

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, A Blackburn,
D Collins, P Grahame, K Brooks, T Smith,
C Howley, K Ritchie, R Charwood and
M Midgley

52 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

53 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

54 Late Items

There were no formal late items.

55 Declaration of Interests

No interests were made at the meeting.

56 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Gabriel and Ragan.

57 Minutes - 20 January 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held 20th January 2022, be approved as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

In relation to Minute No.45 – Performance Monitoring, Board Members requested an update on:

- Parking permit schemes. It was noted that a response from the service has been received and will be re-circulated to all members.

58 Standards in the Private Rented Sector

The report of the Head of Service Private Sector Housing provides Board Members with an update on key areas of Private Sector Housing activity during the last 12 months.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Steve Rowley, Landlord Representative
- Mark Ireland, Head of Private Rented Sector

The Chair emphasised the importance of ensuring landlords are responsible, and legislatively compliant, and that there is sufficient investment in PRS properties, to ensure the wellbeing of tenants.

The Head of Private Rented Sector (PRS) introduced the report, and provided a presentation that highlighted the following information:

- The PRS makes up 20% of tenure in the city and is mainly found in pre 1919 stock.
- The accommodation in Leeds is considered good quality accommodation
- Inner-city areas have seen the biggest increase in the PRS, and the poorest quality accommodation is also in inner city areas.
- The aim is to ensure everyone has good quality homes. The Council is working with landlords and continuing to develop the Leeds Rental Standards. The council will also target landlords who fail to meet their legal obligations and will carry out formal action where appropriate.
- An overview on Leeds Rental Standard.
- Physical inspections have been affected by Covid-19, and guidance has largely been provided remotely during the pandemic period. Inspections re-commenced in March 2021.
- 3,000 HMOs are licenced at any one time, and it is coming up to the period of renewals for mandatory licensing. Conditions around ASB are currently being consulted upon and poor standard HMOs are being targeted.
- Rogue landlord unit – targeting criminal landlords in partnership with West Yorkshire Police and sharing intelligence to improve outcomes.
- Leeds Neighbourhood Approach has targeted properties in Holbeck, and provided support in Harehills and Beeston. A holistic approach ensures that residents can access a range of services including employment support alongside ensuring rental standards.
- Selective Licensing area was designated in January 2020. 6309 applications were received, 4530 final licences issued. Proactive inspections ensure people are complying with selective licence.
- It is estimated 500-600 properties remain unlicensed, 62 Civic Penalty Notices have been paid, a further 129 are currently being investigated and 132 are awaiting investigation.
- Homelessness prevention – additional support has been provided to landlords who have assisted the Council in boosting its supply of emergency accommodation for homeless citizens in Leeds. Since March this approach has helped deliver 334 new tenancies
- Concern was expressed about a perceived increase in empty homes in the city centre and student markets.
- Government White Paper – the Council is awaiting further detail on the implications of the Levelling Up white paper, which may affect the private rented sector. There have been indications that further detail

may relate to creating minimum standards, introducing a national landlords register and expanding decency standards to all tenures.

In responding to questions from Members, the following information was highlighted:

- Selective Licensing – clarification was provided about the process of developing a business case around strict criteria where there is a desire to identify an area for selective licensing. Most board members were keen to see the approach expanded into other areas of the city.
- The cost associated with Selective Licences is £825 per property, over a 5-year period. It was noted that accredited landlords signed up to Leeds Rental Standard are offered a £150 discount on licences.
- Consultation has been undertaken with community groups, social media, and hubs. There are no specific tenant groups and associations that are targeted through the consultation process due to the diverse nature of the market.
- Clarity was provided in relation to the application of mandatory conditions for Selective Licences and the weight applied to such conditions when providing evidence to be able to legally remove a licence from a landlord.
- It was acknowledged that some issues relating to fly-tipping and waste, were due to some landlords not understanding where to report issues and further work is required to educate tenants about their behaviour and responsibilities. Members were informed that landlords who are part of Leeds Rental Standard can receive some benefits in terms of depositing waste Household Waste Centres. Leeds Rental Standard is not a Council led scheme; however, the Council promote and encourage accredited landlords to join.
- In response to concerns regarding minimum standards for Permitted Development conversions, the Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate confirmed that a document has been produced on Purpose Built Student Accommodation and HMOs and consultation is expected to take place shortly. Confirmation on the progress of this will be provided in due course.
- Section 21 notices allow landlords to evict tenants without reasons on the notice. It was acknowledged that the Governments White Paper seeks to replace Section 21 notices, and proposals in relation to this are yet to be confirmed.
- Tenants can be moved into properties, prior to a Selective Licence being issued.
- Properties with a licence are inspected at least once. However, where this is intelligence on a property or specific issues, inspections will be carried out more regularly.
- Fee income generation from Selective Licensing and mandatory HMO licencing covers the cost of administering and ensuring compliance of schemes and the fee cannot be used to inspect properties / enforcement. It was noted that income from civic penalties introduced by the Government, allow the Council to retain income and use this for enforcement within the PRS and pay additional legal resources.

- HMOs are targeted based on intelligence, and it is recognised that a number of properties fall below the criteria for mandatory HMO licences.

The Chair thanked those in attendance and reiterated the valuable input of services to improve the PRS.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the contents of the report, and comments made during discussion of this item.
- b) To note the progress made across the service on housing activity over the last 12 months.

59 LeedsWatch Update

The report of the Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities provided an update on the implementation of the new model of working at LeedsWatch and a progress report in respect of the implementation of recommendations made by the Review Team.

