

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY, 2018

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Bentley, A Blackburn,
K Bruce, D Collins, A Gabriel, P Grahame,
R Grahame, A Khan, D Ragan, K Ritchie
and G Wilkinson

70 Late Items

There were no late items.

71 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

72 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors G Harper and M Lyons. Notification had been received that Councillor D Ragan was to substitute for Councillor G Harper and Councillor R Grahame was to substitute for Councillor M Lyons.

73 Minutes - 15th January 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2018 be approved as a correct record.

74 Matters arising from the minutes

Minute No. 64 Performance Report

Further to the issues raised last month regarding controlled access to Community Hubs, it was acknowledged that other security solutions have now been introduced within the Compton Centre, which was welcomed by Members.

Further reference was also made to tackling missed bins, with the Board emphasising the need for the service to effectively communicate any key access issues with residents and to also work with Housing Leeds to explore further opportunities for improving collections at high rise properties.

75 Update on Universal Credit

The report of the Director of Communities and Environment presented an update on Universal Credit and the implications for residents in Leeds.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Director of Communities and Environment
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access and Welfare
- Dave Roberts, Financial Inclusion Manager
- Diane Gill, Senior Policy and Development Officer, Financial Inclusion Team
- Kevin Bruce, Service Manager, Resources & Housing
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services
- Simon Betts, Relationship Manager, Department for Work & Pensions
- Alison France, Employer and Partnerships Manager, Department for Work & Pensions

The following key issues were raised:

- *Advance payments* – the Board acknowledged the positive changes introduced from 1st January 2018 in relation to Advance Payments. However, it was considered too early to measure the local impact of this particular change in procedure.
- *Full service implications* - the Board noted the extended national timetable in rolling out the full digital service of Universal Credit, which meant that Leeds will now go onto the full digital service on 10th October 2018 and not June 2018 as previously advised.
- *Impact on new claims* – in view of the number of changes announced in the Government's Autumn Budget in November 2017, it was highlighted that DWP are not allowing any new claims to Universal Credit to the current live service. This in effect reverts local authorities back to the process of Housing Benefit administration before the live service was introduced i.e. claims to legacy benefits.
- *Impact on staff resources* – it was noted that whilst there would be a steady reduction in local Universal Claimants until Leeds moves into the full service in October 2018, the service remains adequately resourced to deal with ongoing claims for legacy benefits and also in preparation for moving into the full service for Universal Credit.
- *Rent arrears* – it was noted that whilst evidence suggests that rent arrears are initially increasing for Universal Credit tenants in the first 3-4 month period of claim, the support offered to tenants by Housing Leeds is helping to address this and provide financial stability. More detailed information was sought regarding the position with rent arrears for Universal Credit tenants.
- *Proposed new criteria for Free School Meals* – the Board discussed the proposed new criteria by the Department for Education that would enable a greater number of children to benefit from free school meals compared to the number receiving these meals at present.

- *Migration phase* – it was noted that DWP are still awaiting further clarity nationally regarding this final phase of roll out which will see all remaining legacy benefit claimants migrated onto Universal Credit. This phase is expected to run from July 2019 through to March 2022.

RESOLVED – That the update report be noted.

76 Inquiry into Universal Credit - Tracking of Scrutiny recommendations

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support presented a progress update on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the previous scrutiny inquiry into Universal Credit.

However, in view of the length of time that has lapsed since the original inquiry during 2015/16 and the implications of ongoing national developments, as discussed as part of the previous agenda item, the Chair proposed that the Board assigns a progress category status of 1 (stop monitoring) to the remaining recommendations as set out in appendix 2 of the report. In doing so, it was also proposed that a general update be brought back to Scrutiny in Spring 2019 setting out the position in Leeds once full service for Universal Credit has been in place for six months.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Board assigns a progress category status of 1 (stop monitoring) to the remaining recommendations set out in appendix 2 of the report.
- (b) That a general update report be brought back to Scrutiny in Spring 2019 setting out the position in Leeds once full service for Universal Credit has been in place for six months.

77 Inquiry into reducing repeat customer contacts - Tracking of Scrutiny recommendations

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support presented a progress update on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the previous scrutiny inquiry into reducing repeat customer contacts.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Director of Communities and Environment
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access and Welfare
- Wendy Allinson, Head of Customer Access Development & Support Services
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services
- Rob Goor, Responsive Repairs Service Manager
- Andrew Cameron, Head of Council Tax and Benefits

In consideration of the progress made, a position status category was assigned to each recommendation as follows:

Recommendation 1 – (Cat 2) – Achieved
Recommendation 2 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
Recommendation 3 – (Cat 2) – Achieved
Recommendation 4 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
Recommendation 5 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
Recommendation 6 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
Recommendation 7 – (Cat 2) – Achieved
Recommendation 8 – (Cat 2) – Achieved
Recommendation 9 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
Recommendation 10 – (Cat 4) – Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the above position status categories against each of the recommendations are agreed.

78 Work Schedule

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board's work schedule for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

The Chair explained that whilst a refuse collection re-routing update is currently reflected in the work schedule for the Board's next and final meeting on Monday 12th March 2018, this remains subject to the ongoing Trade Union engagement process being completed at that stage.

RESOLVED – That subject to any on-going discussions and scheduling decisions, the Board's outline work schedule be approved.

79 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 12th March 2018 at 10.30 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.00 am)

(The meeting concluded at 11.15 am)