other options have been considered.

How will success be measured?

110 Success will be measured via update reports.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

111 Implementation will be immediate.

Appendices

- Leeds Money Information Centre leaflets

Background papers

- There are no background papers to this report

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Local Welfare Support Scheme Review Update

Date: 15th September 2022

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report aims to provide members of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board with an update on the progress of the Local Welfare Support Scheme Review. It details proposals for a revised policy document, including updated eligibility criteria, bringing it in line with the current cost of living.

Recommendations

- a) It is recommended that the members of Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board consider the updates contained within this report and provide feedback on the progress of the Local Welfare Support Scheme Review.
- b) It is recommended that the members of Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board consider the proposed revised policy document and make recommendations for its content.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report provides details on the review of the Leeds City Council Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS); setting out the progress since the last update to Scrutiny Board and proposing a revised policy document and next steps following the pilot of a cash grant scheme via LWSS.
- 2 LWSS is designed to support residents who may find themselves in an emergency/crisis - offering short term support to ease that position. This typically consists of an award made up of one or a number of the following: supermarket vouchers, fuel vouchers, white goods, furniture and flooring, all of which is underpinned by the provision of advice, guidance and signposting to additional services and partner agencies.
- 3 The scheme, in its previous form, required improvement as the short-term support provided to customers in financial crisis often resulted in customers returning for further support. The COVID-19 pandemic put further pressures on low-income households and the most vulnerable in our society; pushing many more households into financial uncertainty, hardship, to seek support and advice, and to claim benefits. This has been further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. A review of the scheme was needed in order to provide better support to customers in need over the short, medium and long-term and to ultimately reduce dependency on local welfare support across the city, whether through Leeds City Council, our partner advice services or third sector organisations.
- 4 The review of LWSS began in August 2021, with initial proposals presented to Scrutiny Board in November 2021 outlining the discovery work needed to obtain a fuller understanding of the former scheme and the improvements required to make it a more effective offer for the city's most vulnerable residents, making best use of the budget available.
- 5 The review has been undertaken during the height of a cost-of-living crisis, the context of which is outlined in the following reports 'Reducing Poverty and Improving Financial Inclusion' (September 2022) and 'Understanding and addressing the cost-of-living crisis' (July 2022).
- 6 In order to respond to the cost-of-living crisis and the disproportionate impact on those on the lowest incomes, this report outlines the steps taken to better support vulnerable customers and meet increased demand to LWSS, whilst also transitioning from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 7 During the 22/23 financial year the Household Support Fund has been used to double the LWSS budget to £1.2 million. This has meant the service is in a better position to cope with the increased demand and will allow the Council to continue to increase the fuel awards in line with the further energy price cap rise. Funding requirements for the financial year 2023/2024 are currently under review.

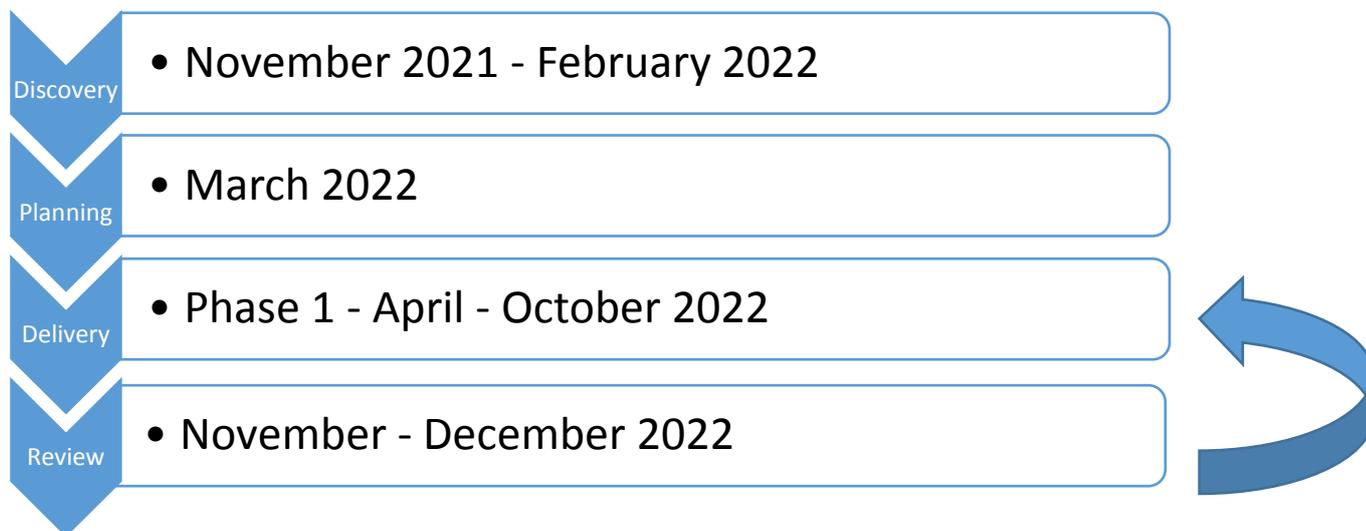
Methodology

- 8 The LWSS review has been broken into four distinct phases; **discovery, planning, delivery and review**, based on PM lite/agile project management methodology. The first phase began in November 2021, following the scrutiny board meeting, taking on board recommendations from members, which are summarised below:

- Ensure that signposting is effective
- Review Reuse Network offer
- Ensure NHS or relevant Third Sector representation for Mental Health and suicide
- Ensure cash grants are used for intended purposes

- Consult with members
- Ensure input of smaller groups in citywide welfare offer is recognised

9 The initial timeline for delivery is outlined below. Following completion of phase 1, a review and prioritisation exercise will take place and phase 2 will begin:



Discovery

10 A number of activities took place in order to gather learning and understand what urgent improvements of the scheme were required in order to better meet the needs of vulnerable customers. In light of the cost-of-living crisis and the challenges this presented in the background of this review, an agile approach had to be taken and a number of areas had to be prioritised. This meant that further engagement with wider groups was limited but will be undertaken in the future.

11 Engagement took place via an immediate working group with relevant services and the third sector represented, via team meetings, surveys, meetings with partner services such as Money Buddies and Citizen’s Advice Leeds.

12 A Cash Grant Pilot also took place between 1st October to 1st April.

13 Key learning from this phase is summarised below:

- **Eligibility** is outdated and applied inconsistently- results in repeat referrals
- £330k of the £600k budget is spent on **white goods** – opportunity to make savings
- **Wraparound support/signposting** was not adequate – resulting in repeat referrals
- **Referral process** needed to be improved – method (phone only – no online option) and communication of outcome
- No formal **third-party referral process** – partners wanted this and it would ease the pressure on Contact Centre team
- Existing **processes** are time-consuming, including evidencing eligibility by sharing proofs
- **Staff training** needed; to challenge outdated approaches and move to a more supportive model

- **Other funding sources** exist for similar purposes – Tenancy Intervention Fund and Section 17
- **Greater choice** could be offered to customers- dignity and agency

Planning and delivery

- 14 In order to build on the learning from the Discovery Phase, a number of workshops were organised in order to develop key actions to tackle each area of development. These workshops focussed on the aims and objectives of the scheme, Resourcing, the LWSS offer and Eligibility and led to the production of the detailed action plan.
- 15 The action plan was broken down into priority areas, with the immediate priority areas spanning from April to October. The key areas of focus for delivery this period included resourcing, eligibility and the LWSS offer.
- 16 Further detail on each of these key areas is provided in the following section of this report.

