

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 17TH OCTOBER, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, J Bentley,
A Blackburn, D Collins, A Gabriel,
P Grahame, A Khan, P Gruen, M Harland,
N Sharpe, K Brooks and T Smith

Brief introductions were made.

On behalf of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities), the Chair thanked Simon Costigan, Chief Officer Property and Contracts, for the service he has provided to the Council and within his team; wishing him well on his retirement.

38 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal.

39 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

40 Late Items

There were no late items.

41 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

42 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies of absence received.

43 Minutes - 12 September 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held 12th September 2019, be approved as an accurate record.

44 Matters Arising

Minute 34 – *Parking Strategy and Management*. Concern that Ward Member Briefings had not yet been scheduled in regard Highways. The Chair requested that the Head of Transportation be contacted, and for those briefings to be arranged.

45 Inquiry into Leeds' Response to Grenfell

The report of the Chief Officer Housing Management, set out the progress made in relation to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Board's 2017 inquiry into Leeds' response to the fire at Grenfell Tower.

Appended to the report includes – Appendix 1 including the recommendation tracking flowchart and classifications; Appendix 2 details the progress against each recommendation.

The following were in attendance:

- Cllr Coupar, Executive Board Member for Communities
- Neil Evans, Director of Resources and Housing
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Simon Costigan, Chief Officer Property & Contracts
- Sarah Martin, Chief Officer Civic Enterprise Leeds
- Richard Jackson, Head of Cleaning Services

The report set out for Members the status of the recommendations that Members had previously considered at the Board meeting in January 2018.

The status of recommendations were agreed as follows:

Recommendation 1 – Achieved.

Recommendation 2 – Achieved.

Recommendation 3 – Achieved.

Recommendation 4 – Achieved.

Recommendation 5 – Achieved.

Recommendation 6 – Achieved.

The Board discussed the following points:

- Recommendation 5 – *Sprinkler systems*. The Executive Member for Communities, informed the Board that, although the Government had responded to the Council's letter of January 2018 regarding the cost of retro-fitting sprinkler systems in high rise blocks, there had been no engagement on the substantive request for assistance with funding in the region of £32m. It was requested that the Scrutiny Board (EHC) write again to the Secretary of State on this matter jointly with the Executive Member.

Further to this, the Director of Resources and Housing added that the Government focused primarily on issues with buildings that have Aluminium Composite Cladding. Leeds has no buildings of this type, and therefore does not qualify for funding. The role of sprinkler systems in making sure residents are safe and feel safe in their homes was reiterated, especially in regard to vulnerable residents. The Board was informed that sprinkler systems are being installed in eight sheltered high rise blocks and that the intention is to retrofit sprinkler systems in all 116 high rise blocks in Leeds.

- Recommendation 6 – *Minimum Standards*. In response to a query as to whether building regulations had been updated to strengthen building standards; the Board were informed that this particular issue didn't fall within the remit of Scrutiny, and would be a separate City Development issue. The Director of Resources and Housing explained there are on-going discussions around the scope of change, and proposals would come from the Government.

The Chair thanked officers for all of their efforts and work throughout this Inquiry.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the contents of the report and Members' discussion during the meeting;
- b) Approved the status of the recommendations as set out above.
- c) The Scrutiny Board and Executive Member to jointly write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to again highlight the impact of retro-fitting sprinkler systems on the Council's wider capital programme.

46 Standards in Private Rented Sector - Monitoring and Regulation (including energy efficiency)

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing provided an update about general interventions by the Council in the private rented sector and the progress made by Housing Leeds on implementing selective licensing in Beeston and Harehills.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Coupar, Executive Board Member for Communities
- Neil Evans, Director of Resources & Housing
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Simon Costigan, Chief Officer Property & Contracts
- Mark Ireland, Service Manager, Private Sector Housing
- Mike Brook, Service Manager, Private Sector Housing

The Service Manager, Private Sector Housing, presented the report and highlighted the following key issues:

- There has been an increase in the level of inadequate and unacceptably managed accommodation provided by poor landlords;
- 4,100 requests for service from tenants in the private rented sector had been received;
- 1,740 legal notices had been served;
- The intention to do marketing around the application process with selective licensing;
- The Leeds Neighbourhood Approach (LNA);
- Helped 153 households in one of the most deprived areas of Leeds;
- The scheme led to nearly 500 new lets';
- Selective licensing in Beeston and Harehills as of 6th January 2020.

