

2023/24 Scrutiny Annual Report

This report updates Council on how the authority has carried out its overview and scrutiny functions during the 2023/24 municipal year.



Foreword

This Annual Report reflects the breadth of subjects explored by our Scrutiny Boards during the last year. We all want to thank the members of all our boards for their commitment and hard work. Almost 70% of non-executive councillors are a member of at least one Scrutiny Board. Together they provide 'check and challenge' for decision makers with the ultimate aim of improving public services for local people.

We also want to thank the Council officers, Executive Members and partners who have engaged with our Scrutiny Boards and shared their experience, advice and expertise.

The context for the work of the Scrutiny Boards has been challenging with rising demand pressures for our own and partner organisations, and a tough financial environment. Through our work we have explored some very difficult choices for service providers and service users. However, we have also seen examples of innovative co-production of services and effective partnership arrangements.

Looking to the year ahead—and the likelihood of further difficult decisions for our organisation—we recommend that Scrutiny Boards are engaged in a higher degree of 'pre decision scrutiny,' which is where scrutiny members can add most value and influence positive change. Continuing to recognise, and value, the input of scrutiny will lead to better decision making by the organisation as a whole.

We wish our successor boards the very best for 2024/25.



Cllr Dan Cohen



**Cllr Stewart
Golton**



**Cllr Abigail
Marshall-Katung**



Cllr Asghar Khan



**Cllr Andrew
Scopes**

Thank you to all Scrutiny Board members for your work over the last year. Through their examination of varied issues, our Scrutiny Boards have helped to ensure that Council decision-making remains transparent and accessible to the public.

Our Scrutiny Boards perform a vital role by working alongside Executive Members in a cross-party way to ensure decisions made within our organisation are the right ones for the city of Leeds and that issues needing additional focus are brought to the fore. The proactive work undertaken by Scrutiny Boards makes a positive difference and their value is recognised by the Executive Board. Scrutiny is an essential part of our democracy.

The current landscape of local government has demonstrated the importance of strong governance in order to create resilient organisations. Supporting effective scrutiny within our Council is a significant part of our governance framework and the Executive Board is keen to retain a positive culture in which that work can take place.

I have particularly welcomed Scrutiny's engagement with the budget setting process in what has been another exceptionally challenging year financially. There are undoubtedly further challenges ahead and I agree with Scrutiny Chairs that more pre-decision scrutiny over the coming year would offer a constructive approach to navigating some of the extremely difficult decisions we will have to take.

Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources



Scrutiny Arrangements 2023/24

This Annual Report provides a summary of work undertaken by Leeds City Council's Scrutiny function in 2023/24. It includes highlights from the work of each of the five Scrutiny Boards.

As set out in the Council's '[Vision for Scrutiny](#),' the service continues to support members in carrying out public scrutiny that is focused on driving improvement in public services in accordance with the nationally agreed four principles of effective scrutiny.

Context of Financial Challenge

The work of the Scrutiny Boards has inevitably been set within the context of increasingly challenging financial circumstances for Leeds City Council. As a result, all Scrutiny Boards have prioritised their activities on the basis of where their work can best add value in line with the aspirations set out in the Best City Ambition.

Capturing the 'Lived Experience' of Leeds Citizens

During 2023/24 Scrutiny members have sought to better capture the 'lived experience' of Leeds citizens to strengthen their understanding of complex issues affecting local communities. Members of the public and the voluntary sector have brought valuable qualitative insight to Scrutiny's consideration of matters including access to dental care; support for families seeking an education, health and care plan; progress towards eliminating road deaths; services for social housing tenants; and the Council's approach as an employer to equality, diversity and inclusion.

End of Year Summaries

While this report provides the highlights of work carried out in 2023/24, each Scrutiny Board has also produced an end of year summary, which provides full detail of their work programmes. These can be found on the [Scrutiny at Leeds](#) webpage.

SCRUTINY BOARD	 Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles	 Children and Families	 Environment, Housing and Communities	 Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth	 Strategy and Resources
SCRUTINY CHAIR	 Cllr A Scopes	 Cllr D Cohen	 Cllr S Golton	 Cllr A Marshall- Katung	 Cllr A Khan
COUNCILLORS	 11	 14	 13	 13	 11
CO-OPTED MEMBERS	 1	 8			

Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

44 Public
Scrutiny Board
Meetings



16 Working
Groups



2 Site Visits



62 non-
executive
Councillors



9 Co-Opted
Members



‘Call-in’ provides a mechanism for councillors to initiate a pause in a decision making process—to ‘call in’ for examination an executive or key decision that has been made but not yet implemented. While not used frequently, call-in provides a tool for scrutiny to influence decision making. Three call-ins have been initiated by non-executive members this year with additional meetings arranged to consider the requests. All decisions were released for implementation after review by the relevant Scrutiny Board.

