

Report of the Director Communities & Environment

Report to Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources)

Date: 11 February 2019

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 2018 – 2021.

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.

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 **All-out elections** - The elections team effectively arranged all-out elections to elect 99 Councillors following a ward boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). This included an innovative block vote counting method not previously adopted in Leeds which was well received by both Members and the counting staff.
- 3.2.2 **Register of Electors** - Publication of the 1 December 2017 register of electors took place in accordance with regulations, and showed there were 560,303 people on the Register of Electors. This decreased to 552,977 on the 1 December 2018 publication of the Register of Electors. On 2 January 2019 this figure has decreased slightly by 228 electors to 552,749 due to registration applications continuing to come in after the end of the annual canvass and removal over 1,000 expired overseas electors declarations.
- Due to GDPR the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is no longer able to block add students to the register using information supplied by Universities but has instead used the information to write out to each individual student inviting them to register and provide the further information we require. The response to these invitations is low and has affected the electorate as such. The ERO has now followed up these invitations with reminders.
- 3.2.3 **Vote100** - A commemoration event which was hosted by Councillor Judith Blake, Leader of the Council was held on 9th February 2018 to celebrate some women getting the vote for the first time. The event provided an opportunity for women and girls to influence established programmes of activities around women's issues in the city as well as an opportunity to directly influence service leads within the council on identified priorities for women and girls.

The findings of the discussions were incorporated into the work being undertaken by Women's Lives Leeds and the Women's Voice staff network. There were approximately 150 women at the event who come from a range of backgrounds, including, service users and service delivers and elected Members.

3.2.4 **New Software** – Electoral Services are now fully migrated to their new electoral software and have successfully carried out the all-out elections in May 2018 and the annual canvass from August – December 2018 using the new functionality.

3.2.5 **Electoral Review** - All-out elections have now been held as a consequence of the ward boundary review conducted by the LGBCE. The new boundaries and changes to the electoral register were accurately made by the Electoral Services Team and implemented in a timely manner.

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 81% in quarter 1, rising to 84% in quarter 2 and 86% in quarter 3). There has been a national dip in figures in the early part of the year, which was replicated in Leeds, and which was a continuation of a national decline over recent years. However, at 86% Leeds still 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 but much work has been done during the period to improve customer acknowledgement of the statutory target and overall performance. The following actions are continuing:

- 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;

In addition the following are also being actioned:

- Reminding community GPs about the statutory target
- Providing more appointments on Fridays and at more One stop centres.

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%. The performance target (95%) for availability of birth registration appointments has also been met – with Leeds achieving 100%.

3.3.3 **Notices of Marriage / Civil Partnership** - The performance target (95%) for availability of notice of marriage / civil partnership appointments has also been met – with Leeds achieving 98%.

3.3.4 **Appointment waiting times** – the performance target of dealing with 95% of appointments within 10 minutes has been met.

3.3.5 **Move to Merrion** – the service relocated in May 2018 with minimal disruption and has adapted well to the new surroundings although there are still some on-going accommodation issues relating to office space and affecting the customer journey. In the meantime contingency measures have been put in place to better manage the customer journey. Implementation of some key work to support the service following relocation has been delayed. These include:-

- Completing a scanning project to digitise the most regularly requested records and to improve processing efficiency. Once this is in place this will allow easier and quicker access to records;
- specifying and developing a new electronic diary and on-line forms, and it is anticipated that this will be in place before the end of March

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** As reported in the 2018 Scrutiny report there is 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 this commenced in August 2018 and is aimed to 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 99.8% of local searches within an average of 2 working days throughout the first 3 quarters of 2018/19. In 2017/18 it achieved 99.9%

Year	Number of Local Search requests	% Turnaround in 3 days
2017/18	11217	99.97
2018/19 (to end of Qtr 3)	6825	99.98

- 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 2017/18 (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** The key aims of service improvement is 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, and preparation for the transfer of the Local Land Charges Register [to Land Registry] at some point within the next few years.

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 Policies and Best Council Plan

- 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 2018 – 21.

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.