Please find below a list of questions set down and the written answers given, from the last Council meeting on 10th July.

**Q** Does the council know how many people are sleeping rough in the city centre and are they on a register and what support are they receiving?

**A**         Executive Member for Housing

The Street Support Partnership do have a clear understanding on the numbers of rough sleepers found each month in the City Centre. We have a commissioned team (CGL street outreach) who do a daily early morning sweep as well as a monthly headcount covering the whole of Leeds.

The people found often have multiple complex needs and so a support plan is agreed and arranged in conjunction with those individuals around their unmet needs. This can be a combination of needs which range from accommodation to physical health, mental health, criminal justice or substance misuse. The people we are working with are often the ones who fall through the systems and services, making it harder for them to address problems via the usual pathways which is why the outreach model is so important.

Not every person who is found rough sleeping is homeless and so support is offered to those with accommodation around understanding the difficulties someone maybe experiencing which leads them to sleep rough.

The partnership and commissioned services, use a case management system licenced by LCC to record all interactions, risks and support plans with anyone found to be rough sleeping or use and access support services available such as the St Annes Resource Centre or our off street accommodation provision.  LHO also have multiple systems which they record personal information around assessments, tenancies and legal duties.

Leeds are constantly striving to improve the work we do with those who rough sleep and we are hoping to soon become a MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) City. MEAM partnership supports local areas across the country to transform services and systems and to directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We will then use our shared knowledge and practical experience from this work to influence policy at the national and local level.

**Q** As we approach the first anniversary of the launch of Beryl Bikes in Leeds can the executive member update on how usage and uptake is versus initial projections and how the next 12 months will see this scheme develop?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

For the Leeds City Bikes scheme, operated by Beryl, ridership is measured in trips/active vehicle/day where active vehicles are bikes available to hire by users. The scheme was projected to average 2 trips/ active vehicle/day across the year with each month’s forecast adjusted for seasonality. In December and January, ridership was expected to be 1.2 and would peak in July at 2.8.

When the scheme launched in mid-September 2023 the initial demand for the scheme was very high with ridership figures of just under 3. However vandalism and resulting reduced bike availability, along with the exceptionally wet weather during the winter meant ridership was reduced significantly through Autumn and winter reaching its lowest number of 0.33 in January 2024.

Throughout the spring, ridership has improved and Beryl have revised the seasonality to account for the potential for high demand in the summer and lower than expected demand in the winter. Since expansion of the scheme at the start of April, we have seen an upturn in demand and the following ridership figures:

April: Actual 1.25, projected 2.4

May: Actual 2.12, projected 2.6

June: Actual 2.06, projected 2.6

At the current time, the number of active vehicles is lower than expected due to another increase in vandalism and anti-social behaviour directed towards the bikes. This means that although uptake of available bikes is good, there are fewer bikes than expected available on-street. Discussions are ongoing with partners including WYCA and West Yorkshire Police around specific enforcement resources and Beryl are working with partners to find more resource to support the operations team based in Leeds.

The final tranche of docking stations and bikes, match funded by Beryl in the contract, were due to be deployed into the scheme at the end of June. Due to the issues stated above the final expansion of the scheme has been put on hold until a manageable and predictable service level can be achieved. The plans for this expansion would see the service area extend further into Roundhay, Moortown and Weetwood wards. There would also be stations added into the current service area to support popular locations. We still anticipate this expansion to take place within the next 12 months.

**Q** Please can the Executive Member for Equality, Health & Wellbeing give an update on services supporting people with drug and alcohol issues in the city?

**A** Executive Member for Equality, Health and Wellbeing

As a compassionate city, Leeds City Council has an absolute commitment to support our residents who are experiencing harm from drug and alcohol use.

Our Public Health team commission an integrated service that supports adults and young people affected by drug and/or alcohol issues called Forward Leeds. The service provides:

• Recovery co-ordination - support from prescribed medicines if necessary and access to different activities to support recovery

• Harm reduction

• Community detox

• Specialist support - e.g. families, young people, pregnancy, co-occurring mental health and alcohol / drug use

• Sustained recovery - recovery support and relapse prevention

• Training for professionals

There are usually around 3,500 people being supported at any one time, with on average 300 people moving into and leaving the service each month. To put this into context, Leeds has the third largest treatment population in England, only behind Birmingham and Lancashire.