1. [Active Travel Fund A660](#)
2. [Six High Rise and Resident Rehousing](#)
3. [Lawnswood Roundabout Improvement Scheme](#)



Partnership Working

Scrutiny members are mindful of the fact that partners are involved with the majority of Council services, activities and intervention programmes. The way in which citizens therefore experience local services is often influenced by partnership dynamics.

During 2023/24 representatives from more than 45 external organisations have agreed to engage with our Scrutiny Boards to share their experience and knowledge. This has included statutory, contracted and commissioned partners, other public bodies and commercial organisations.



Next Steps

Closer relationships with academics at the University of Leeds have been explored during 2023/24 with a view to enhancing the evidence considered by Scrutiny Boards in Leeds. In addition, having reflected on the work of the last 12 months, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board has set out an ambition to directly capture the voices of young people more frequently in the year ahead.

Collaborative Activity

Regional Health Scrutiny

The West Yorkshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) has continued to enhance the collaboration between local authority health scrutiny functions across West Yorkshire. The JHOSC met on four occasions this year and considered a wide range of issues, including details of the West Yorkshire Urgent Care Service Review; Dentistry and Oral Health in West Yorkshire; West Yorkshire Winter Planning for 2023/24; Non-surgical Oncology; Workforce Priorities; Harmonisation of commissioning policies; and Health Inequalities and Prevention.

Support for the management and administration of the JHOSC this year has been provided by both Calderdale Council and Kirklees Council, with Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Kirklees Council) elected as Chair for 2023/24. Further details surrounding the membership and work of the JHOSC can now be accessed via the [Kirklees Council website](#).

Budget

In September 2023 the Scrutiny Boards received a joint briefing from senior officers about the financial challenges facing the Council. This provided context for the subsequent examination by individual Scrutiny Boards of the budget proposals relating to their respective remits.

All Boards considered the Proposed Budget 2024/25 during the January 2024 cycle of public meetings. Prior to this, Executive Members and senior officers attended working group sessions with each Scrutiny Board in December 2023.

The conclusions and recommendations of the consultation with scrutiny were reported to the [Executive Board in February 2024](#).

Case Study

Closer collaboration with NHS partners on financial planning

Adults, Health & Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board

Embracing a more integrated approach with health partners to maximise resources



The Scrutiny Board (Adults, Health and Active Lifestyles) has a special responsibility to fulfil the council's statutory health scrutiny function, including the remit for reviewing and scrutinising any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of local health services. This may also involve scrutinising the finances of local health services.

With the establishment of statutory Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) being tasked to lead the integration of health and care services across their areas, a more integrated approach to the Scrutiny Board's Budget consultation process was newly adopted and welcomed this year.

The Board's budget working group meeting in December included an initial briefing on the financial position of the Leeds Place of the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and in context of the wider Leeds and West Yorkshire NHS systems. A subsequent briefing on the financial plan for 2024-2025 was also provided. This approach enabled Members to consider how NHS partners are working collaboratively with the Council to maximise resources and ensure implications of decisions are understood and, where possible, mitigated both for partners and citizens.

Case Study

Leeds Parent Carer Forum -
EHCP Scrutiny Inquiry

Children & Families Scrutiny Board

*Enabling the voice and the
concerns of the public to be
heard.*



'A crucial element of the Children and Families Board's inquiry work on the provision of EHCP support in Leeds was effective and meaningful engagement with stakeholders on their lived experiences accessing EHCP support in the city. Given the centrality of stakeholder feedback to the work, the Board requested a dedicated working group to hear from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum (LPCF) about the challenges they have faced when seeking to get an EHCP for their children. The Working Group took place on 23 November 2023 and featured attendance from the LPCF Steering Group who were able to share both their own personal lived experiences but also those of their wider membership to help the Board understand the problems faced at a time when children and families are often at their most vulnerable and seeking assistance with appropriate school placements for their children and young people. This stakeholder engagement was a significant milestone in the inquiry and much of the feedback on lived experience was important evidence when the Board came to formulating their recommendations.'

