

Report of the Director of Communities & Environment

Report to Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources)

Date: 22 February 2018

Subject: Elections, Registrars and Land and Property Search Services Performance Report

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1. Summary of main issues

This report provides a summary of Elections, Registrars and Land and Property Search Services performance against the strategic priorities for the council and city and other performance areas relevant to the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources).

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:-

- Note the most recent performance information in this report and the issues which have been highlighted and consider if they wish to undertake further scrutiny work to support improvement over the coming year in any of these areas; and
- Consider if there is further detail in any of the areas which Scrutiny would like to be further developed in the next performance report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report presents a summary of the most recent performance data, and provides an update on progress in delivering the relevant priorities in the Best Council Plan 2015 – 20.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Members will note that the Best Council Plan (BCP) sets out the Council's key objectives and priorities. This report provides an overview of the relevant Elections, Registrars and Land and Property Search Services performance relating to this plan, enabling the Scrutiny Board to consider and challenge the council's performance.
- 2.2 This report includes three Appendices showing a summary of the most recent performance information relevant to the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources).

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The main performance information from Elections, Registrars and Land and Property Search Services is detailed below.

3.2 Elections

Members' attention is drawn to the following performance areas: -

- 3.2.1 General Election - The elections team effectively arranged a snap General Election for 8 June 2017 with 7 weeks' notice. An election of this nature normally takes around 6 months planning.

- 3.2.2 Register of Electors - Publication of the 1 December 2016 register of electors took place in accordance with regulations, and showed there were 552,864 people on the Register of Electors. This had risen to 560,303 on the 1 December 2017 publication of the Register of Electors. On 1 February 2018 this figure had increased to 570,107 due to registration applications continuing to come in after the end of the annual canvass and the late receipt of student data.

The number of people now registered is the highest Leeds has ever seen for the electorate and the postal voting arrangements.

- 3.2.3 Vote100 - Leeds has been successful in receiving funding to support projects celebrating 100 years of votes for women. The funding is from the Government Equalities office.

As part of this work a commemoration event will be held on 9th February 2018 which will be led and opened by The Leader of the Council to celebrate women getting the vote for the first time. This event will be a city wide event which will have two key themes. This will include commemoration of the Representation of the People Act 1918 which allowed women to vote for the first time. The event will also give women from the City the opportunity to discuss with key policy makers and service providers the key 'challenges' that they still face and give them the opportunity to help to shape the agenda as we move forward.

A Community Outreach programme will be developed and hosted by Women's Lives Leeds. Using the links Women's Lives Leeds has developed with small women's centred and led community groups and organisations the focus will be on reaching out to those

women and girls who are the furthest away from mainstream involvement and engagement activities, and provide activities to empower, inform and encourage them to vote in the future. Their target group is women, younger women, women with complex needs and migrant women. This will link into their existing Community Development strategy and approaches already in place. The project will provide outreach support and appropriate activities and events to target the four listed target groups. The outcomes of the project are that marginalised groups and communities of women will be more informed of the democratic system in Leeds and receive information about how to register and where to vote in the future.

3.2.4 New Software - Elections are moving to a new electoral software system in February 2018. This is to replace the current old software which is outdated and restricting working. The new software is used by over 200 local authorities and has more functionality to support the increasingly complex registration system. Training is currently taking place on this new system to ensure that the all-out elections in May go smoothly. The cost is less than the old software across the 5 year contract period.

3.2.5 Electoral Review - The Local Government Boundary Commission for England selected Leeds City Council for an electoral review due to the variations in electorate in some wards. The review was designed to achieve a balance in the number of electors per ward. There are still 33 wards, but from May there will be 3 new ward names – Headingley & Hyde Park, Hunslet & Riverside and Little London & Woodhouse. All 99 Council seats will be up for election on 3 May which must happen after ward boundaries have changed. Most of the changes in relation to the recent joint polling district and community governance review were to address ward boundary changes brought about by the Electoral Review.

3.3 Registrars

Members' attention are drawn to the following performance areas: -

3.3.1 Registration of Deaths – Whilst availability of appointments to register a death within 2 working days of customer contact has consistently been above target (target of 95% and achieved 100%), the target to register 90% of deaths within 5 days of death has not been achieved (achieved 84% in quarter 1, rising to 87% in quarters 2 and 3). Leeds compares favourably to the national performance of 80% and regional performance of 85%. It is recognised that various factors contribute to failed targets nationally, mainly customer choice (where customer chooses an appointment outside the 5 day statutory target) and delays in receiving the Medical certificate from the hospital.

To try and improve the position Leeds is: -

- Re-enforcing the 5 day target in all literature/web-site information;
- Emphasizing the need, where possible, for Contact centre staff to book appointments to meet the 5 day target, taking into account customer preference as to date/location for their appointment;
- Liaising with hospital Bereavement office to identify where delays in process may occur and to sign-post informants to quicker appointments; and
- Providing more appointments on Fridays.