Resourcing

- 17 LWSS experienced a sharp increase in calls since the energy price cap rise and in April 2022, calls increased by 41%, rising to 42% in May when compared with the same period in 2021. This increased demand has put pressure on an already busy team. To help ease this pressure, targeted work to create efficiencies has been a key focus as part of the review, a selection of which are provided in the following section. The Contact Centre have also recently appointed ten Customer Service Officers in order to cope with the significant increase in demand. These posts have been funded by the central Contact Centre Resourcing budget and not the LWSS budget. As further efficiencies are introduced as part of the review and the increased demand reduces, these roles will be absorbed into other areas of the Contact Centre.
- 18 The team currently use two Customer Record Management (CRM) systems as part of their role. This is both time-consuming, causes duplication and means that reporting is inaccurate. The team are now being moved onto one system, already used by the Council, and savings of £15,000 per year will be achieved by decommissioning the former system.
- 19 After a detailed review of the end-to-end process of ordering white goods and furniture, it was identified that these two processes were the most time-consuming for Customer Service Officers. Each individual item ordered required an order to be raised on FMS (Financial Management System). From October 2022, instead of raising individual orders, bulk ordering will be introduced as well as monthly invoicing. This will create significant efficiencies.
- 20 To further respond to the burden of administrative tasks on Customer Service Officers, a new back-office function will be introduced from October with one member of staff trialling this role on a pilot basis. The role will pick up tasks, such as the bulk ordering of white goods, raising orders on FMS and arranging deliveries of Hisense fridge freezer donations.
- 21 The Customer Service Officers (CSOs) within the LWSS team are currently split into two key areas: the initial call taking and assessing. The CSOs that take the initial calls collect the details of the customer's current situation and needs, screen and either add to a work queue to be assessed or signpost to alternative support. The CSOs that focus on assessing pick up cases from the work queue and determine their eligibility for an LWSS award, based on the previous policy document. This may also involve collecting additional information about the customer's situation or requesting evidence, such as a bank statement. These considerably different roles

have both deferred from the original job description of a Customer Service Officer significantly since the introduction of the scheme.

22 It is proposed that this role be streamlined and brought back to its original job description, in line with Customer Service Officer roles within the Contact Centre environment. This will ensure fairness in the distribution of tasks across the team and mean that all officers can undertake all tasks expected of the role.

LWSS Offer

23 The following section of the report outlines the priority areas of the LWSS offer, which have been reviewed and initial improvements implemented. Additional aspects of the offer will be reviewed in the future, such as carpets and removals.

White Goods

24 White goods, such as fridges, freezers, washing machines, cookers and other items account for over 50% of the LWSS budget spend each year. The scheme is currently out of contract with their white goods supplier, which has meant that value for money is not being achieved. As such, this has been high priority area to review and act on, in order to generate savings where possible.

25 Work has been undertaken alongside the Procurement Team to prepare for a full procurement exercise. As part of this, a Market Sounding Exercise was undertaken with potential suppliers, to test the market and gauge interest in a procurement with a social value focus. This exercise provided useful learning to inform the full procurement, such as around the purchase of high efficiency, refurbished items where possible. This provides both a high-quality item for customers, minimises the ongoing energy costs as best as possible, whilst providing value for money to the Council, so that more vulnerable customers can be supported with a finite budget. The exercise also provided useful learning around how the procurement should be made accessible to charitable organisations. The procurement exercise is expected to start in autumn 2022.

26 A new innovate partnership with Hisense is being piloted, where high quality, refurbished goods, that have been fully cleaned, repaired (where necessary) and tested are donated to the scheme to allocate to customers. Hisense have agreed to donate between 100-200 fridge freezers per year, which are being delivered in-house by the Civic Enterprise Leeds team and has the potential to lead to £46,000 in savings for the scheme overall. This will allow further funding to be allocated to fuel vouchers, in response to the energy price cap rise.

Cash Grants

27 A **Cash Grant Pilot** scheme ran from 1st October 2021 to 1st April 2022 with a £50,000 budget, in partnership with Trussell Trust. An independent evaluation of the pilot has been undertaken and the report will be published in October this year. The aim of the pilot was to understand whether cash grants impacted the following areas for grant recipients:

- To increase their emotional wellbeing
- To negate the need for further food bank use within 12 months
- To enable them to be better able to afford the essentials
- To enable them to be better able to manage their financial situation

28 Draft findings from the evaluation revealed that the cash grant pilot scheme has had a positive impact on grant recipients, allowing them to prioritise their household's needs which were mainly to buy food and pay for gas and electricity. It also gave them more freedom of choice than a food parcel, and the majority were happy receiving the grant as cash from a cash machine and found it to be a straightforward process. Examples of customer feedback are shown below:

“This scheme was brilliant, you guys really did save me, when I had nobody else to turn to you guys were there for me, thank you. I appreciate everything you have done for me, your grant literally saved my life and my home, I can't thank you enough” – Web survey respondent

“I'd say it had a good impact on mental health because knowing that you've got extra money to buy your essentials and make sure that you've got what you need for that week or for that month.” – Interviewee from the second round of interviews

“It gives you breathing space so that you don't panic as much as to where your money is going or how far your money can stretch” – Interviewee from the second round of interviews

29 The final research paper is to follow shortly, however based on the draft report it is expected that LCC will seek to adopt a cash grant offer as part of the LWSS review. Additional methods for the customer to collect a cash award will also be considered, such as Post Office Payout and direct payments into bank accounts.

Fuel

30 LWSS have worked in partnership with Green Doctor to offer fuel support since May 2020. This has been a successful arrangement and has allowed customers to be supported with both fuel vouchers and wraparound support to reduce their energy bills and increase energy efficiency within their homes in the long term.

31 In April 2022, this partnership expanded so that the majority of fuel-related referrals are now awarded via Green Doctor, with all customers offered wraparound support. Work with Leeds Credit Union continues, where it is more convenient for a customer to collect their award from one of their branches.

32 On the 3rd February 2022, Ofgem announced that the energy price cap was to rise by 54% in England, Wales and Scotland from April, affecting 22 million households overall. This led to an estimated increase of £693 per average household and £708 for households on pre-payment meters per year. Although most households would be affected to some degree, Joseph Rowntree Foundation summarised “the impact of rising energy bills is expected to be much harsher for families on low incomes, there is a clear case for targeted protections to prevent serious hardship once the energy price cap is lifted.”

33 In order to respond to this emerging need, and in consultation with the Executive Member for Communities, it was agreed that the budget for LWSS fuel support and award amounts were increased by 54%, to bring them in line with the energy price cap rise. This was funded using Household Support Funding. The funding requirements for fuel awards for the financial year 2023/2023 will continue to be reviewed and the energy situation monitored.

- 34 A review is now underway ahead of the further fuel cap rise in October 2022 which will enable the LWSS service to bring the budget and award amounts in line with the further increases.
- 35 Research is being undertaken in partnership with Green Doctor to model energy costs across a range of households, based on property type, household size, fuel type and month of the year. This would allow LWSS to introduce seasonal awards that meet the needs of each particular household, better support customers during the winter months and make the best use of the budget available.

Furniture

- 36 Partnership working has been taking place to re-establish a relationship with the Furniture Reuse Network post-lockdown and look to purchase items from the network again, with the aim of reuse being the first choice for LWSS to direct funds into community partners, reduce waste and ultimately be able to buy more goods for more customers.
- 37 Work is also underway with the network to improve how items are purchased, reducing the administrative burden on the network members whilst a longer-term solution is developed.

Digital

- 38 The introduction of a digital offer within the scheme is being considered, to tackle digital exclusion and better link in with the work being done in the city to address this issue, including working with third sector groups within the city. This could, for example, introduce areas such as free sim cards loaded with data, calls and messages obtained via LCC partnership arrangements with the 'Good Things Foundation'.