For some years, Forward Leeds has consistently been one of the highest performing drug and alcohol services in England. It is also one of only a few drug and alcohol treatment services in the country that is rated outstanding by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Following the publication of the national drug strategy: From Harm to Hope, Leeds City Council were allocated substantial grant funding, from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to increase and enhance drug and alcohol prevention, treatment and recovery service provision for Leeds. This has now been invested and I’m pleased to say that in June OHID visited Leeds as an area of good practice in supporting opiate and crack users into treatment – Leeds is an exemplar and the learning will be shared with other Local Authorities.

There is a new national threat of synthetic opioids which are much stronger than heroin and fentanyl and which pose a risk to overdose. Leeds is well-placed to respond to these threats, we have a drug alert system in place and people who use opioids - as well as our partners in Police and Probation - carry lifesaving Naloxone.

I’d like to thank Officers in Public Health, Adults and Health Commissioning, and Forward Leeds for the excellent service they provide to our residents.

**Q** Would the Executive Member for Economy, Transport & Sustainable Development please confirm to Council what actions he will be taking to reverse the unsightly and dangerous ‘relaxed mowing’ of highway verges, now that vegetation can be seen growing on/through the Ring Road surface?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

The areas of relaxed mowing introduced across the city are now maturing well with an attractive, healthy diversity of species appearing, providing food and habitat for insects and small mammals helping to support biodiversity across the city in response to the declared climate emergency. In addition to the support for wildlife, these areas help tackle pollution, reduce urban heat extremes, slow down rainfall flows entering drainage systems and lock away atmospheric carbon below ground. These changes to mowing approaches only involve soft margins with no changes introduced to the engineered highway road surface. Where sight lines are required for safety at highway junctions these remain on our mowing list. We are always looking at opportunities to introduce further relaxation to mowing activities as we consider the changes made to grass maintenance across the city provide long term environmental and ecological benefits and there are no plans to revert to close mowing for any of the relaxed areas in the foreseeable future.

**Q** Councillor B Anderson – What excuse does the Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space give for Recovery Collections being ignored in some Wards in order to give preference to other wards, and what actions will he introduce to ensure that all Wards are treated equally in the future?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

The recovery of bins that were missed on the scheduled day of delivery follows processes that have been in place for a number of years, and are always dependant on the amount of resources available on a given day to do the extra work required.

For smaller scales misses, of up to a handful of streets, the work is usually undertaken by the same crew the next day before they begin that day’s scheduled collections. This is often referred to as “slippage” work.

Where that is not possible, or the scale of the missed collections is more than a few streets, the  work is added to a recovery list and is allocated by the Duty Manager Team to a recovery/back up crew to do. That of course relies on there being enough resources (staff and wagons) spare to create a recovery crew for that day. How that work list is prioritised may depend on a number of factors, such as:

* creating a list of the same waste type (for example all black bin misses collected together).
* creating an efficient recovery day’s work to maximise the amount done; for example avoiding sending a crew to do a few streets on one side of the city and then travelling several miles to the other side of the city for a few more.
* prioritising black bin waste over green bin waste over brown bin waste.
* consideration as to the relative impact of leaving the waste uncollected on the local environment – for example if it is a consecutive miss and overflowing or side waste is likely.

The staff make these decisions in professional and fair manner and with the above sensible considerations. All wards are treated equally in how the above factors are considered and it is the customers that we focus on, not the ward in which they live.

**Q** Councillor B Anderson – Will the Executive Member responsible for Street Cleansing explain why the service are refusing to take further actions in regard to landowners who are refusing to cut back overgrown paths, when those landowners are not responding to requests?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

Where vegetation from private land overhangs a highway or any other road or footpath to which the public has access so as to endanger or obstruct the passage of vehicles or pedestrians, or obstructs or interferes with the view of drivers of vehicles, the Council’s Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team (CNT) will and does use powers set in legislation (Highways Act 1980) to serve notice on the land owner to lop/cut the vegetation to remove the cause of the danger, obstruction or interference.