3.3.2 Registration of Births - Leeds is registering 99% of births within 42 days in comparison to 98% regionally and 97% nationally. The performance target is 98%.

3.3.3. Move to Merrion – considerable preparation is taking place to ensure a smooth and efficient move to Merrion, which includes:-

- a scanning project to digitise the most regularly requested records and to improve processing efficiency (with our records repository due to be located 2 floors away);
- specifying and developing a new electronic diary and on-line forms; and
- specifying storage requirements, re-designing processes, creating additional outlets at other community hubs to provide services in additional locations.

3.4 **Land and Property Search Service (formerly Local Land Charges and Street Registry)**

Members' attention are drawn to the following performance areas: -

3.4.1 Changes to Land Registry - There is currently considerable uncertainty caused by the Land Registry's proposed takeover of part of the service. The Land Registry (LR), through the Infrastructure Act 2015 is set to take over responsibility for the Local Land Charges register (and searches). This is a national project and will involve the LR taking a copy of the register held by every local authority in England and Wales. A phased approach will be followed and it is planned to commence in Spring 2018 and be completed by Autumn 2023. Notification will be sent to the Chief Executive when the LR wish to commence the transfer. Until this point, there is no way of knowing where Leeds will be in this process. The search of the Local Land Charges Register (LLC1) will become the responsibility of LR and anyone wishing to carry one out will need to visit the LR web site (rather than LCC). The income the council will lose will be approximately £250K. The national project will aim to standardise LLC1 search reports, create a national fee and speed up search turnarounds. Unfortunately, it is believed that the project, whilst benefitting citizens nationally, will lead to higher fees and increased turnarounds for the people of Leeds. The council, along with the LGA and others, raised these concerns during the consultation period but changes have not subsequently been made

3.4.2 Local Authority Searches - The service provides local authority searches ie 'the local search' (LLC1 and Con29), which is a key component of the conveyancing process. Approximately 75% of searches relate to residential properties (the remainder to commercial sites and land). These searches are usually done at the end of the entire process so a quick turnaround is vital to ensure solicitors can complete sales.

Staff have continued to work efficiently to ensure high quality service provision. The service has a target to process 90% of searches within 3 working days, and has achieved processing 100% of local searches within an average of 2 working days throughout the first 3 quarters of 2017/18. In 2016/17 it achieved 99.8%

3.4.3 Street Gazetteer - The service also has to submit street gazetteer information on a monthly basis to GeoPlace. A Gold standard was retained, having also been achieved in 2016/17 (Silver, Bronze, At National Standard and Below National Standard being other awards). The Local Highway Authority (LCC) is responsible for maintaining the National Street Gazetteer (NSG) by producing and maintaining Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) data

and Additional Street Data (ASD). This data is used nationally in England and Wales to form a consistent national dataset with local Government and other organisations. The information is required under the New Roads and Street Works Act legislation and involves updated information being submitted monthly to Geoplace. Work is done to maintain the accuracy of the information to maintain a 'Gold Standard' – this being the top of 5 tiers of accuracy. Failing to maintain this standard would result in poor quality information being available for Leeds, and potential issues with Contractors, Statutory Undertakers and other interested bodies.

3.4.4 Service Improvement Plan - The team merged successfully with the Street Registry team in Quarter 3 and the service improvement plan (for all the services the team provides) is to be implemented in early 2018. The services covered include: Local Land Charge 1 Searches, Con29 searches (extra enquiries, which are optional depending on the property circumstances), Personal Searches, Solicitors Own Enquiries, Adopted Extent Plans, and Future projects. The key aims of the service improvement plan are to streamline working processes, allow staff to undertake all functions i.e. local land charges and street registry and free up resources for other projects e.g. historic documentation digitisation.

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1. This is an information report and as such does not need to be consulted on with the public. However all performance information is published on the council's website and is available to the public.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 This is an information report and not a decision so it is not necessary to conduct an equality impact assessment. However, some of the data provided will link to wider issues of equality and diversity and cohesion and integration, and there may be occasions when Scrutiny Board members will want to look more closely at these issues, and may request further information to inform their investigations.

4.3 Council Priorities

4.3.1 This report provides an update on progress in delivering the council priorities in line with the council's performance management framework.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 There are no specific resource implications from this report, although some performance indicators relate to financial and other value for money aspects.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 All performance information is publicly available and is published on the council website. This report is an information update providing Scrutiny with a summary of performance for the strategic priorities within its remit and as such is not subject to call in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There is a comprehensive risk management process in the Council to monitor and manage key risks. This links closely with performance management.

5 Conclusions

5.1 This report provides a summary of performance against the strategic priorities for the council and city related to the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources).

6 Recommendations

6.1 Members are recommended to: -

- Note the most recent performance information in this report and the issues which have been highlighted and consider if they wish to undertake further scrutiny work to support improvement over the coming year in any of these areas; and
- Consider if there is further detail in any of the areas which Scrutiny would like to be further developed in the next performance report.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 Best Council Plan 2015 – 20.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.