Eligibility

- 39 The LWSS policy document was last updated in 2017 and is now significantly outdated. As such, it has been reviewed and a number of areas introduced, and criteria suggested. Whilst there are still aspects of the process being developed, an early draft revised policy document can be found in **Appendix A for Scrutiny Board comment**. A summary of the key changes is provided below:
- Introduction of **low income** as a broader criterion, where previously only those on benefits were accepted, recognising the rise in in-work poverty and current cost-of-living crisis.
 - **No refusals** – awards and/or quality signposting will be provided to all customers, within the remit of the LWSS and wider welfare offer in Leeds.
 - Greater emphasis on **wraparound support** introduced, to help address the needs of vulnerable customers longer term, as appropriate.
 - Introduction of a **person-centred, intensive support programme** that will connect customers to wider support services in Leeds, for example with debt management, benefits advice or budgeting support. This programme will particularly support those that return for support, working with the customer to access support, in a way that best meet their needs. This may include a package of longer-term awards until they are in a position to best receive this support. It is anticipated that this programme will be piloted from 2023 and funding has been applied for from the Shared Prosperity Fund to fund the full cost of the pilot.
 - Removal of the £10,000 low-income threshold and introduction of a **variable low-income threshold**, based on household size and make up, current cost of living at the time of application and is evidence-based.

- Introduction of **new application methods**; online application form for self-referrals and supported referrals via Community Hub sites and trusted partner agencies. These applications methods are dependent on the development of the existing, or a new, Customer Records Management System. This work has been taken on as part of the Contact Centre Digitisation Programme and will begin in September 2022.
- The introduction of a **digital award**; recognising the impact of digital exclusion and the barriers this presents when accessing support services. An example of an award is a free sim card with credit for a set time period.
- The introduction of **new payment methods**, taking learning from the Cash Grant Pilot, the full report of which will launch in late September 2022, cash and bank transfers are to be introduced as payments methods, where appropriate.

Next Steps

40 This report outlines the current focus of the LWSS review, which has been adapted to meet significantly increased demand to the scheme during a cost-of-living crisis. The below section summarises the next steps that will follow:

- **Launch revised policy document** with amendments suggested by the Scrutiny Board. The design of the document will be updated, working with the Council's Communications Team. The updated eligibility criteria will also be shared with relevant partners and published on the Council's website so that applicants and supporting organisations are aware of the criteria before they apply.
- **Budget** to be reviewed, demand monitored, efficiencies/savings costed, and further government funding/other grant funding considered to provide a clear indication of the budgetary requirements for financial year 2023/2024.
- **Review fuel awards** in line with any further energy price cap rises and government support packages.
- **Review payment methods** to ensure that a range of options are available that enable dignity and choice for LWSS customers and best meets their needs. This will include both a review of the Cash Grant Pilot findings and a review of voucher schemes available including the Charity Gift Card and additional supermarkets.
- **Develop and implement technical solution** that will allow for referrals to be made by trusted partner agencies, Council services and individuals, to reduce call volumes to LWSS and increase access to the scheme.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 41 The proposal will have a citywide impact on residents facing financial insecurity and aims to better support these residents through a period of crisis.
- 42 The delivery of the review has already introduced some key areas that are making a positive difference to the lives of residents through a better provision that better meets needs in light of the challenges the cost-of-living crisis has presented.
- 43 In addition to the support offered to vulnerable residents, the review also seeks to direct funding to charitable organisations for the provision of wraparound support or the purchase of items, such as furniture.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

44 This proposal will impact all three pillars of the Best City Ambition. Health and Wellbeing – through the provision of welfare support that aims to tackle poverty and inequalities and provide improved wraparound support, linking to the wider determinants of health. Inclusive Growth – through working with the third sector around the provision of goods and tackling of poverty. Zero Carbon – through the focus on reuse and refurbished furniture and white goods, reducing embodied carbon.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

45 A number of services, organisations, members and recipients of support via the LWSS have been consulted through a range of methods, including surveys, phone/teams interviews and meetings/workshops.

What are the resource implications?

46 £600,000 of funding from the Household Support Fund was added to the LWSS budget for the financial year 2022/2023. Further resource implications for the sustainability of a future scheme are being considered within the next stage of this review.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

47 A corporate risk has been identified on Escalating Poverty. Further details of the risk can be seen in the Annual Corporate Risk Report, as presented at Executive Board Meeting – July 2022.

What are the legal implications?

48 There are no legal implications to this work as there is no legal requirement for local authorities to provide a Welfare Assistance Scheme.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

49 No other options have been considered.

How will success be measured?

50 This is currently being reviewed and new reporting being developed to ensure that data detailing the number of customers supported, range of awards and wider signposting is reported more accurately. Once the technological solution is in place, it is intended that improved reporting around the outcomes of wider wraparound support and referrals will be in place, to better understand the success of this support, to meet the needs of vulnerable customers in Leeds.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

51 Implementation is ongoing and the delivery of key actions with the action plan are likely to be completed in 2023, with some schemes and pilots ongoing.

Appendices

- Proposed Revised Policy Document – Appendix A

Background papers

- 'Reducing Poverty and Improving Financial Inclusion' (September 2022)
- 'Understanding and addressing the cost-of-living crisis' (July 2022)

Local Welfare Support Scheme

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1.0 Purpose of the scheme

- 1.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme provides support to Leeds residents facing financial hardship where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to move into or maintain their independence within the community. It aims to alleviate that hardship through short-term support, allowing applicants the time to take the necessary steps to resolve the cause of hardship, where possible.
- 1.2 As part of the scheme, consideration is given to ways in which applicants could benefit from further support, to help address the root cause of the hardship. This will be provided through both immediate signposting and a person-centred support programme, that aims to connect applicants to wider support services in Leeds, for example with debt management, benefits advice or budgeting support.
- 1.3 Principles:
- We will endeavour to award all eligible applicants.
 - We will provide quality signposting to relevant support services for both applicants who are eligible and those who are ineligible for an award, to help applicants resolve challenges affecting their income levels. This may also involve a referral if consent is provided.
 - The Local Welfare Support Scheme is one part of a network of organisations and services across Leeds that can support.

2.0 Eligibility

2.1 To be eligible for an LWSS award, applicants must:

- Be a Leeds resident
- Be aged 16 years or over
- Have access to public funds and not be subject to immigration control (we will try to signpost to services that can support if we cannot)
- Be in receipt of benefits* **OR** on a low income* **AND**
- Be able to evidence insufficient funds to meet their/their dependant household's immediate needs
- Be willing to engage with wider services for support, as appropriate

2.2 An award will not be made if:

- Applicants have sufficient funds (e.g. savings) to meet immediate needs
- Applicants have other means of accessing support, such as through friends or family

- Applicants have already received support from another scheme for the same need
- Applicants cannot provide evidence of their financial situation
- There is evidence that awards are likely to be sold on or otherwise misused

*Eligible benefits include:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Employment and Support Allowance (income-related)
- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Reduction
- Child/Working Tax Credit
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment

*Income will be calculated on a case-by-case basis, based on the total household income, the number of dependents in the household and the ages of the dependents.

The amount will be reviewed, as necessary, and based on current living costs and informed by a range of sources, including Joseph Roundtree Foundation, the Leeds Poverty Factbook and the Minimum Income Calculator.

Example

At the time of publication (August 2022), for a single person household without children, low income would be classed as an income under £19,000.

3.0 Application process

3.1 Applications can be made via the following routes:

- Direct phone number
- Online form*
- At Community Hub sites*
- Through trusted partner agencies*

*These application methods are currently in development. This document will be updated as soon as they launch.