The legislation sets out clear requirements in terms of fair notice and timescales that must be allowed and the council should always be proportionate and pass the public interest test in its actions/enforcement.

Appropriate arboriculture consideration must also be given during bird-nesting season, for example with reference to the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Where appropriate, Parks and Countryside take the lead in issues relating to how trees on private land affecting the highway are best resolved.

Ultimately if the vegetation is overgrown and meets the criteria in the legislation (so not just height or aesthetic issue), CNT can and does undertake work in default and seek to recover costs from the landowner where notices are not complied with*.*

**Q** Councillor B Anderson – Who does the Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space hold responsible for the unacceptable missed bins in the city and in particular Adel & Wharfedale Ward?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

Leeds has the second largest council refuse operation in the UK. Our hardworking staff empty about 5,000 tonnes of household waste from half a million black, green and brown bins every week; making sure less than half a percent goes to landfill.

The service has experienced difficulties in completing all collections on a number of occasions in the last couple of months. Unfortunately, due to difficulties mainly in getting driver cover, the ability to revisit missed streets has been severely affected, meaning we have been unable to recover all bins within the two-day timescale we aim for, and a small proportion we have not been able to recover at all.

On those days we are unable to send all 75 crews/wagons out to fully complete the collection rounds due, we prioritise black and green bin collections. On the rare occasions we need to stand a brown bin route(s) will we choose the route(s) with the least amount of garden waste due to be emptied that day based on previous tonnage records.

Communications have been sent to ward members on missed collections and we are very sorry to the relatively small number of customers who have had to wait until the next collection.

In line with many other operational services that work on a shift based pattern, cover for staff absence is provided through a combination of a permanent staffing pool, agency and voluntary overtime. We have found it more difficult recently to source LGV drivers from Agencies. Recent recruitment has resulted in more drivers and loaders for the cover pool, which in turn will reduce the reliance on voluntary overtime and reduce the risk of future difficulties and disruption to service.

**Q38** Councillor B Anderson – When will the Executive Member responsible for Highways be advising Council of their plans to recover the service after their predecessor admitted the service was not achieving the standards we all aim for?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

The Highways and Transportation Service is a busy, complex £200m (capital and revenue) per annum Service undertaking a wide range of work across multiple teams, ranging from heavy civil engineering projects, flood risk management, maintaining street lights, carrying out winter maintenance, strategy setting, bidding for funding for schemes to teaching road safety at schools. As such, its circa 450 staff, comprising 300 office and 150 operational staff have thousands of interactions with Cllrs, partners and residents each year.

Performing the duty of the Highway authority cross 3000km network, it works closely with multiple contractor and consultant organisations across a large number of procurement frameworks and interacts with key partners such as WYCA, Network Rail, National Highways, many different utility companies and a multitude of developers, ranging in size from the very local to national, all of which adds complexity to the work being undertaken.

Given this level of interaction and the high level of demand for service, there will be occasions when service levels do drop below our high standards, despite best efforts. Staff vacancies, urgent issues, weather and unexpected circumstances will play a part in this. Particular issues in Traffic Engineering for example earlier in the year, culminated in the unusual step of a letter being sent to all Cllrs.

The Service has a continuous improvement ethos and will always seek to learn lessons and employ new ways of working, where appropriate.

Having said the above, the Service has a successful track record in delivering across its revenue and capital budgets and delivering its programme of capital works; it continues to take the lead on initiatives across West Yorkshire e.g. Vision Zero and the Service does receive many compliments for its work and has received regional and national recognition via the many awards won in recent years and entertained visitors from various governmental departments and other authorities from across the country who have visited Leeds to learn more about the projects delivered.

In context of the busy and complex operating environment set out above, if there are any specific concerns, please raise them with me and I will endeavour to assist.

**Q43** Does the Administration believe the brown bin service is a vital service for many and the collections should be treated as such?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy Environment and Green Space

Leeds City Council continues to invest significantly in the city’s kerbside garden waste collection service. Leeds operates by far the largest garden waste collection service of any single council in the UK. Despite the budget challenges, the service in Leeds remains free, with the majority of councils currently charging extra for this discretionary service. Currently 220,000 (60%) households in Leeds receive this service.

