

Scrutiny Board

(Environment and Neighbourhoods)



*Cllr Barry Anderson
Chair of Scrutiny Board
(Environment and Neighbourhoods)*

Membership of the Board:

Cllr Barry Anderson (Chair)
 Cllr Christopher Beverley
 Cllr Ann Blackburn
 Cllr Debra Coupar
 Cllr Mrs Ruth Feldman
 Cllr Angela Gabriel
 Cllr David Hollingsworth
 Cllr Graham Hyde
 Cllr Richard Lewis
 Cllr Adam Ogilvie
 Cllr Linda Rhodes-Clayton
 Cllr Frank Robinson

The Chair's Summary

It has been another busy year working with the Scrutiny Board and I am pleased to present this annual report.

There is a huge remit for the Board covering two Executive Board Member portfolios, and I am grateful for the work and commitment of other Board members throughout the year. However, I feel there is still much to do and in many ways regard this report as 'work in progress'.

I am pleased with the progress of the inquiry into housing lettings and the interim report that the Board has produced – I look forward to receiving an initial response to our recommendations and monitoring progress against these. Nonetheless, like many of the Board members, I do not feel that our work in these areas is complete but I also recognise that this in itself may present a significant challenge for the Board next year. With such a wide remit will need to focus on the outcome of our efforts and think very carefully about our future work programme, placing a higher priority on those areas we wish to examine in more detail.

I am equally pleased with the work we have done around the Council's own CO₂ emissions, but also feel somewhat frustrated that, as a Board, we have not achieved more in this area. Perhaps this reflects the importance of establishing realistic priorities at the beginning of the year and maintaining that focus as the year progresses.

I am grateful to Councillor Les Carter and Councillor Steve Smith, both Executive Board Members, who have attended the Board on more than one occasion this year and discussed a number of key issues facing the Council.

I was particularly heartened by the discussion with Councillor Les Carter, which led to the Board undertaking its inquiry into housing lettings. I feel this provides a good example of the benefits to be had when Scrutiny and the Executive work collaboratively to identify a policy area that will benefit from some detailed examination by a cross-party group of local councillors. I am sure that I reflect the views of other Board members when stating that I truly hope the recommendations we have identified help to address some of the housing pressures across the City.

Finally, it has been an honour to Chair the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) during the current year and I am extremely grateful to my fellow Board members, officers, and other witnesses who have contributed to the work of the Board and shown a true committed to improving services for the residents of Leeds.

Councillor Barry Anderson
Chair of Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods)

DRAFT

Inquiry into Housing Lettings Pressure



A Council Property

As members of the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods), we have been extremely keen to ensure that Housing remains a priority area throughout 2007/08. In June 2007, as part of the Board's initial work planning discussion, we identified a number of potential issues to be considered in detail throughout the year and following a further discussion with the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing, it was suggested to us that we could usefully undertake an inquiry which examined the Council's current Housing Lettings Policy, including the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

We were aware that a number of issues were currently having an impact upon the Council's Lettings Policy in general and we were eager to understand these in more detail. Therefore, we agreed to the suggestion of the Executive Board Member.

We recognised that there are some significant difficulties and challenges facing the City Council and its partners in this regard, but we wanted to understand more about the overall factors affecting the supply and demand for Council Housing in Leeds, while maintaining a focus around Local Lettings Policies and the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

The inquiry consisted of three dedicated sessions, where we received, considered and discussed evidence from a range of different sources, including the Strategic Landlord and representatives from each of the three Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and the Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation (BITMO) – as these organisations are responsible for interpreting, implementing and administering the Council's Lettings Policy. We believed this approach to be a fundamental element to this inquiry, helping to ensure it was undertaken in a comprehensive manner.

Main recommendation

To be confirmed

Other recommendations were:

- ***To be confirmed***

In December 2007, we wrote to Yvette Cooper MP, the then Government Minister for Housing, inviting her to meet with us and discuss the national context for Housing, how this impacted locally and any areas for future development. However, primarily due to a ministerial reshuffle, we were unable to secure a convenient date for such a discussion. Nonetheless, in March 2008, the Chair of the Board, was able to secure a meeting with a Civil Servant from Communities and Local Government to discuss some emerging themes from the inquiry.

The Chair also met with the Council's Deputy Chief Environmental Health Officer to discuss some additional matters raised during the third session, namely Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and Selective Licensing. However, we have not discussed this in any detail and, therefore, these remain areas of particular interest that we may wish to revisit sometime during the new municipal year in 2008/09.



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Inquiry into CO₂ Emissions



There is now near universal acceptance by world governments that climate change is occurring as a result of man-made greenhouse gas emissions. Previously, the drive for reducing the levels of carbon emissions has come from a small, but growing, number of committed individuals. However, it is increasingly recognised that local councils are uniquely placed to provide leadership, raise awareness and influence behaviours and councils are now recognising that systemic changes locally can have a significant contribution on the level of carbon emissions in general. It is also recognised that action by local councils is crucial to the achievement of the Government's climate change objectives.

As such, in September 2007, we included an inquiry into the Council's Climate Change agenda on our work programme. However, given the potential breadth of this topic, we agreed that the inquiry should initially focus on the Council's own CO₂ emissions.