3.2 Applicants must provide:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Contact number
- Details of other members of household, where applicable
- Current full address and postcode
- If applicable, the tenancy start date and details of the property being moved into
- Details of income received, whether through a salary, benefits or other means
- Details of any savings
- Details of why help is needed and any supporting information

- National insurance number, if in receipt of benefits

3.3 Supporting evidence is required in order to confirm the applicant's identity, address and financial situation. This is most likely to be a bank statement, but could include other documentation and system checks, as necessary. Applicants must provide the evidence required and it should be provided at the earliest opportunity in order to prevent delays. *

*Opportunities to reduce the ID requirements are being considered as part of the review. A flexible approach to providing any necessary documentation will be taken, for example via email, at community hub sites and upload of documents to online form, whilst this is in development.

3.4 Following receipt of an application **and** supporting evidence, the contents will be reviewed, and an outcome decided:

- Where the applicant **meets** the eligibility criteria, an award will be offered alongside any relevant signposting information.
- Where the applicant **does not meet** the eligibility criteria for an award, they will be offered relevant signposting information to services that may be able to support.

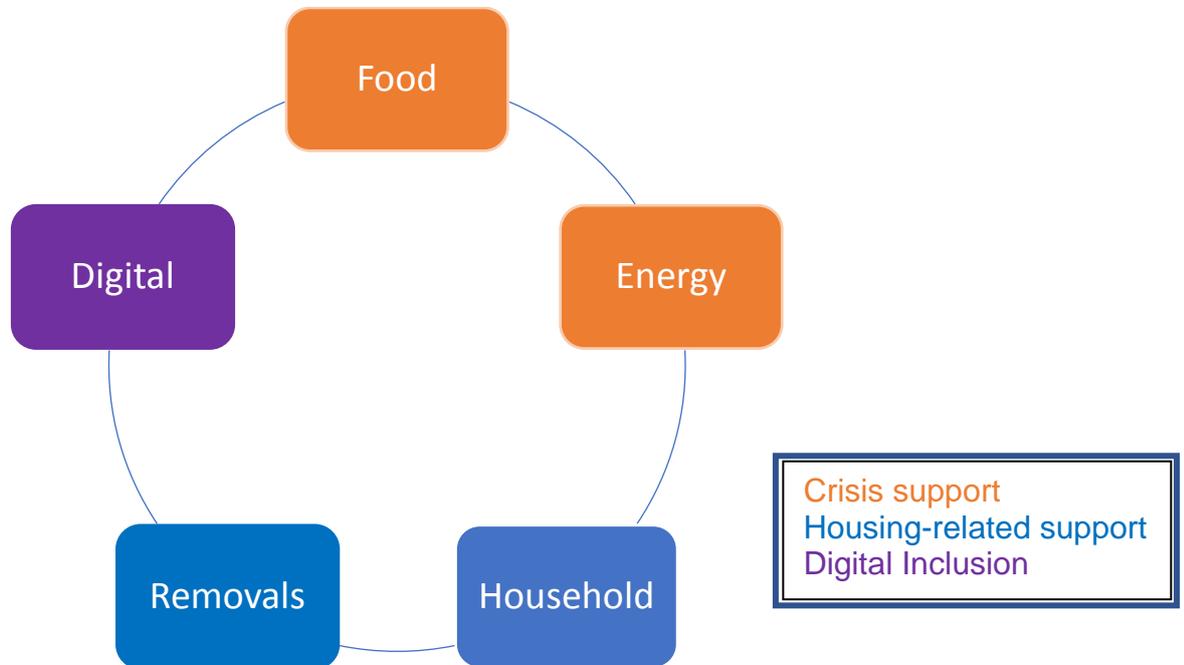
3.5 We aim to provide support to all applicants. If an applicant is not eligible for an award, they will be offered other support in the form of a referral to a relevant service or signposting information. Staff will always endeavour to provide as much support as possible, within the remit of the scheme and the wider welfare support offer available in Leeds.

3.6 Additional person-centred, intensive support will be available to applicants that have a repeat need (referrals to this support will be judged on a case by case basis) for support via the Local Welfare Support Scheme. This could include support with debt management, energy efficiency, benefits advice and money management. Additional discretionary support, such as supermarket and/or energy vouchers, may also be awarded to these applicants. Those in the most urgent need will be prioritised. *

*This support programme is currently in development. This document will be updated as soon as it is launched.

4.0 Awards

4.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme in Leeds provides a range of support, focussing on (but not limited to) the below key areas:



4.2 Typical awards could be:

Food - Cash, supermarket voucher, food pantry/foodbank referral

Energy – Smart meter top up, BACS transfer, fuel voucher

Household – Fridge/freezer, cooker, washing machine, microwave, bed, cot, sofa

Removals - Removal costs where it is linked to the Homelessness Prevention Fund and approved by the Homeless Support Team/Housing Options.

Digital – Sim card with credit*

*This award is currently in development. This document will be updated as soon as it is launched.

4.3 The Council will determine the most appropriate method of support to be provided to successful applicants, which may be through the provision of vouchers, cash, bank transfer or the purchase of items or a combination. The decision will be made based on the type of support required, the individual's circumstances and personal preferences.

5.0 Partnership Working

5.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme works in partnership with a wide range of organisations across the city in both the public and third sector, working collectively to support residents facing financial insecurity and tackle poverty and inequalities.

5.2 Where a partner organisation would be better placed to support a customer, a customer may be referred to them, subject to customer's consent.

5.3 Where there are other suitable funds to apply for within the Council or in the city, a customer may be advised to apply for these. Where possible applications to alternative support funds will be a fully integrated part of the LWSS offer following completion of the 2022 review

5.4 The LWSS person-centred, intensive support programme will help customers to navigate the support available in the city, to identify what best meets the customer's needs at a time when they are ready to receive support. This may involve support from more than one organisation at any one time. *

*This support programme is currently in development. This document will be updated as soon as it is launched.

6.0 Reviews

6.1 An applicant can ask for the decision to be looked at again if there has been:

- A factual error in the decision making
- An omission or oversight in the decision making
- New evidence since the application which was not put forward at the time.

6.2 The review request will need to be sent/logged within 14 working days of the date of decision.

6.3 The review process will involve a re-assessment by a more senior officer than the original decision maker. Their decision will be final.

6.4 If the applicant remains dissatisfied, they will retain the right to make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or seek a Judicial Review.

7.0 Accessibility

7.1 To ensure accessibility for speakers of community languages, an over-the-phone interpreting service will be offered via Language Line for applicants who require it. Language Line provide interpreting services.

7.2 Video calls with a BSL interpreter or use of platforms, such as Type Talk can be used for customers that use British Sign Language.

7.3 The online application form has been developed in line with Leeds City Council's accessibility statement, available on the following link:

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/accessibility>.

8.0 Monitoring

8.1 The scheme will be monitored and will be subject to monthly and quarterly reporting providing data and information such as:

- Number of applications and reasons
- Number successful vs. unsuccessful applications
- Number of awards per ward area
- Value of awards
- Funding committed and funding remaining
- Compliments and complaints

8.2 Regular quality assurance checks will take place to review the outcome of applications to ensure that they are dealt with fairly and consistently.

8.3 Customer feedback will be reviewed to ensure that continual improvement takes place.

8.4 The Local Welfare Support Scheme works closely with partners in Leeds to address financial exclusion. Where funding is allocated to support community initiatives aimed at tackling financial exclusion, debt, fuel poverty and food poverty and is directly working with LWSS, additional reporting will take place in order to review the effectiveness of the initiatives.

