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## SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

**PRESENT:** Councillor A Khan in the Chair

Councillors E Carlisle, D Chapman,  
D Cohen, B Flynn, S Hamilton,  
T Hinchcliffe, W Kidger, A Parnham,  
E Thomson and C Timmins

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair noted the recent changes at senior officer level at the Council and thanked the incoming interim Chief Executive, Mariana Pexton, for her contributions to the Board as Director of Strategy and Resources, noting that Mariana will become the first female Chief Executive in Leeds. In addition, the Chair thanked the outgoing Chief Executive, Tom Riordan, for his work and contributions to Leeds and wished him the best in his new role the Department of Health and Social Care.

### **24 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents**

There were no appeals.

### **25 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There was no exempt information.

### **26 Late Items**

There were no late items.

However, member's attention was drawn to the supplementary information on Item 7 Financial Health Monitoring, this was circulated as supplementary information due to publication deadlines for this meeting in relation to similar papers being considered by Executive Board on 18 September 2024.

### **27 Declaration of Interests**

In relation to item 9, the Gambling Act 2005 – Review of Statement of Licensing Policy, Cllr C Timmins noted that he is a Trustee and Chair of a local charity in Calverley and Farsley Ward that has a Small Society Registration.

## **28 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Andrew Carter with Cllr Dan Cohen as substitute.  
Cllr Pauleen Grahame

## **29 Minutes - 22 July 2024**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 July 2024 be approved as an accurate record

### **MATTERS ARISING**

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser noted the following matters arising:

Minute 19 – Members have been provided with additional information linked to the finance items considered at the 22 July meeting.

Minute 22 – On the Employee Pay Date change work programme suggestion subject to agreeing timescales with the Chair, Director and Executive Member this will be added to the Board's work programme.

## **30 Financial Health Monitoring 2024/25 - Month 4 (July)**

The Board considered a report from the Head of Democratic Services which provided the Board with the latest update on the in year financial position in respect of the Revenue Budget and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis, Leader of Council
- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Richard Ellis, Deputy Chief Finance Officer

The Board received a presentation to support this item with the following key points covered:

- The authority is projecting a £22.2m overspend which is up from £19.9m when the board considered financial health information in July 2024. This is largely as a result of demand led pressures in Children and Families and Adult Social Care budgets.
- £63.9m of directorate savings were approved in the 2024/25 Budget. Since that time, a further £19.3m savings actions have been identified.

- £15.9m of the projected overspend is based on demand budget pressures, which are reduced by savings of £3.5m on staffing, £0.7m running costs and £3.8m client income.
- Key budget pressures were also highlighted in children looked after budgets (£12m) and transport (£3.7m).
- Another key demand area was highlighted in relation to Adults and Health residential care and nursing placements which stand at 3,475 residents compared to the budgeted figure of 3,273 and past years such as 2021 when there were 3,173 such placements.
- The board were also informed of council tax and business rate collection rates, which in both cases are below pre-covid levels (2019).

Responding to comments and questions from board members the following issues were covered:

- The Executive Member for Resources noted the financial pressures being experienced by the Council both in year and in terms of the next financial year. Successive funding reductions from Government have been major contributing factor towards the current challenge and when this is added to growing demand pressures it has created a very difficult financial environment. Within Children Looked After budgets there are significant issues with external residential placements some of which is driven by market forces and the growing costs of placements linked to private providers. It was also noted that the figures before the board are projections and the measures being taken over the full 12 months of the financial year are expected to reduce the projected overspend levels.
- The Board acknowledged that many of the problems being faced in Leeds are national in nature with all local authorities struggling to manage budget pressures often in the same budget areas.
- Responding to a question on Government funding plans the Board heard that the detail of funding plans from the new Government will hopefully be clearer following the Chancellor's Budget Statement on 30 October. In addition, as members of the Local Government Association it was noted that the LGA have made a submission as part of the budget process which sets out the challenges being faced in the local government sector.
- Board members referenced the need to mobilise communities to get involved directly in voluntary activity such as involvement in tree management which might assist in easing some budget pressures. The Executive Member for Resources highlighted that the Team Leeds approach has delivered significant success and Leeds does have a good voluntary culture, good examples being the response to the flooding in Kirkstall, support during the pandemic and the many In Bloom groups that are active across the city.
- The Leader of Council highlighted the challenges faced in setting and managing often complex, demand led budgets at local government level with some of the procedural elements such as bringing forward a provisional budget in December and being legally required to have a balanced budget almost 15 months later being particularly challenging.