On [12 October 2023](#) the Scrutiny Board considered the current approach to designing parks and greenspaces, with a particular focus on 'access for all' and the safety of women and girls.

The work of the Scrutiny Board was informed by research carried out by the University of Leeds on behalf of West Yorkshire Combined Authority in relation to the safety of women and girls in parks. Representatives from both organisations attended the Scrutiny Board to provide further insight into their research and the practical application of the guidance that emerged from it.

The Scrutiny Board subsequently made 7 recommendations to the Council's Executive. This included members recommending officers revisit equality impact assessments where there are changes to the way in which natural features are maintained, in order to seek assurances that new practices do not inadvertently create barriers to access. It was recommended that this process should include capturing the lived experience of park users, including women and girls, and those with disabilities.

Case Study

Capturing lived experience to
ensure access for all to parks
and greenspaces.

Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board

*Providing 'critical friend'
challenge to executive policy
makers and decision makers*



In [November 2023](#) the Scrutiny Board brought together representatives from the Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, First Bus, Arriva, Transdev, the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK and Unite the Union.

Given public concern about the future of bus services in Leeds, members aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities facing the sector post pandemic.

This included examining new trends in patronage and bus revenue, as well as the way in which changes to the bus network impact upon connections to sites of employment and education for disadvantaged communities.

Issues relating to network design, technological integration, punctuality, emission reduction targets and staff retention were all examined.

Members also considered the potential implications of proposals for bus reform—including the differences between franchising and an enhanced partnership model.

Case Study

Advancing bus provision in Leeds

Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board

Bringing stakeholders together on issues of public concern to provide recommendations for improvement.



Case Study

Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion — staff networks

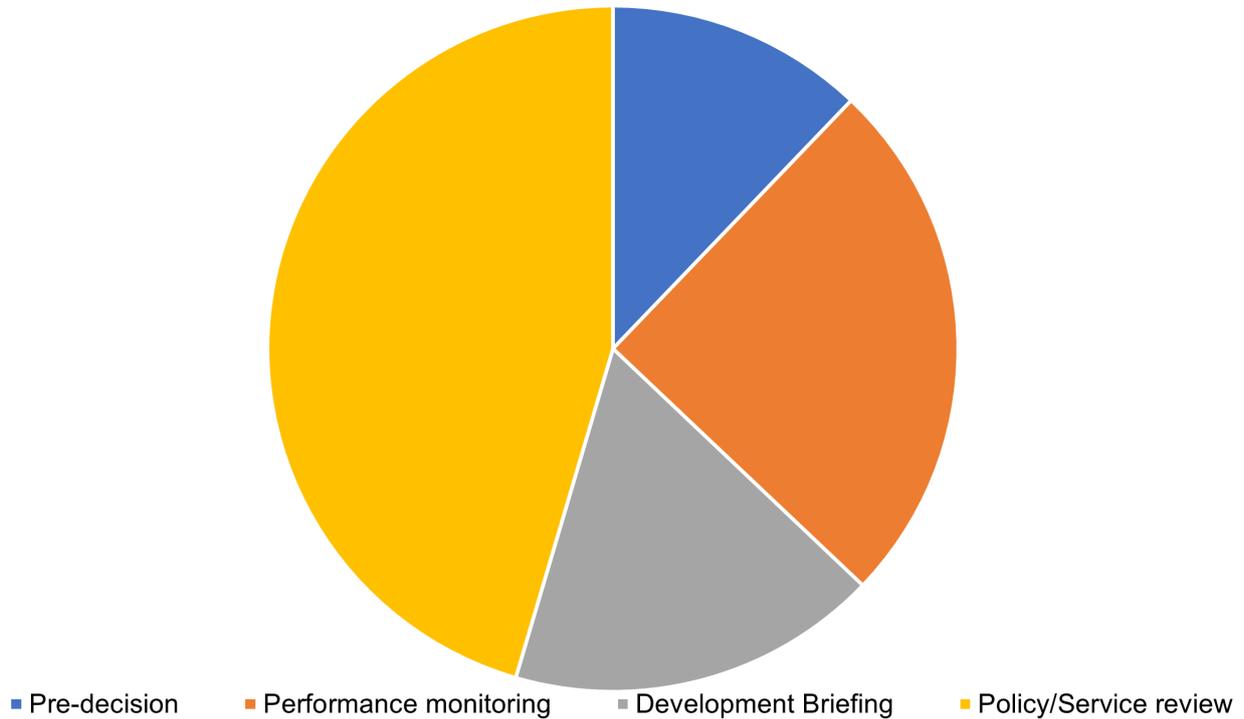
Supporting organisational improvements to strengthen decision making.