9.0 Policy Reviews

9.1 This policy will be reviewed to accommodate any changes in legislation, funding and living costs, as necessary.

Work Schedule

Date: 15th September 2022

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

- All Scrutiny Boards are required to determine and manage their own work schedule for the municipal year. In doing so, the work schedule should not be considered a fixed and rigid schedule, it should be recognised as a document that can be adapted and changed to reflect any new and emerging issues throughout the year; and also reflect any timetable issues that might occur from time to time.
- The Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules also state that, where appropriate, all terms of reference for work undertaken by Scrutiny Boards will include 'to review how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on all equality areas, as set out in the Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme'.
- The latest iteration of the Board's work schedule is attached to this report for the Board's consideration.

Recommendations

Members are requested to consider the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2022/23 municipal year.

What is this report about?

1. All Scrutiny Boards are required to determine and manage their own work schedule for the municipal year and therefore the latest iteration of the Board's work schedule for the remainder of the municipal year is attached as Appendix 1 for Members' consideration.
2. The latest Executive Board minutes from the meeting held on 27th July 2022 are also attached as Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider and note the Executive Board minutes, insofar as they relate to the remit of the Scrutiny Board; and consider any matter where specific scrutiny activity may also be warranted.

Developing the work schedule

3. When considering any developments and/or modifications to the work schedule, effort should be undertaken to:
 - Avoid unnecessary duplication by having a full appreciation of any existing forums already having oversight of, or monitoring a particular issue.
 - Ensure any Scrutiny undertaken has clarity and focus of purpose and will add value and can be delivered within an agreed time frame.
 - Avoid pure "information items" except where that information is being received as part of a policy/scrutiny review.
 - Seek advice about available resources and relevant timings, taking into consideration the workload across the Scrutiny Boards and the type of Scrutiny taking place.
 - Build in sufficient flexibility to enable the consideration of urgent matters that may arise during the year.
4. In addition, in order to deliver the work schedule, the Board may need to take a flexible approach and undertake activities outside the formal schedule of meetings – such as working groups and site visits, where necessary and appropriate. This flexible approach may also require additional formal meetings of the Scrutiny Board.

What impact will this proposal have?

5. All Scrutiny Boards are required to determine and manage their own work schedule for the municipal year.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

6. The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Boards promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the Best City Ambition.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

7. The Vision for Scrutiny states that Scrutiny Boards should seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director and Executive Member about available resources prior to agreeing items of work.

What are the resource implications?

8. Experience has shown that the Scrutiny process is more effective and adds greater value if the Board seeks to minimise the number of substantial inquiries running at one time and focus its resources on one key issue at a time.
9. The Vision for Scrutiny, agreed by full Council also recognises that like all other Council functions, resources to support the Scrutiny function are under considerable pressure and that requests from Scrutiny Boards cannot always be met.
10. Consequently, when establishing their work programmes Scrutiny Boards should:
 - Seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director and Executive Member about available resources;
 - Avoid duplication by having a full appreciation of any existing forums already having oversight of, or monitoring a particular issue;
 - Ensure any Scrutiny undertaken has clarity and focus of purpose and will add value and can be delivered within an agreed time frame.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

11. There are no risk management implications relevant to this report.

What are the legal implications?

12. This report has no specific legal implications.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Latest work schedule of the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board for the 2022/23 municipal year.
- Appendix 2 – Draft minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 27th July 2022.

Background papers

- None.

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Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) Work Schedule for 2022/2023 Municipal Year

| June | July | August |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Agenda for 23rd June 2022 at 10.30 am | Agenda for 21st July 2022 at 10.30 am | No Scrutiny Board meeting |
| Co-opted Members (DB) Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference (DB) Potential Sources of Work (DB) Performance Update (PM) | Safer Stronger Communities – Annual Update (PSR) West Yorkshire Police & Crime Plan 2021-2024 – Update (PSR) | |
| Working Group Meetings | | |
| | | |
| Site Visits | | |
| | | |

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Scrutiny Work Items Key:

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| PSR | Policy/Service Review | RT | Recommendation Tracking | DB | Development Briefings |
| PDS | Pre-decision Scrutiny | PM | Performance Monitoring | C | Consultation Response |



Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) Work Schedule for 2022/2023 Municipal Year

| September | October | November |
|--|--|---|
| Agenda for 15th September 2022 at 10.30 am | Agenda for 17th October 2022 at 10.00 am | Agenda for 10th November 2022 at 10.30 am |
| Reducing poverty and improving financial inclusion (PSR) Revised Local Welfare Support Scheme (PSR) | Locality Working & Priority Neighbourhoods (PSR) Ensuring the future resilience of the Third Sector (PSR) | Housing Activity Update (PSR) |
| Working Group Meetings | | |
| | Development of the Waste Strategy (PDS) – 5/10/22 @ 10.30 am Understanding the role and responsibilities of the Housing Service (DB) – date tbc | Reviewing the Air Quality Strategy Action Plan 2021-2030 (PSR) – date tbc |
| Site Visits | | |
| Visit to LeedsWatch – date tbc | | |

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| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| PSR | Policy/Service Review | RT | Recommendation Tracking | DB | Development Briefings |
| PDS | Pre-decision Scrutiny | PM | Performance Monitoring | C | Consultation Response |



Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) Work Schedule for 2022/2023 Municipal Year

| December | January | February |
|---|--|--|
| No Scrutiny Board meeting. | Agenda for 5th January 2023 at 10.30 am | Agenda for 2nd February 2023 at 10.30 am |
| | Performance report (PM) Financial Health Monitoring (PSR) 2023/24 Initial Budget Proposals (PDS) Best City Ambition – Update (PDS) Reducing Gambling Harms (PSR) | Parks and Green Space Strategy 2022-2032 Update (PSR) Reviewing the existing Cemeteries and Crematoria Strategy (PSR) |
| Working Group Meetings | | |
| Monitoring the strategic approach to migration (PSR) – date tbc | | |
| Site Visits | | |
| | | |

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Scrutiny Work Items Key:

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| PSR | Policy/Service Review | RT | Recommendation Tracking | DB | Development Briefings |
| PDS | Pre-decision Scrutiny | PM | Performance Monitoring | C | Consultation Response |



Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) Work Schedule for 2022/2023 Municipal Year

| March | April | May |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Agenda for 2nd March 2023 at 10.30 am | No Scrutiny Board meeting | No Scrutiny Board meeting |
| Climate Emergency Update (PSR) | | |
| Working Group Meetings | | |
| | | |
| Site Visits | | |
| | | |

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Scrutiny Work Items Key:

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| PSR | Policy/Service Review | RT | Recommendation Tracking | DB | Development Briefings |
| PDS | Pre-decision Scrutiny | PM | Performance Monitoring | C | Consultation Response |

EXECUTIVE BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 27TH JULY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor J Lewis in the Chair

Councillors S Arif, D Coupar, S Golton,
M Harland, H Hayden, J Pryor, M Rafique
and F Venner

APOLOGIES: Councillor A Carter

SUBSTITUE MEMBER: Councillor A Lamb

15 Substitute Member

Under the provisions of Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rule 3.2.6, Councillors A Lamb was invited to attend the meeting on behalf of Councillor A Carter, who had submitted his apologies for absence from the meeting.

16 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no information contained within the agenda which was designated as being exempt from publication.

17 Late Items

Late Item of Business – ‘Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds’

With the agreement of the Chair, a late item of business was admitted to the agenda entitled, ‘Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds’ to be considered within the ‘Adults and Children Social Care and Health Partnerships’ portfolio. Given the significance of this matter, it was deemed appropriate for the Board to receive an update at this meeting. This report was coming to Executive Board as a late item of business to ensure that Board Members received detailed information on this issue as requested, and as undertaken by the Executive Member for Adult and Children Social Care and Health Partnerships at the recent meeting of full Council. (Minute No. 34 refers).