- The Board were assured that lobbying of Government does take place through the Core Cities group and SIGOMA, in addition to the work done through the LGA. The importance of the 30 October budget was highlighted in terms of providing more certainty to the resources assumptions contained within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, with full details for 2025/26 expected in the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December.
- Board members focussed on budget action plans and the details behind them particularly given the scale of the in year challenges faced in both Children and Families and Adult Social Care. It was noted that the scrutiny support team are working up proposals to align financial information with performance reporting and further communication is planned with scrutiny chairs on this. The Board were assured that the Children and Families Scrutiny Board does consider financial information as part of its work programme and that discussion today will be considered as part of that ongoing work.
- The Board focussed on external placements for Children Looked After and the high costs associated. The development of new in house children's homes was noted and it was felt that the new homes should be backed locally by ward members and that negative impacts within local neighbourhoods are rare when these homes are opened. The Board heard that due to a national move towards more in house provision by local authorities, Ofsted registration has led to some delays.
- In response to a query on budget action plans and vagueness in some of the explanations the Board heard that detailed work is ongoing to address budget pressures in those areas and that the feedback on the detail in the drafting on this report will be taken away and considered. The Board were assured of the line by line, cross-directorate focus on the budget issues being experienced in Children and Families budgets.
- In response to a question from the Chair on reserves the Board heard that the in year budget has a planned £1.5m contribution to general reserves in addition to the Medium Term Financial Strategy setting out a £3m contribution to General Reserves from 2026/27 for the rest of the years covered by each year to provide budget resiliency and sustainability in future years.

**Resolved** – The Board noted the financial information in the report and appendix.

### **31 Electoral Services Update**

The Board considered a report from Electoral Services containing a review of the 2024 elections and also additional information on plans for postal voter re-application.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- John Mulcahy, Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory

- Susie Benton, Head of Electoral Services

To introduce the report the Board received a presentation from the Head of Electoral Services covering the following key points on the update report:

- A comparison of the methods of voting between postal and in person particularly in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Turnout and comparison between postal voter turnout and in person
- Postal vote rejection rates – covering signatures not matching, incorrect dates of birth and documentation getting mixed up within households.
- Electors unable to vote due to voter ID following the introduction of ID requirements in May 2023. Leeds has seen a decreasing number of people unable to vote due to ID requirements and work is ongoing to facilitate greater awareness of voter authority certificates.
- Postal voter re-application process and the measures to be undertaken to support residents through the process.

Following questions and comments from board members these key points were discussed:

- The Chair of the Board, Board members and the Executive Board Member for Resources thanked the Elections Team for the work that has been done in 2024 in dealing with a Mayoral Election, Local Election and then a General Election and asked that thanks are taken back to the team as feedback.
- In response to a question on Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) and how widely they have been taken up in Leeds the Board were informed that take up of the VAC has been relatively low with approximately 2000 applications received since 2023 and around 500 actually used on polling day.
- The Board wanted to know more about any impacts from the changes to how postal votes are managed when handed into polling stations on the day of the election. In response the Board were informed that tracking that information is not possible as the documentation goes into sealed packs at close of poll and are only opened in an Election Court. The statistics on handing in postal votes prior to the changes in the rules suggested that the impact of the change would be limited, and no issues were reported from polling stations on the day.
- The Board discussed data associated with voters who attended a polling station without accepted ID and did not return with correct ID. The Board were assured that the Elections Team work with the Communications Team to target areas where the data suggests this is more of a problem with the aim of reducing these rates. It was noted that levels on this metric are low in the city.
- Members asked about reductions in polling stations and were informed that there is a requirement to have a polling station for every 2,250 electors. In addition, voting methods are monitored and with a trend suggesting a reduction in postal voting, following the pandemic, it could be that more polling stations are introduced. Recent changes in polling

stations have focussed on ending the use of portacabins which has seen a reduction of approximately 15 stations citywide.