Over recent years, the Council has initiated work to strengthen organisational values and behaviours and as part of that has developed and implemented a refreshed approach to workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) with a key aim to support everyone to be their best in the workplace and a commitment to treat people fairly. In support of this work the Strategy and Resources Board has considered a number of items on EDI which has also included attendance from the Council's staff networks to provide direct feedback on the Council's work in this area and to enable to the Board to use those lived experiences to inform a scrutiny statement setting out recommendations to contribute to decision making and policy. This statement will be considered by the Executive Board in the 2024/25 municipal year and showcases the role scrutiny can play in widening the number of voices heard through engagement with stakeholders which will contribute to strengthening the decision making process.

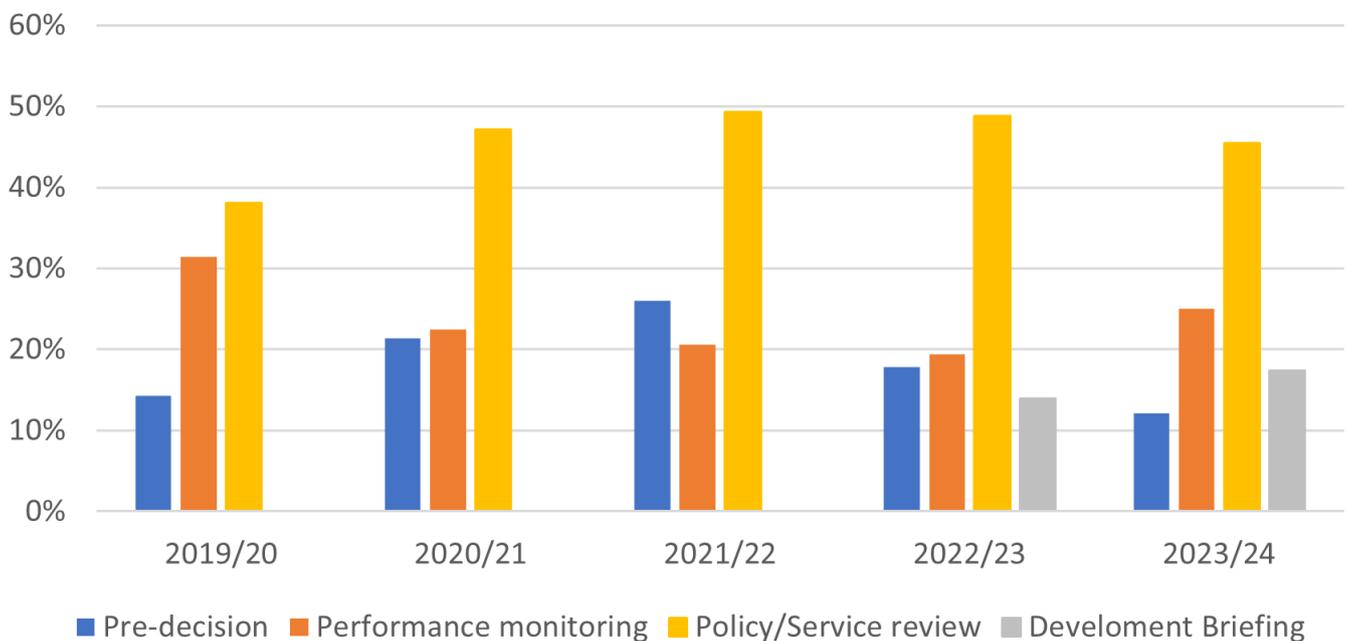
Scrutiny Activity 2023/24

Categories of Substantive Agenda Items 2023/24



132 items at public meetings 2023/24

Categories of Work As a Percentage of Total Items

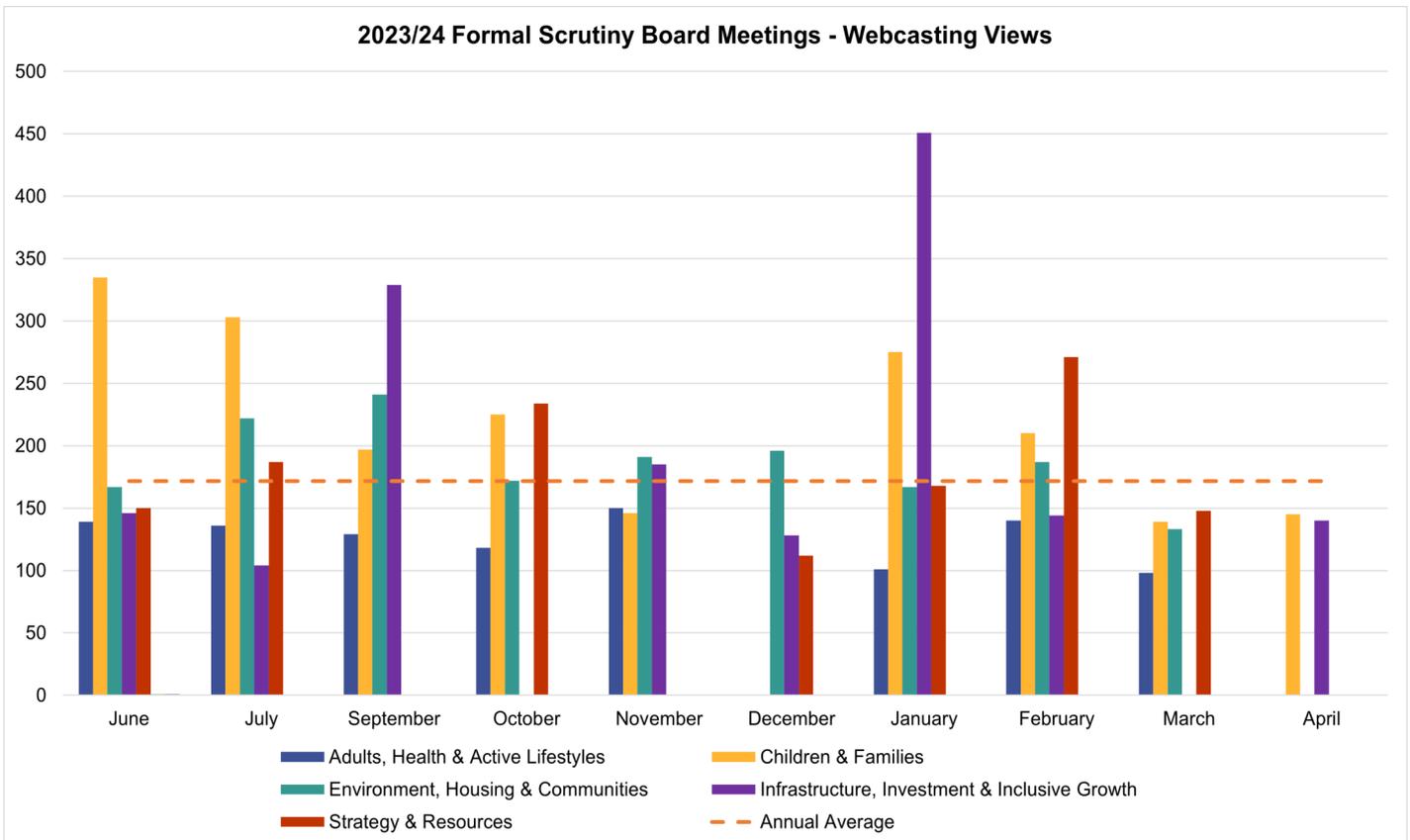
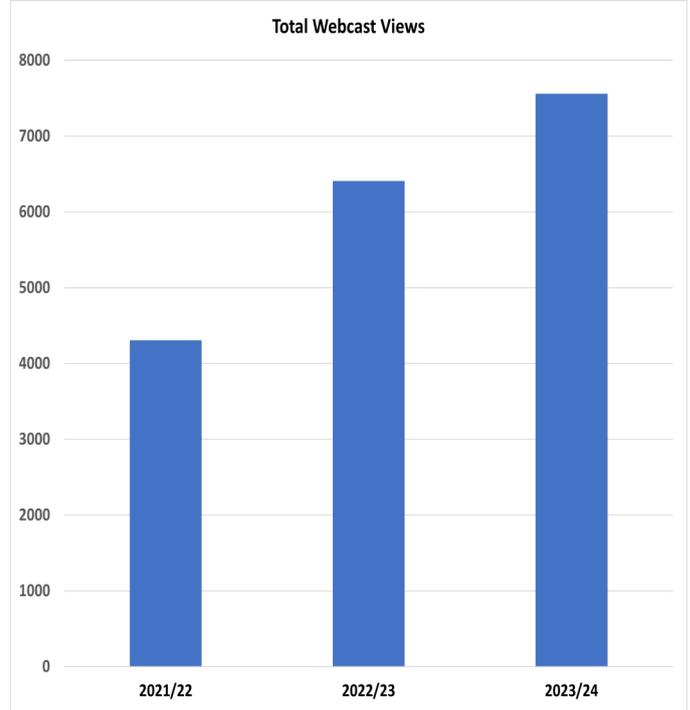
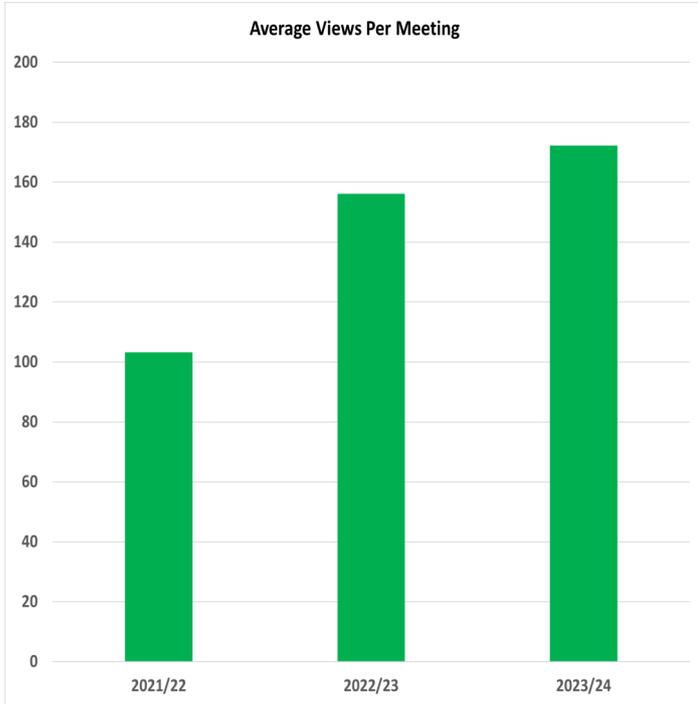