Key issues identified in discussion with the Board included:

- *Targeted interventions in Holbeck.* The work undertaken had been praised. A Member commented that the Council ought to carry on ensuring that Holbeck becomes a stable environment, including by taking care not to support interventions that increase the concentration of vulnerable residents with chaotic or transitory lifestyles to a higher degree than other areas of the city. A Member also requested that bilingual issues be taken into consideration and accommodated for the smaller minorities of residents.
- *Selective Licensing.* In response to a query as to whether this would be extended across additional wards, the Director of Resources and Housing informed the Board that implementing Selective Licensing across an area, has to be done on a business case basis, and evidence would need to be provided. The Board heard that the Council have raised concern to the government, that within some of the poorest communities, landlords are funded through housing benefit, with no guarantee on the quality of the property.
- *In-house lettings agency.* A Member sought clarity on the Council's position on the previous proposal. In responding, the Service Manager (Private Sector Housing), confirmed this wasn't a viable option. Alternatively, Members' were informed that the 'Leeds' Letting Scheme' successfully created 500 lets last year, and enabled the minimum building standards to be met; the Board were informed the scheme is running well, and the service are working closely with landlords on vulnerable tenants.
- *Legal notices.* Concerns were raised in regard to the amount of money spent on Legal Services, in regard to the losses in appeal hearings. Officers explained the effectiveness of courts and tribunals and informed Members of the process in regard to civic penalties and how they're similar to prosecutions; further generating an income of which will go back into the private sector. Members' further heard that a number of multiple prosecutions, could lead to the landlord being banned.

To summarise, the Executive Board Member for Communities informed the Board that the Council are dealing with an estimated 70 thousand private rented units of accommodation; the focus has been on number of properties to ensure the safety of tenants to ensure the minimum standards are being met.

Additionally, the Chair requested that an update be brought to the Scrutiny Board (EHC) at the meeting to be held in February, in regard to fuel poverty and energy efficiency in the private rented sector. Further to this, the Board were informed an annual landlord conference is being held in November, and the key theme focuses on the climate emergency declaration. It was confirmed that 250 landlords would be in attendance, and the National Landlord Association and EON would also be in attendance to provide presentations on what the industry are doing in regard to the declaration.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance, and for their work.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the information contained within the report, and provided at the meeting;
- b) Requested that, a further progress report be presented to a future meeting of the Board – on the subject of fuel poverty and energy efficiency.

47 PROCUREMENT OF HOUSING RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND VOIDS SERVICES FOR THE WEST OF LEEDS

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing, seeks approval from the Executive Board at its meeting on 16 October of plans for the future delivery of citywide housing repairs and voids services.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Coupar, Executive Board Member for Communities
- Neil Evans, Director of Resources and Housing
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Helen Jackson, Head of Housing Projects, Contracts and PFI

The following information was appended to the report and considered by Members’:

- Executive Board Report
- Map of options, and changes by ward (Appendix A)
- Scope of service delivery (Appendix B)
- Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact Assessment (Appendix C)
- Performance Data

Members’ were informed the decision had been taken by Executive Board on 16th October, that approval be given for LBS to deliver housing responsive repairs and voids services for the East and South of the city, and that an external contractor delivery such services for the West and that the new arrangements are planned to start from autumn 2021. Members also heard that the decision included agreeing the proposal to change existing service delivery boundaries in order to align with Leeds electoral Wards.