Appended to the submitted report were the LeedsWatch New Models of Working report, LeedsWatch Structures and Effective Services to the Public – Keeping People Safe & Feeling Safe.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Stronger Communities
- Zahid Butt, LeedsWatch Service Manager
- Sharon Coates, Service Improvement Manager
- Elizabeth Jarmin, Head of Locality Partnerships

The Chief Officer Safer, Stronger Communities introduced the report and provided an introductory presentation. The following information was highlighted:

- An overview of all the services LeedsWatch manage. It was noted that all services run 7 days a week and are based at Middleton.
- The main aim of the review is to improve the working environment within LeedsWatch and to ensure services work efficiently.
- Scope of the initial 2021 review: to consider new service delivery models to ensure a structure which is scalable and fit for purpose, and one that will also allow a better work life balance for employees.
- Staff engagement and working groups were undertaken with key stakeholders to explore different options for service delivery.
- The introduction of a new service delivery model that includes Multi-functional Response Officers, Multi-Functional Control Room Officers and the introduction of a triage and deployment function. This has increased the flexibility and capacity of the service.
- The new model involved the introduction of enhanced service delivery support including the creation of Performance and Relationships Team and standardisation and streamlining of processes.

- An overview of case studies was appended to the submitted report and an example from one of these was highlighted to show early intervention and prevention of crimes.

In responding to questions from Members, the following information was highlighted:

- Patrols of parks and greenspaces are undertaken by foot and aim to reach all parks in Leeds at least once per day, with bigger parks receiving more visits.
- Further work around engagement with Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs) will be undertaken, particularly around CCTV hotspots.
- Members referred to information provided as part of Community Committee updates and requested that further information be provided on a regular basis to illustrate ward activity. Officers agreed to work with members to develop a format of reporting that better meets the needs of community committees. Further to this, the Head of Locality Partnerships confirmed that further work to strengthen roles of Community Safety Champions will be considered.
- Engagement with staff on the new model of service delivery, is an on-going process. The new model of working is coming up to its 6-month milestone and officers will therefore be looking again at feedback from staff.
- CCTV footage is provided to West Yorkshire Police (WYP) daily, and LeedsWatch deal with approximately 50 requests per day. It was noted that there is a liaison officer to inform NPTs of CCTV in their area.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and requested that a document be provided setting out workstreams within LeedsWatch, as well as contact details for the service.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the contents of the report, together with members comments.
- b) To note the progress of implementation on the new model of working implemented by LeedsWatch.

60 Climate Change Update

The report of the Director of Resources sets out the annual review of the work undertaken in response to the declaration of a Climate Emergency in March 2019.

Appended to the submitted report was the Energy Strategy and Action Plan and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Hayden, Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate
- Councillor Walshaw, Chair of CEAC
Neil Evans, Director Resources
- Polly Cook, Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Air Quality

The Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Air Quality introduced the report, and provided the Board with an introductory presentation that highlighted the following:

- The Climate Emergency Annual Report has recently been published, as well as the Net Zero: Build Back Greener.
- An overview of activity in 2021, including the expansion of district heating, significant retrofitting of the Council's estate, the creation of new green jobs and the number of skills events being held in the city, as well as tree planting across the Council's estate.
- It was acknowledged that the costs associated with such projects are high but it was further noted that there will be an economic impact if projects are not carried out.
- An overview of the Energy Strategy.
- Developing new guidance to ensure that new homes are more resilient to climate change and that place making reflects the increased likelihood of extreme events such as flooding.
- The Council has committed to buy and source food locally and to reduce the carbon footprint of meals served by 2030. It was confirmed that the consultation on the draft food strategy is expected in Autumn.
- There are challenges surrounding the eligibility criteria for homeowners seeking funds through the Green Home Grants. The Government is being consulted on the criteria.
- Transport targets for modal shifts include increasing rail travel by 100%, cycling by 400%, bus use by 130%, walking by 33% and decreasing car travel by 30%.
- Work with businesses and communities to highlight the co-benefits of climate action and to promote financial and non-financial support.
- An update on the workstreams of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and its Working Groups: food and biodiversity, planning, energy and buildings, transport and behaviour change and finance.

Members discussed the following matters:

- Concerns with the challenging modal shift targets and uptake with electric vehicles.
- Clarity on the proposals to use the district heating system in greenhouses to produce fruits, vegetables, and flowers. It was confirmed that a feasibility study has been completed with partners to present low carbon growing in the city.
- The importance of visible role models was discussed in relation to positive, individual action on climate change. However, in the case of transport it was acknowledged that there are financial barriers for most households while the cost of electric vehicles remains high and public transport provision inconsistent, particularly in rural areas.
- In discussing a matter relating to gully cleansing, it was confirmed that the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Board will be informed to consider this as part of their remit.

The Chair thanked those in attendance.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the contents of the report and comments made during discussions.
- b) To note the annual review of the work undertaken.

Councillor K Brooks left the meeting at 13:00, during discussion of this item.

61 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services introduced the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2021/22 municipal year. Appended to the report included the Executive Board minutes from the meeting held 9 February 2022, as well as a summary of the working group discussion about tree maintenance and a summary of the working group discussion about the Housing Strategy Review.

Members agreed the wording contained in the summaries for both working groups.

RESOLVED –

- a) To note the contents of the report and the work schedule for the remainder of the municipal year.
- b) To note the Executive Board minutes appended to the submitted report as well as both summaries of the working group discussions on tree maintenance and the Housing Strategy Review.

62 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting as 31st March 2022 at 10.30am with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 10.00am.

The meeting concluded at 13:05.