Notes: The categorisation of work items changed in 2022/23 with the category of 'development briefing' being introduced.

Webcasting 2023/24

A legacy of changes in technology and working practices during the covid-19 pandemic is the continuation of webcasting to enhance public access to Scrutiny Board meetings. Webcasting allows stakeholders to observe meetings at a time and location that is convenient to them.

The tables below show the webcasting figures for each board this year and the trend in viewing figures over the last three years.



To Note:

- There were two meetings of the Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board in both September 2023 and January 2024 due to additional 'call in' meetings.
- Webcasting figures are as correct at 26 April 2024.



Adults, Health & Active Lifestyles Scrutiny Board

2023/24 Highlights



Cllr Paul
Alderson



Cllr Caroline
Anderson



Cllr Luke
Farley



Cllr Mahalia
France-Mir



Cllr James
Gibson



Cllr Conrad
Hart-Brooke



Cllr
Mohammed
Iqbal



Cllr Wyn
Kidger



Cllr Kevin
Ritchie



Cllr Andrew
Scopes



Cllr Eileen
Taylor



Dr John Beal
(co-opted
member)

1

Improving oral health and access to NHS dentistry remained a key priority for Scrutiny. In November 2023, the Board once again engaged with local providers, practitioners and patient representatives to review the local position. Following the transfer of commissioning responsibility for local dental services to the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) from April 2023, the Board welcomed this as a positive move enabling more targeted improvements to be made. However, to achieve more significant improvements, the Board stressed the need for other constraining factors to be addressed at a national level. These relate to workforce challenges; insufficient resources; and a much needed reform of the dental contract.

2

In July 2023, the Board published a statement setting out its views regarding a decision to cease referrals into the Leeds Tier 3 Specialist Weight Management Service. Linked to this, Members had raised concerns regarding the rising prevalence and wide-ranging implications of living with obesity on health and beyond, with reported UK-wide NHS costs projected to reach £9.7 billion by 2050 and wider costs to society estimated to reach £49.9 billion per year. The Board therefore agreed to also theme its March 2024 meeting around supporting healthy weight and active lifestyles for the population of Leeds. The Board welcomed contributions from Public Health, Active Leeds, primary care and other NHS partners as it considered the impact of social and environmental determinants of health; Tier 3 service recovery and redesign plans; the perspective of GPs; and progress in delivering the city's Physical Activity Ambition.