18 Declaration of Interests

In relation to Agenda Item 6, ‘Refreshing Leeds’ Cultural Investment Programme’, Cllr Pryor declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in this item, and as such, Councillor Pryor did not participate in the consideration of that item, and left the meeting room for the duration of that consideration. (Minute No. 20 refers).

19 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

ECONOMY, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

20 Refreshing Leeds' Cultural Investment Programme

Further to Minute No. 9, 23 June 2021, the Director of City Development submitted a report that sought approval for a one-year cultural grants programme for 2023/24 whilst a comprehensive review and refresh of the Council's current cultural funding programmes, arts@leeds and Leeds Inspired, was undertaken, prior to a revised funding programme being launched for the period 2024-27.

By way of introduction to the report, the Board received information on the key reasons as to why the proposal for a one year programme was being put forward. It was noted that the one year programme would operate within the existing budget envelope and that organisations would be required to apply for grants. However in doing so, it was emphasised that there would be an extensive application window and that organisations would be supported through this process.

Responding to an enquiry, Members received further information regarding the guidance and supportive measures which were currently available to organisations, with it being noted that consideration was being given to the ways in which cultural organisations could be signposted and supported in accessing other funding streams, where appropriate.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Board received further information and assurance regarding the role which would be played by the Leeds 2023 Neighbourhood Hosts, with it being noted that the Hosts were currently being recruited for each Ward, which was a process being undertaken by the Leeds 2023 organisation.

Also, in response to a specific enquiry officers undertook to provide the Member in question with details of the current financial position regarding the funding of the Leeds 2023 initiative.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the delivery of a one-year arts@leeds programme for 2023/24, which supports the transition towards a refreshed cultural funding programme, be approved;
- (b) That the necessary authority be delegated to Director City Development in order to enable the Director to approve funding decisions for the one year programme, 2023/24;
- (c) That the development of a refreshed three-year Culture Investment Programme for 2024-27, be approved, with the development and adoption of the Cultural Investment Programme being subject to open consultation and engagement with the sector prior to Executive Board approval being sought in 2023.

(Further to the declaration of interest as detailed at Minute No. 18, Councillor Pryor took no part in the consideration of, or voting upon this matter and left the meeting room for the duration of this item)

21 Outcome of consultation to permanently increase learning places at Leeds City Academy from September 2023

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report on a proposal to increase learning places at Leeds City Academy, brought forward by The White Rose Academies Trustees working in partnership with Leeds City Council. The report detailed the outcomes of the associated consultation undertaken and which sought agreement to related Authority to Spend proposals.

In considering the report, a Member highlighted and welcomed the popularity of the school, which had led to the submitted proposals of expansion.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the outcome of the consultation undertaken on the proposal to permanently expand Leeds City Academy from a capacity of 750 to 1050 students by increasing the admission number in year 7 from 150 to 210 with effect from September 2023, be noted; and that it also be noted that The White Rose Academies Trust Board, as the decision maker, have considered the outcome of that consultation and approved the proposal to expand Leeds City Academy;
- (b) That approval for authority to spend (ATS) up to £8.9m to deliver the proposed permanent expansion at Leeds City Academy, be granted, with final approval of expenditure being confirmed by the Director of Children and Families (in consultation with the Director of Resources and Director of City Development) following receipt of further detailed design work and planning applications;
- (c) That it be noted that The White Rose Academies Trust intends to self-deliver the build scheme and that the proposal has been brought forward in time for places to be delivered for 2023.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

22 Living with Covid - What does 'Living with Covid' mean for Leeds?

The Director of Public Health submitted a report outlining what 'Living with Covid-19' meant for Leeds, and which sought the Board's support for continuing to promote safer behaviour messaging and the Covid vaccination programme in communities. The report also highlighted the robust and resilient plans and systems in place to protect the highest risk settings and groups from the impact of Covid, and the structures that were in place to respond to any change in circumstances.

Members received an introduction to the report which provided an overview of the key points, with it being noted that work continued on the preparation and management of winter pressures in this area.

Responding to a Member's comments regarding the Council's post-pandemic ways of working and the need to ensure that customer facing roles continued, it was highlighted that many services across the Council continued to be delivered in person. Further to this, the Board was assured that work continued in liaison with Scrutiny on this matter, with a view to submitting a related report to a future Executive Board.

Emphasis was placed upon the need to ensure that the impact of the pandemic on young people remained a priority. In response, assurance was provided that this was the case and it was noted that this would be further addressed in the subsequent agenda item (*Leeds – A Mentally Healthy City: Update Report*). Further to this, assurance was provided that a key principle to the approach taken remained the need to strike the correct balance between minimising the risk from the virus and infection whilst at the same time looking to preserve an individual's overall wellbeing.

Tribute was paid to the Director of Public Health and her team for the work which had been undertaken throughout the pandemic to the present day. Emphasis was placed upon the importance of the work undertaken by the Leeds Health Protection Board together with the guiding principles of that work, and how that had been used as a platform for the wider actions taken in response to the pandemic across the city.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the submitted report, be noted;
- (b) That the proposed approach for the Leeds system going forward, as set out in section 11 of the submitted report, be approved, which looks to ensure that people are supported as we move into 'Living with Covid'.

23 Leeds - A Mentally Healthy City: Update report

The Director of Public Health submitted a report which provided an update on the current position regarding mental health in Leeds and the provision in place to support good mental health across the city. In addition, the report outlined the actions being taken to further develop a partnership approach in this area, in line with the 'Best City Ambition' and which aimed to ensure that Leeds was a Mentally Healthy City which created conditions for positive mental health in all our communities.

In introducing the submitted report, the Board received an overview of the current position in Leeds, how that position had been affected by the Covid pandemic, and the actions being taken to address the challenges faced. Members received further information on the Children and Young People's Mental Health Strategy: 'Future in Mind', and it was noted that the 'All Age Leeds Mental Health Strategy' was currently scheduled to be relaunched on 10th October 2022, which was World Mental Health Day.

Responding to a Member's enquiry, the Board was provided with further information on how the relaunch of the 'All Age Leeds Mental Health Strategy' would be promoted.

The importance of further liaison taking place with partners across the city to continue the development of self-support networks in Leeds was highlighted as an area to focus upon and promote moving forward.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the submitted report, be noted;
- (b) That the current and future challenges around promoting good mental health in the city, be recognised, together with the fact that Leeds City Council has invested in programmes of work in the city that promote good mental health and prevent mental ill health;
- (c) That the mental health work being undertaken across Leeds be promoted, with support being provided for the continued creation of conditions for positive mental health in local communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE

24 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan

The Director of Resources submitted a report which presented a range of actions being taken across the Council, and with partners, to better understand and deliver on the city's ambition to strengthen resilience against the impacts of climate change locally, and in doing so, which sought the Board's approval for the development of a Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan, based upon the approach outlined. The report also sought agreement to enhanced city-wide engagement in Leeds on the Council's activity to support both climate mitigation and adaptation.

By way of introduction to the report, the Board received an overview of the key challenges faced as a result of climate change, and the range of actions being taken to adapt to the current position and become more resilient. However, it was highlighted that at the same time, work continued on progressing towards a position of net zero emissions.

Regarding Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC), a Member noted the recent change in Chair of that committee. In response to a Member's comments encouraging Executive Member attendance at CEAC meetings, it was noted that the Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate was a member of CEAC and a regular attendee. Further to this, clarification was sought as to whether this comment related to other Executive Members.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Board received further information regarding the range of key areas which were intended to be included within the proposed programme of engagement over the coming 12 months.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the development of a Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan, based upon the approach as outlined within the submitted report, be approved;
- (b) That a programme of enhanced citywide engagement in Leeds over the next 12 months on the Council's activity to support both climate mitigation and adaptation, be supported.