CO₂ emissions impact on climate change

Insert summary of the agreed statement

Presentations and reports

During the course of the year, we received and considered a number of reports and presentations covering various aspects within our remit. Such items helped us fulfil our monitoring and review role and included the following areas:

Safer Leeds

Early in the year, we considered the Safer Leeds 2006/07 Annual Performance Report, which detailed progress made towards the 2005-2008 strategy. Later in the year we welcomed Councillor Les Carter in his capacity as Chair of the Safer Leeds Board, when we considered the draft Safer Leeds Partnership Plan (2008 – 2011), which set out the Partnership's proposed priorities and targets



for 2008-2011. During this discussion, we identified a number of issues, namely around prostitution and domestic violence, to be considered as part of the further development of the Plan. We also queried whether the expected reduction in funding would impact on the delivery of the priorities.

Integrated Waste Strategy for Leeds



Kerbside recycling in Leeds

Throughout the year, we have considered a number of areas relating to the issue of waste across the City, including the Council's approach to recycling and its recycling targets, the role of the voluntary and community sector in helping to deliver the waste strategy, the issue of garden waste and progress of the Leeds Waste Solution project.

As part of this work we heard from a range of community group organisations currently operating in various part of the City, including the Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store – an organisation which collects unwanted furniture and redistributes this socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and families. The organisation not only provides a useful service to some of the most disadvantaged people in the City, it also diverts a significant amount of furniture that might otherwise be sent to landfill.



Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store

We also heard from Seagulls – an organisation that collects surplus paint and redistributes this to various community groups and people on low incomes – thus reducing the level of hazardous material requiring disposal.



Community RePaint Leeds

Leeds Organic Growers (LOGs) is another local enterprise we spoke to. LOGs is currently seeking to establish a green garden waste kerbside collection service for households in the Kirkstall and Weetwood areas of the City. We heard that such waste will then be composted, sieved and graded. Bagged compost will be available for sale to scheme members and the general public.



Leeds Organic Growers

We welcomed the input from the various organisations that we spoke to and look forward to their continued involvement in helping to deliver the integrated waste strategy for Leeds.

Pest Control

Arising from discussions with the Executive Board Member with the responsibility for Environmental Services, we requested a report detailing the current arrangements for dealing with vermin and other pests across the City. We were presented with the following information:



A brown rat



A house mouse



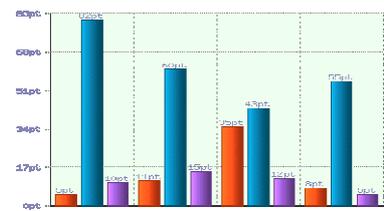
A wasps nest

- The Council's primary legal obligations in relation to pest control;
- Performance trends relating to requests for pest control services;
- A summary of the pest control service in Leeds;
- An outline of the recently established partnership arrangement between the Council and Rentokil, to provide the reactive domestic pest control service, including current performance levels;
- Details of opportunities to reduce the rodent population in Leeds.

Later in the year, we agreed to invite representatives from Rentokil to attend a future meeting of the Board (in the new municipal year) to discuss performance issues and the operation of the new arrangements with the Council. We hope this will help us take a broader view of the new arrangements and the approach to pest management.

Performance Reports

Over the course of the we have considered detailed performance reports on a regular basis. Using a suite of performance indicators, these reports have helped to provide us with a very good overview of performance and highlight those areas where there is room for improvement. Using the information provided



Monitoring performance is a key role

we identified a number of areas where performance was not meeting the targets set and questioned the Director on the underlying reasons for any apparent under-performance, or where there were concerns regarding the quality of the data systems used to produce the information. This also helped us identify issues on which we wanted further and more detailed information, such as:



Dealing with abandoned vehicles in Leeds

- Vacant homes and re-let times;
- Dealing with abandoned vehicles;
- Progress in achieving housing decency standards

However, while the focus of the Board has tended to be on those areas where performance has been below target, we feel it is equally important to recognise and acknowledge those areas where performance has been good and targets met.

The Board's full work programme 2007/08

Main Inquiries

- Lettings pressures
- Inquiry into the Council's role in reducing CO2 emissions

Previous Inquiries – Formal responses and update reports

- Monitoring of recommendations – Anti Social Behaviour
- Monitoring of recommendations – Affordable Housing
- Inquiry into Regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck – Formal Responses to Recommendations

Other

- Performance Report Quarter 4 2006/07
- Performance Report Quarter 1 2007/08
- Performance Report Quarter 2 2007/08
- Performance Report Quarter 3 2007/08
- Members' questions
- Safer Leeds 2006/07 Annual Performance Report
- Recycling Strategy
- Consultation on Strategic Outcomes and Improvement Priorities for the Leeds Strategic Plan
- Voids and Empty Properties Update
- Street Cleansing and Britain's Cleanest City Award Update
- Outcomes of Research into the Housing Market in Leeds
- Rodent Control in Leeds
- Integrated Waste Strategy – Waste Solution for Leeds
- Budgetary Issues and Considerations – Environment and Neighbourhoods
- Integrated Waste Strategy – The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Safer Leeds Partnership Plan