3

The Board engaged with representatives from the Leeds GP Confederation and Leeds Local Medical Committee to discuss expectations surrounding the new model of general practice set out in the national Primary Care Access Recovery Plan. As well as considering ongoing efforts aimed at reducing barriers that some patients face when accessing services, attention was also given to addressing staff burnout and morale issues linked to local and national challenges around recruitment and retention. Access to GP services was also an issue raised during the Board's consideration of out of hours bereavement services, with the Chair seeking support from the GP Confederation to help encourage a proactive and consistent approach across local GP practices to help meet the needs of bereaved families.

4

The Board continued to monitor progress in delivering the Leeds Mental Health Strategy (2020-2025), with particular attention given to the new Community Mental Health Transformation Programme. Further pieces of scrutiny work also stemmed from the Board's consideration of this Strategy, which included a working group on the challenges surrounding children's neurodiversity and a detailed overview of the Leeds Suicide Prevention Action Plan (2024-27).



Children & Families Scrutiny Board 2023/24 Highlights



1

The Board identified the Provision of EHCP support as a key issue in 2023/24 following performance data that indicated statutory timescales around EHCPs had become a significant issue affecting children and families in Leeds. Working closely with the Children and Families Directorate the Board initiated an inquiry to support improvement work already commissioned by the directorate which resulted in 11 recommendations. An important element of this was hearing evidence from parents and carers and seeking to ensure their views were central to the Board's findings. Amongst a range of recommendations, the Board noted the need to work quickly towards better performance on timescales, utilise new digital approaches to improving communication, a commitment to practice driving process and improved casework processes as key areas for

2

The growing problem of youth vaping was an important theme in 2023/24. Data on youth vaping showed a worrying upward trend on usage by children and young people in Leeds. As a result Board members requested several updates on this to understand the depth of the problem and to seek to deliver solutions. The board noted the Government legislation on the Smokefree Generation and submitted a board response as part of the consultation process for that legislation, to ensure the Leeds position was clearly heard.

3

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in 2022, followed by the Government response 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' in 2023. The review and response to it was a key area of interest for the Board as they sought to understand how this would impact services in Leeds and to seek reassurance that the key principles were being implemented in the city. Leeds has a strong, recent track record in children's social care which the Board is keen to support through further updates on this in the future.

4

Throughout 2023/24 the Board were clear that they wanted to hear as much as possible from the voices of children and young people. To support that the Voice, Influence and Change Team provided a report on how the Council listens to children and young people and how that impacts service delivery. The Board is now keen to hear more on this in 2024/25 and is setting up processes through which that can be delivered.



Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board

2023/24 Highlights



Cllr Barry Anderson



Cllr Javid Akhtar



Cllr Stewart Golton (Chair)



Cllr Pauleen Grahame



Cllr Abdul Hannan



Cllr Norma Harrington



Cllr Asghar Khan



Cllr Annie Maloney



Cllr Adrian McCluskey



Cllr Andy Rontree



Cllr Simon Seary



Cllr Penny Stables



Cllr John Tudor

1

Housing related matters have been a priority for Scrutiny members during this year. The Board has monitored performance figures relating to the number of void properties within the Council's housing stock, rent collection and the responsiveness of the repairs and maintenance service. The Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Board was invited to share the views of tenants on recommendations regarding damp and mould. At the start of the year the Board examined a testing programme to seek assurances about the potential risks to social housing tenants where radon gas is detected.

2

The Scrutiny Board considered the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan, with representatives from West Yorkshire Police and West Yorkshire Combined Authority attending to update members on strategic policing and crime priorities for Leeds. Assurances were sought about resource allocation and proactive interventions to deter anti-social behaviour during periods such as Halloween and Bonfire Night. Separately, the Board considered the Safer Stronger Communities Leeds Plan, receiving updates in relation to activity in priority areas such as domestic violence and public order.

3

Representatives from the third sector shared their views about opportunities for future collaboration between voluntary organisations and public partners, while also highlighting the increased cost pressures facing the third sector. Separately, third sector partners working to tackle financial exclusion and poverty shared their experiences of escalating demand for support services from people facing "grim" circumstances. The Scrutiny Board recommended greater involvement of the community anchors network with Community Committees.