COMMUNITIES

25 Understanding and addressing the cost of living crisis

The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment submitted a report providing an overview of the current position regarding the cost of living crisis and which highlighted measures being undertaken nationally to address such issues. The report also focussed upon the local approach being undertaken from a welfare and financial inclusion perspective, highlighting the key actions and programmes.

In introducing the report, the Executive Member highlighted the current position in Leeds with regard to the cost of living crisis and provided an overview of the key actions being taken and proposed to address the challenges faced.

Members discussed the role of Government in such matters. Also, the Board considered the importance of reflecting on the experience gained from the supportive approach taken during the pandemic and how that could be utilised when looking to support communities throughout the cost of living crisis.

Responding to a Member's enquiry, the Board further considered the role of the Council in this area and received details on how the supportive approach taken by the Council continued to adapt to current circumstances, and the ways in which this approach would continue to evolve, with officers undertaking to provide further detail to the Member in question, if required. In discussing the proposed key areas of focus moving forward, specific reference was made to the establishment of a cross-cutting welfare group, with further detail being provided on the intended work programme, timeframe and reporting mechanisms for that group.

In conclusion, Opposition Groups were invited to become involved in the welfare group and the associated work that it would undertake.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the submitted report, be noted, and that the approach being adopted, as outlined within the report, be endorsed;
- (b) That the next steps, as set out fully in paragraphs 94-99 of the submitted report, be endorsed, which will accelerate progress towards the mission set out in the Best City Ambition through:-

- Ensuring the three pillars of the Best City Ambition strongly and consistently reflect the challenges of tackling poverty and inequality.
 - Transitioning to a new performance framework for the Best City Ambition to reinforce and embed linkages between the three pillars in tackling poverty and inequality.
 - Establishing a breakthrough priority with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”.
- (c) That it be noted that the Chief Officer for Community Hubs, Welfare and Business Support will be responsible for overseeing and implementing the actions and recommendations as detailed above and included within the submitted report.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

26 Review of Protocol for the Roles of Members and Officers in Decision Making

The City Solicitor submitted a report setting out proposed amendments to the Council’s Protocol for the Roles of Members and Officers in Decision Making, following a review which had been undertaken as an action arising from the Annual Governance Statement approved in 2021. The purpose of the proposed amendments was to ensure that the protocol remained up to date and fit for purpose.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the amended Protocol for the Roles of Members and Officers in Decision Making, as presented at Appendix A to the submitted report, be approved;
- (b) That the authority to make future amendments to the Protocol be delegated to the City Solicitor, in consultation with the Leader of Council, Opposition Members of Executive Board and the Chief Officer Financial Services; with it being noted that the Monitoring Officer will amend Article 15 of the Council’s Constitution to reflect this resolution.

27 Annual Corporate Risk Management Report

The Director of Resources submitted a report which provided the Board with an update on the most significant risks currently featured on the Council’s corporate risk register. In addition, the report provided summary assurances which described the key controls in place to manage those risks and also provided information on further actions planned in this area.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Risk Management Report together with the assurances provided on the most significant corporate risks, as presented

within the submitted report and appendix, be noted, in line with the Council's Risk Management Policy and Strategy and the Board's overarching responsibility for their management.

28 Annual Corporate Performance Report 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report presenting the Annual Corporate Performance Report for 2021/22 which reviewed the progress made in delivering the Council's ambitions, outcomes and priorities, as set out in the Best Council Plan (BCP) during the 2021/22 financial year. The report also noted that for performance reporting purposes, 2022 would be a transitional year given that there would be a shift from existing reporting frameworks based on the Best Council Plan towards a revised approach to support the Best City Ambition.

Responding to a Member's specific enquiry, the Board received further detail on the work currently being undertaken on the refresh of the target and performance framework as the Council transitioned from the Best Council Plan to the Best City Ambition.

In response to an enquiry, the Board noted that some of the performance data compiled could be broken down to Ward level, and that the Member in question could be provided with further information on this, if required. In addition, Members discussed the range of priorities that the Council had, and the ways in which the Council's day to day decision making and establishment of wider policies linked to such priorities.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Performance Report, be received, and that the progress made during 2021/22 in delivering the ambitions and priorities set out in the Best Council Plan, as detailed within the submitted report and appendix, be noted.

RESOURCES

29 Financial Health Monitoring 2022/23 – Quarter 1 Update

The Chief Officer (Financial Services) submitted a report providing an update on the financial health of the Authority in respect of both the General Fund revenue budget and the Housing Revenue Account, as at Quarter 1 of the 2022/23 financial year.

In presenting the report, the Executive Member highlighted the key points within it. The Board also received details of the final pay offer from the National Employers which had recently been announced, and it was noted that work was being undertaken to identify the potential financial impact of this upon the Council. An undertaking was provided that the Board would be kept updated on such matters and that the intention was to submit a report on this, together with the impact of other inflationary pressures, to the September 2022 Board.

Responding to a specific enquiry, it was reiterated that an update report would be brought to Executive Board 6 months after the implementation of the

amendments made to aspects of the Council's non-residential Adult Social Care charging policy.

A Member requested that as part of the monthly financial health update report to Executive Board, further detail was provided within those reports to the current position regarding the 'Business As Usual' savings proposals.

Responding to a Member's comments, the Board received an update on the work being undertaken to manage the identified budget pressures referenced in the report within the Children and Families directorate, with specific reference to the 'Little Owls' nurseries and the provision of semi-independent living placements for 16 – 17 year olds.

In conclusion, the Executive Member for Resources highlighted the cross-directorate approach that continued to be taken when looking to manage and overcome the significant financial challenges that continued to be faced.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That it be noted that at Quarter 1 the Authority is forecasting an overspend of £1.8m for 2022/23, which is comprised of directorate pressures of £2.3m, netted down by a strategic saving of £0.5m;
- (b) That it be noted that directorates will be required to present action plans to mitigate the £2.3m pressures, in line with the Revenue Principles agreed by Executive Board in 2019, which are scheduled to be received at the September 2022 Executive Board;
- (c) That it be noted that the position as detailed within the submitted report does not reflect the potential effects of the 2022/23 pay award negotiations, other inflationary rises or the wider impact of rising cost of living pressures on the Council's financial position, above that which has already been included within the 2022/23 Budget; with it being noted that any pressures arising from emerging issues will be reported to a future Executive Board. Furthermore, it be noted that proposals will need to be identified by directorates in order to absorb such pressures, which will be included in the action plans as referenced in resolution (b) above.

30 Capital Programme 2022/23 - 2026/27 Quarter 1 Update

The Chief Officer Financial Services submitted a report setting out the Council's updated Capital Programme for 2022-2027, which was split between the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA), with a forecast of resources available over that period. The report also included a specific update on the 2022/23 programme and sought agreement to several injections into the Capital Programme, as detailed.

Responding to a Member's enquiry, the Board received details on the proportion of the Capital Programme that was funded via borrowing, and with regard to a related enquiry regarding the impact upon Minimum Revenue

Provision (MRP), officers undertook to provide this further information to the Member in question.

In response to a specific enquiry, the Board received clarification and further detail regarding the 'City Development Public Realm' entry within the 'Major Programmes & Other Directorate Schemes' section of the report.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the following injections into the Capital Programme, as detailed at Appendix A (iii) to the submitted report, be approved:-
- £2,000.0k of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Grant for the 'Fitting The Future' Housing Leeds scheme;
 - £150.0k of additional Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) Grant from WYCA for the Public Bike Hire Scheme; and
 - £100.0k of Department for Education Grant for Sustainable Drainage at two Schools in Otley.
- (b) That it be noted that the above resolution to inject funding of £2,250.0k into the Capital Programme will be implemented by the Chief Officer Financial Services;
- (c) That the latest position on the General Fund and HRA Capital Programme, as at Quarter 1 of 2022/23, as detailed within the submitted report, be noted.