- Members were interested in the possibility of attestation or vouching being used for voter ID. It was noted that the Electoral Commission have recommended that as a possible change in the process, but the Government would be the final decision maker.
- The Board noted that Leeds has the largest number of postal voters nationwide. This resulted from a write out to all voters during the pandemic which received a large number of applications in Leeds. It is expected that this will reduce over time with voters gradually opting to return to voting in person, particularly in light of the planned postal voter re-application process.
- A query was made around postal votes and problems with mail delivery impacting the ability of electors to vote. This is being looked at by the Electoral Commission, Government and the Association of Electoral Administrators working with Royal Mail to improve the level of service received linked to the postal voting process. It was noted that in the July 2024 election service did improve with the lowest number of applications for re-issue of postal vote for a number of years.
- In terms of resourcing for the postal voter re-application the board were informed that with it being a fallow election year in 2025 the process can be managed through existing resources within the Elections Team.
- On proxy voting the Board were informed that this is captured in the data through the in person statistics. Leeds has a low level of proxy voting arrangements at around 300 citywide.

**Resolved** - The Board noted the content of the Election Update report and thanked the Elections Team for their hard work on the May and July 2024 elections.

### **32 The Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Policy**

The Board considered The Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Policy which is being reviewed and approved/adopted in the current municipal year and is brought before scrutiny as part of the authority's Budget and Policy Framework.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- John Mulcahy, Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory
- Sue Duckworth, Principal Licensing officer

The Principal Licensing Officer introduced the report setting out the statutory requirement to review the statement of licensing policy on a three yearly basis and the requirement to consult scrutiny under the budget and policy framework of the authority.

Following the Gambling Act Review being undertaken by Government all councils have been recommended to conduct a brief review of their licensing policy in relation the Act by the Gambling Commission.

In Leeds, a fuller review has taken place to future proof the statement in terms of language used and more broadly to prevent the need for further review next year which was part of the Gambling Commission recommendation.

Details on the changes being made to the Statement and the three consultation responses received were also highlighted to board members.

In response to questions and comments from members the following issues were discussed:

- The Board raised a query around past activity and breaches of the operating license related to Victoria Casino and communication links between the Council, Gambling Commission and the casino operator. The Board were informed that the Council has corresponded with the Gambling Commission on that issue setting out concerns about not being informed of the investigation taking place. The view of the Gambling Commission was that the issue was linked to the operating license and the license conditions and codes of practice and were therefore not a matter for the local authority.
- Members raised a query in relation to training of staff who are involved in smaller gambling venues where fruit machines and other such devices offer a secondary revenue stream to a business rather than major gambling firms with staff who are trained. In response the Board heard that in large part the gambling trade in Leeds is operated by large operators. In relation to pubs and clubs gambling products in them are dealt with through the Licensing Act (alcohol licensing) which sees regular visits to premises with a focus on supervision of gambling products in those venues and preventing access to children. New technology is in development around having machines that indicate when it is in operation to staff which should assist with enhanced supervision capability.
- The Chair asked about the work of the Environment, Housing and Communities Board on gambling harm and how that has impacted the statement of licensing policy. In response the Board heard about the rigorous measures taken in Leeds, and in partnership across the region, to prevent gambling harm with reports going back to the council's licensing committee on an annual basis on that subject.
- The Board inquired about online gambling and whether that means that in person or on street gambling is reducing. In response, the board heard it was approximately 50-50 in terms of how customers access gambling between online and on street gambling, though the latter is reducing. There are links between on street shops and online products as customers will be notified if they pass a gambling shop with offers and other such incentives.
- Test visits to book makers does focus on test purchasing and preventing young people accessing gambling through the high street. The board

heard that there is a thorough inspection regime focussed at on street book makers.