Members’ discussion focused on the use of insourcing and outsourcing of services for Council tenants. Members requested performance indicators for the current external contractor. In response, the Director of Resources and Housing explained that both Mears Limited and the in-house service provider, Leeds Building Services (LBS), both have scope to improve various aspects of their performance. The 5 year contract being put out to tender is anticipated to attract healthy competition, setting a challenge for the firm that secures the contract to deliver the standard of service required. The Executive Member for Communities added that the report sets out a general intention to insource where possible, while also minimising risk for tenants and service users.

A Member made reference to the 5 year contract, and identified the scope for apprenticeship schemes; it was confirmed that there are already 40 apprentices, and this will grow even further.

The Chair thanked the report coming before the Scrutiny Board, and thanked those officers in attendance for their contributions.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the information contained within the report and the appended Executive Board Report and its appendices.
- b) Requested that the information provided during discussion be actioned.

48 Referral to Scrutiny

The Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support submitted a report that presented a request for scrutiny, alongside some background information to help inform the Board's consideration.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Wadsworth
- Councillor M Rafique, Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles
- James Rogers, Director of Communities and Environment
- John Woolmer, Deputy Chief Officer Waste Management

The request for Scrutiny was submitted as follows:

To consider an inquiry into *'the reasons for continued problems with collections, the issue of fly tipping, and continued delays to the route rationalisation process, data and information management and the overall effectiveness of leadership and management structures within the service'*.

Councillor Wadsworth presented the request for Scrutiny to the Board, informing Members of the continued missed collections, particularly in the summer months, which ultimately affects all of the wards across Leeds being a city wide issue. It was highlighted that the reporting of those streets that are missed is of concern, and the report which is produced at the end of the day, doesn't include all of the streets that have been missed. It was requested that a working group be set up, to hear from the signatures on the referral letter and their concerns.

Additionally, the Chair added that John Woolmer has proposed that he will be visiting each of the Community Committees, to discuss an array of proposals which are being worked on. It was suggested that a working group be held on the 11th November for the signatures on the referral attend, and in December, the Inquiry on Kerbside Collection and Recycling would be brought forward, and a report be prepared for this meeting with an update on the recommendations.

In response, the Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles, explained that:

- The issues surrounding the end of day report would be addressed in the coming months;
- The use of the term “route failure” would be looked into in further detail with future end of day reports been clearer on the specific reasons for the failure;
- It has been identified there are annual challenges around the summer school holiday period, and further detail in regard to staffing issues would be looked into;
- Whilst in-cab technology is now been used, we are still in the process of training drivers to use the system appropriately and fully.

The Director of Communities and Environment added that the service collects somewhere in the region of 60,000 bins per day and there are a number of factors contributing to failed collections, most notably access issues which are a major factor. A full review of the service is currently being undertaken which aims to address many of the issues referred to in the request for scrutiny. The end of day report is being considered and some improvements have already been made but other changes are also needed to make it much more meaningful to members.

Members agreed that they understood the concerns raised by those referring the matter to scrutiny and as such decided further detailed discussion at a working group was unnecessary. It was noted that officers were due to report back on last year’s scrutiny inquiry into waste management issues in January 2020 but at the request of the Scrutiny Board officers agreed to bring this forward to December’s meeting. Additionally, it was agreed that a response would be sent to those signatures on the referral letter, confirming what the directorate’s report would include on the agenda for the December meeting.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) That the contents of the report, along with Members comments, be noted;
- b) That a response be written to the signatures detailed within the referral to Scrutiny, to provide some scope on the Inquiry on Kerbside Collection and Recycling report, which is intended to come before the Scrutiny Board, at the meeting to be held on 2nd December 2019.

49 Work schedule for 2019/20 Municipal Year

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board’s schedule for the 2019/20 municipal year. Copies of the draft work schedule and the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held Wednesday 18th September 2019 were appended to the report.

Members discussed the items scheduled for the December meeting.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the matters outlined in the report and raised during the meeting
- b) Noted the Executive Board minutes
- c) Agreed the overall work schedule

50 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting as Tuesday 3rd December 2019 at 2.30pm