ADULTS AND CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

31 Leeds City Council Fostering Service: Annual Fostering Report, April 2021 to March 2022

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report presenting an overview of the work of the Fostering Service during 2021/22, and which invited the Board to adopt the 2021/22 Fostering Service Annual Report, as appended, together with the priorities set out for the forthcoming year.

In presenting the report, the Executive Member highlighted the key points detailed within the Fostering Service Annual Report, with it being noted that attracting more foster carers remained a key priority moving forward.

Members welcomed the contents of the report, and highlighted the valuable role played by foster carers across the city.

Responding to an enquiry, the Board received further detail on the processes in place and the range of data that was available to identify the reasons why foster carers had left the Council, and how that data could be used when looking to recruit more foster carers.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the 2021/22 Fostering Service Annual Report, as appended to the submitted report, be adopted, together with the service priorities for

next year; with it being noted that this resolution will be implemented during 2022-23;

- (b) That the Fostering Service's plans to increase the range of carers and placements available, be noted and supported, with it being noted that this resolution will be implemented during 2022-23;
- (c) That it be noted that the responsible officer for such matters is the Head of Service, Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting.

32 Adults & Health Service Review 6 - Care Delivery: Care Homes, Implementation

Further to Minute No. 25, 23 June 2021, the Director of Adults and Health submitted a report providing an update on the implementation of the decommissioning of services at Home Lea House residential long stay care home, in Rothwell, and Richmond House Short Stay Residential Care Home, in Farsley.

Responding to a Member's enquiry, the Board received an update on the expected timeframe of the current refurbishment of Dolphin Manor and the management of that process in terms of the residents living there.

Regarding the site of the former Richmond House in Farsley, it was requested that officers continue to work with local Ward Councillors on the development of proposals. Also, responding to an enquiry, officers undertook to investigate whether it would be feasible for the site to be used for extra care housing, considering that an adjacent facility was used for the same purpose, and provide the findings to the relevant Members.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the successful transfer of all customers to alternative services where that was their preference, be noted;
- (b) That it be noted that the closure of both care homes has been achieved without any compulsory redundancies, with staff having made a successful transition to their new posts within the Council where they have chosen to remain in employment, a process which has been supported through the Council's Managing Staff Reductions policy;
- (c) That the achievement of financial savings of £165k in 2021/22, and £1.531m per annum from 2022/23 following the closure of the two care homes, be noted;
- (d) That it be noted that work is ongoing in relation to the future use of the sites.

(As detailed within section 34 of the submitted report, this report was not eligible for Call In on the grounds that the Council's Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rule 5.1.2 states that 'The power to Call In decisions does not extend to decisions which have been the subject of a previous Call In').

33 **Leeds Health and Care Partnership Memorandum of Understanding**

The Director of Adults and Health submitted a report which recommended to Executive Board the approval and formal sign-up to the Leeds Health and Care Partnership (LHCP) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU formally presented the approach towards working together that the Leeds Health and Care Partnership was taking to achieve the agreed vision for Leeds to be “*a healthy and caring city for all ages, where people who are the poorest will improve their health the fastest*”.

In presenting the report, the Executive Member highlighted the reference to ‘Scrutiny’ in the diagrams at section 14 of the submitted report, with a recommendation that the Memorandum of Understanding document, as presented at Appendix 1 be amended to incorporate appropriate reference to Scrutiny, in line with the illustration within those diagrams.

Responding to a Member’s comment that aspects of the approach were complex, the Board received further information on the reasons for this approach, with assurance being provided that the Council would continue to work collaboratively with partners in this area, look to maximise the benefits of this model for the people of Leeds and West Yorkshire, and that the approach taken would be made as comprehensible as possible.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That subject to the comments above regarding the inclusion of appropriate reference in the Memorandum of Understanding document to ‘Scrutiny’ being taken into consideration, the Board approves and signs up to the Leeds Health and Care Partnership Memorandum of Understanding, as presented within the submitted report and appendices;
- (b) That the draft Leeds Integrated Care Board (ICB) Committee Terms of Reference (which were approved by the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board on 1 July 2022), be noted;
- (c) That it be noted that the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out the strategic priorities in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Pillar of the new City Ambition, is due to be refreshed later in the year.

34 **Late Item of Business: Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds**

The Director of Children and Families submitted a report providing an overview of the national and regional context together with the current position in Leeds regarding Children’s Social Work Services. The report also outlined the actions being taken by Children and Families to ensure that the service was able to continue to support vulnerable children and young people to enjoy good outcomes.

In presenting the report, the Executive Member highlighted that this was a report that she had undertaken to submit to Executive Board at the recent meeting of full Council. Further to this, the Executive Member provided a

detailed summary of the key points within the report in terms of the challenges being faced in this area both on a national and local level, together with the range of actions being taken to address them. The Executive Member emphasised the crucial role played by all those involved in the outstanding delivery of children and families social work across the city which it was acknowledged was being undertaken in very challenging circumstances.

In considering the report, Councillor Lamb brought to the Board's attention that he was attending Executive Board in a non-voting capacity, whilst also being Chair of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board. Given the timing of this report's submission, he advised that he was not aware that the Board would be considering this item when agreeing to attend the Executive Board meeting, however, he emphasised that in approaching this matter he would endeavour to keep both of his respective roles in mind.

Officers responded to several questions which were put by Members. In summary, the answers provided were as follows:-

- With regard to a number of enquiries around caseload levels, assurances were provided that cases would remain open whilst it was felt that a child or family continued to require support or protection;
- Regarding the level of vacancies reported, it was noted that the vacancies existed in teams across the service;
- With regard to the approach taken towards co-working, it was confirmed that this practice continued, with the benefits of that approach being highlighted;
- Responding to an enquiry, further to the details within the report, Members received an update on the current position with regard to the grievance submitted by a group of social workers;
- The Board received an update regarding the work which was being undertaken regionally and nationally, in terms of collaborative working with other Authorities and also as part of Leeds' role to help shape the service going forward.

From a national perspective, emphasis was placed upon the need for Local Government funding structures to be reviewed, and specifically regarding Local Authority delivered children and families social care, it was highlighted that in terms of the resourcing of such services there needed to be a parity of esteem with that delivered by the NHS.

In response to a Member's comments regarding the lateness of the report, those comments were acknowledged, and the Executive Member highlighted that it had been deemed appropriate to submit the report to this meeting, following the undertaking at the recent full Council meeting and in order to demonstrate that the concerns raised were being taken seriously and to formally provide assurances in response to them.

Emphasis was placed upon the integral and highly valued role played by social workers in the safeguarding of children and young people across the city which was being undertaken under very challenging circumstances. Further to this, assurances were provided that the Council would continue to

listen to and work through the concerns that had been raised, both in the short and longer term.

Members discussed the importance of an open approach being taken when considering such important matters, which it was noted was the key factor to submitting this report to the Board as a late item of business.

In conclusion, the Executive Member reiterated the Council's appreciation for the integral role played by all those involved in the delivery of children and families social work across the city and the outstanding service that was being provided in very challenging circumstances. In addition, the Executive Member reiterated the importance of championing the services provided by children and families social care in Leeds and promoting the service as a positive place to work.

RESOLVED – That the assurances regarding the Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds, as outlined within the submitted report, be noted.

DATE OF PUBLICATION: FRIDAY, 29TH JULY 2022

**LAST DATE FOR CALL IN
OF ELIGIBLE DECISIONS:** 5.00 P.M., FRIDAY, 5TH AUGUST 2022