- In relation to the accessibility to children of gambling the board heard this is a concern and the My School survey covers the issue, the financial inclusion team also works on this along with colleagues in education to provide teaching and learning on the harms of gambling to young people.
- Members asked about the cumulative impact of book makers located on streets in certain areas of the city, Queen Street in Morley was cited as an example. In response the Board heard that under current legislation refusal of gambling applications is difficult, but the recent White Paper could include provision on cumulative impact to prevent the proliferation of book makers in one street and in the future cumulative impact policies could therefore be introduced assuming the White Paper passes into legislation. Under the current legislation demand cannot be taken into consideration when considering new premise applications.
- The Board asked about available resources in the Council to carry out community engagement on communities that are considered vulnerable to gambling products. Members were informed of the work of the Leeds Gambling Harm Group which includes colleagues from financial inclusion and public health, and this does involve engagement with communities. The Board also heard about the shame associated with gambling and the dangers that can pose in terms of people talking about their problems. It was noted that Leeds has been active in this area and over a period of years have worked with the NHS to get the Gambling Clinic sited in Leeds along with the GamCare Community Gambling clinic in Leeds.
- The Board briefly touched on youth vaping and were informed that this has been and continues to be a work item at the Children and Families Scrutiny Board along with the work undertaken by West Yorkshire Joint Services on visits and test purchasing done to prevent the sale of vapes to young people. In addition, it was noted that vaping is covered in planned Government legislation through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.
- The Executive Member for Resources summed up by thanking the team for their work on reviewing and updating the statement of licencing policy which has become a significant piece of work. The Executive Member also referred to the work done in Leeds on gambling harm noting the establishment of the gambling clinic in the Merrion Centre which was the first of its kind. Leeds has been ahead of the game in provision of support for gambling harm.

**Resolved** - The Scrutiny Board noted the report and appendices and provided comments as required under the Budget and Policy Framework to Executive Board before it is referred to Council for adoption.

### **33 Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment 2024**

The Board considered a report from the Director of Strategy and Resources which outlined the purpose of the Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA) to assess current and future health and social care needs in Leeds to inform the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, specifically to shape priorities, inform commissioners



and guide the use of resources as part of commissioning strategies and plans for the city.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr James Lewis, Leader of Council
- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Mike Eakins, Head of Policy
- Cllr Dan Cohen, Scrutiny Chair Children and Families
- Cllr Hannah Bithell, Scrutiny Chair Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth

The Board received a presentation to introduce the report which covered the following key areas:

- The approach to the 2024 Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA) which included a Sounding Board with representatives from across the health and care system and academia.
- The structure of the report, broken down into a life course approach and picking out key data and information at those stages.
- Population, noting that Leeds is a relatively young city in terms of demographics and overall population growth in the city which is ahead of national trends.
- The recent bulge cohort which saw a larger than average number of births which is feeding through school and education settings now impacting further education and level 3 skills.
- Growth in the number of Leeds residents from ethnically diverse backgrounds and the percentage of these residents living in the most deprived communities.
- Wider distribution of the student population in the city beyond the 'traditional' inner North-West student community.
- Children living in poverty Leeds which now stands at 22%.
- The Geography of Leeds which is broad and has a much larger boundary than other comparable cities which can skew data in relation to deprivation and poverty.
- Children Looked After rates and comparison with other cities.
- Increased prevalence of mental health issues being experienced by children and young people and amongst the population generally.
- Education outcomes at Early Years and Key Stage 2 and disparity in achievement between those on free school meals and those who are not. These disparities continue through each stage of education.
- Life expectancy differences between the most and least deprived communities which can be as high as 11.5 years.
- Cancer mortality rates and inequality between deprived and less deprived communities which suggests that cancer is detected earlier in the least deprived communities compared to the most deprived suggesting poorer access to health services in deprived communities.
- Analysis of the third sector in Leeds.

- Crime rates in the city and the increased overall crime rate in the city of 8% linked to increases in violent crime and acquisition based crime, which can be attributed to cost of living increases.
- Housing and the need for more affordable housing provision in the city. Overall housing delivery is above average, but affordability is a growing issue.
- Fuel poverty in the city defined by low income and low household energy efficiency this impacts particularly in the private rented sector.
- Public transport usage and recent trends following the impact of the pandemic, the data suggested that usage is still considerably lower than the pre-pandemic level.