4

An Annual Update on progress towards the ambitions of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy was examined, with members exploring how to strengthen the role of volunteers within the service and opportunities for income generation as part of the response to financial pressures on the service. Access for all and the safety of women and girls was a recurring priority in discussion regarding greenspaces. Members recommended Scrutiny engagement in the development of a Green Spaces Play Strategy next year.



Infrastructure, Investment & Inclusive Growth Scrutiny Board 2023/24 Highlights



Cllr Neil
Buckley



Cllr Billy
Flynn



Cllr Mike
Foster



Cllr John
Garvani



Cllr Sharon
Hamilton



Cllr Arif
Hussain



Cllr Sandy
Lay



Cllr Abigail
Marshall-
Katung



Cllr Michael
Millar



Cllr
Mohammed
Shahzad



Cllr Nicole
Sharpe



Cllr Izaak
Wilson

1

Members examined progress with the Leeds Station Sustainable Travel Gateway Project and welcomed the opportunity for a site visit to better understand the scheme. An update on progress towards Vision Zero was received. Subsequently, the Chair worked on behalf of the Board with the Executive member and a parent campaigner to advocate for the introduction of a graduated driving licence for novice drivers. She also met with council officers from Legal, Democratic and Information Governance Services to raise awareness of the 'Vision Zero Pledge' and to advocate alongside the Vision Zero team for the organisation to 'lead by example' on this issue.

2

Partners attended the Board to share their experience of the collaborative approach to affordable housing delivery in Leeds. Members sought assurances about how best to secure both positive social outcomes from projects while at the same time meeting targets for value for money. The Scrutiny Board reviewed the outcomes of a pilot project regarding changes to the display of third party comments online in respect of planning applications,

3

As part of their consideration of the delivery of the Future Talent Plan, members explored the anticipated employment and skills demands that may arise from the transition to net zero and concerns about disadvantages for those within the labour market without digital skills. Representatives of the Scrutiny Board attended the Leeds Apprenticeship Fair to understand the offer for young people and the responses of those in attendance. Members also explored how effective business support can encourage productivity in the context of the ambitions of the Inclusive Growth Strategy.

4

The Scrutiny Board fulfilled its responsibility to receive an annual update on the Council's local flood risk management strategy. Particular attention was given to examining the management of surface water as new housing is delivered. The community based approach to digital inclusion from the 100% Digital Leeds team was fully endorsed by Board members. Separately, and in line with the recommendations of the 2023 LGA Peer Review, Board members examined proposals for future rationalisation of the Council's estate.



Strategy & Resources

Scrutiny Board

2023/24 Highlights



Cllr Gohar Almass



Cllr Hannah Bithell



Cllr Sharon Burke



Cllr Andrew Carter



Cllr Dianne Chapman



Cllr Sam Firth



Cllr Tom Hinchcliffe



Cllr Asghar Khan



Cllr Wyn Kidger



Cllr Andy Parnham



Cllr Eleanor Thomson

1

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) has been a theme at the Strategy and Resources Board for a number of years and this continued in 2023/24 with a dedicated session set up to hear about ongoing policy development on EDI and to receive feedback from the Council's staff networks. Ultimately this was used to develop a scrutiny statement that will be presented to Executive Board in the next municipal year aimed at supporting the Council as it continues to implement EDI strategies across the workforce.

2

Employee and workforce strategy has been an important focus for the Board. Members have considered the Organisation Plan, People Management Strategies, the staff survey and a standalone item on employee mental health and well being. Hearing in detail about the Council's ensures that employee feedback is listened to and acted on and to seek reassurance that the Council's policy approach in these key areas is on track and that staff are content in the workplace with support available should it be needed.

3

The Council continues to face a budget challenge and ensuring budgetary robustness and sustainability has again been a feature of the Board's work during 2023/24. As the financial challenge has continued the Board has sought to look in detail at the Financial Reporting series that also goes to Executive Board whilst also considering longer term financial plans through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and detailed consideration of plans for the 2024/25 budget round. The remit of the Board places finance at its core and the Board has fulfilled this by devoting a significant amount of time to those issues.

4

Leeds 2023 has regularly been to the Board throughout its development phase, through implementation and now through evaluation. The Board considered this project on two occasions during the year receiving an update on delivery during the 2023 Year of Culture and also some initial details on evaluation to understand how successful it has been and to provide check and challenge on outcomes and legacy.

More information about Leeds City Council's Scrutiny Service, along with the activity and membership of individual Scrutiny Boards, can be found on the Council's committee webpages.

You can also follow @ScrutinyLeeds on X (formerly Twitter).