In response to comments and question from board members the following issues were discussed:

- The Leader of Council highlighted the comprehensive nature of the report and the role it will play in shaping the direction of the city in the coming years. The report also highlights the positive impacts of work done in the city in recent years such as on selective licensing to improve housing standards.
- Board members asked more about the geography of the city and the impact it has on comparison with other core cities. In response the Board were informed that work is underway to highlight that Leeds is much larger in terms of geography and to make comparison with other core cities easier work is underway, focussing on the inner city which might create a helpful comparison with a more traditional city footprint.
- The Board asked about the Children Looked After (CLA) numbers and that Manchester had appeared to secure a significant reduction in recent years. In response the Leader of Council highlighted that Leeds has been ahead in terms of approaches to tackle CLA numbers through the Child Friendly Leeds approach and working closely with communities to develop solutions such as kinship care and family group conferencing. It is now the case that other authorities are adopting similar techniques which explains that metric.
- The Board also asked about productivity comparisons with Manchester and were informed that the figures for Manchester are for Greater Manchester so a wider area, but it was noted that this is an area for improvement in Leeds. The Board were also informed of the pitch to Government on productivity given high employment rates, Leeds is ready for investment and to deliver increases in economic growth.
- The Board noted that the JSA is wide in terms of its scope, and it impacts all scrutiny boards in terms of their remits and possible shaping of work programming in the future through deeper dive sessions on issues such as productivity and crime rates.
- Members discussed healthier lifestyles and the increased costs associated with eating healthier and also in leading more active lifestyles and the impact this has in more deprived areas. The Board acknowledged that tackling poverty and inequality remains a priority in the Best City Ambition and the work of the council is focussed on this and delivering

interventions that remove barriers to living healthier. Community Hubs and Children's Centres do provide information on living healthier and is focussed on more deprived communities.

- The Leader of Council noted recent positive work on reducing childhood obesity in the city and successfully reducing those levels as a good example of interventions delivered by the Council and partners. On active lifestyles the city does have positive policies in terms of still accepting cash and not requiring the booking of multiple sessions along with prescribing Active Leeds sessions through collaboration with public health.
- Members focussed on what next steps might be taken with the data contained in the JSA to help to ensure work is done to tackle some issues that have become persistent such as disparity in life expectancy. Members heard that the JSA will have an impact directly on commissioning activity between the Council and partners such as the NHS and health services, but it was also noted that it is an informative document and should be used to facilitate future scrutiny work. The Health and Well-Being Board is also active in responding to the JSA and this report has been tabled at that Board over the summer months with a number of actions arising.
- The impact of birth rates was highlighted including the reducing birth rate impacting primary schools and the bulge cohort now going through further education. School organisation was also discussed, and it was acknowledged that the Council does not control delivery of new schools albeit there is still a responsibility for sufficiency of school and further education places.
- Members asked about work being undertaken to address skills gaps. In response the Board heard that work is ongoing on this with the Future Talent Plan focussing on employment gaps and is a subject of dialogue with the Combined Authority and usage of the adult education budget.
- Members praised the report for not using dehumanising language and stressed the importance of this principle in reports of this nature.
- Food insecurity was also a focus, and it was acknowledged that in this area data sources are limited so the impact of fuel poverty on what food is produced in the home is limited but the issue is known and understood by relevant services both in the Council and in the Third Sector.
- In response to a query on vaping it was acknowledged that at the moment data sources are limited on that but in future iterations of the JSA metrics may be available as it is a relatively new issue.
- On Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) a training programme is being rolled out for officers and elected members, but it is not currently compulsory.
- The Board asked about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the report and in particular in relation to maternity practice. In response the Board heard that it was intended that EDI would be a central theme in the report itself and inter-woven into it. On maternity there is a requirement for specific maternity needs assessments within the NHS. On EDI on the broader piece of work the feedback will be taken away to inform future work.

- In conclusion the Leader of Council thanked the Board for consideration of the item and that it will be considered at Executive Board later this week.

**Resolved** – The Board noted the content of the JSA report, and the policy implications drawn from the analysis and noted the opportunities to use the findings of the JSA to shape forward work programmes for all scrutiny boards.

### **34 Work Programme**

Members considered the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Scrutiny Adviser highlighted the following forthcoming working groups:

- An All Scrutiny, remote Budget Working Group on 25 September at 4.30PM
- The opportunity to attend three Affordable Housing Working Groups over the coming months with further details to be provided to board members.

**Resolved** - Members noted the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

### **35 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next public meeting of the Board will take place on 14 October 2024, There will be a pre-meeting for all board members at 10.00am and a start time of 10.30AM.