The service was created to help households, that have a sufficiently sized garden to justify a fortnightly collection, to reduce the amount of garden waste being put in their black bins. It was never designed as a service that would deal with all garden waste produced by every garden irrespective of size. It is there to support/complement other ways of dealing with garden waste, such as home composting, taking excess waste to local Household Waste and Recycling Centres or reducing the amount of garden wates produced in the first place (e.g. leaving grass cuttings on the lawn).

In recent weeks we have had some issues getting all 75 collection routes fully staffed and out every day. On the very rare occasions that happens we prioritise the collection of the black and green bins that all households have. Across Leeds since the garden waste service resumed for 2024, we have collected 99% of all brown bins, with 1% having to wait until their next collection day.

**Q** Can the Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space advise me how far behind schedule the council's tree maintenance timetable is at present?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

At present there are 423 jobs within the forestry system that are outside of agreed parameters for completion. Of those, 30% are already committed for delivery with an anticipated completion in the next 6 weeks. The remaining jobs are low and emerging risk work which will be monitored by officers and progressed as promptly as possible.

**Q** Councillor B Anderson– Can the Executive Member responsible for Planning Enforcement explain how he thinks this section is fit for purpose and delivering for the majority of residents in this city, when Councillors are receiving so many complaints about the lack of enforcement action?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

Planning Enforcement is a high profile and contentious area of statutory activity, dealing with conflict and competing interests on a daily basis.  The service works to the Leeds Local Enforcement Plan which sets out the priorities in working to in seeking to resolve breaches of planning control.  The most effective and quickest way of concluding cases is often through negotiation rather than formal action with the inherent appeal process which can extend the period of resolution considerably.  The Enforcement Plan sets out that formal action is a last resort.

Notwithstanding this negotiation-first approach, the service will not shy away from undertaking formal action where felt necessary; this is demonstrated by the fact that Leeds undertakes significantly more formal action that any other core city – for example in 2023, Leeds served 52 Enforcement Notice (ENS) and 46 Planning Contravention Notices (PCNs), compared to 21 ENs and 23 PCNs served by  Manchester, 8 EN and 4 PCNS in Liverpool, and 6 ENs and 10 PCNs in Newcastle. Even Birmingham City Council , with a much larger population that Leeds, served fewer with 42 ENs and 12 PCNs.

Supplementary information

There is often a perception that enforcement is ineffective and slow; and disagreement where a decision has been taken not to pursue formal action. However, with the confines of the legislation and planning system, the Service is evidently operating to a high level.

The service remains in demand with approximately 1,300 new requests for investigation being raised each year, although this year is on course to see about 1,500 requests.  In recognition of the increase workload and the statutory duty to investigate all complaints, alongside the continuous process efficiency measures undertaken, additional resource has recently been allocated to the service.

**Q** Can the Executive Member for Economy, Transport & Sustainable Development advise me how far behind the council's road maintenance programme is at present?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

The backlog of Highway Maintenance for Leeds currently stands at approximately £288M.

This backlog has continued to increase over recent years from both inflation and overall cuts to local government funding.

There has been a significant increase in overall material, plant, labour and maintenance costs with the previous rise in inflation from 2020 to April 2023 was 21%. (Source Bank of England CPI inflation data).

Despite the rate of inflation reducing recently, costs continue to rise but simply rising at a slower rate.

Whilst our local level of investment in highway maintenance has increased it has not kept pace with both the rate of decline of the network condition, and industry cost increases.

The Highways Maintenance backlog for England and Wales, estimated in the annual ALARM survey on the state of Britain’s roads undertaken by the Asphalt Industry Alliance in 2024, is £16.3bn. As stated, the backlog in Leeds being estimated in 2024 at £288m.

**Q54** Councillor B Anderson – Does the Executive Member for Economy, Transport & Sustainable Development accept that their policy for clearing the backlog of potholes and carrying out quality repairs is at best a concern, but in some areas could be described as worse than just concerning?

**A** Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

The Highways Maintenance backlog for England and Wales, estimated in the annual ALARM survey on the state of Britain’s roads undertaken by the Asphalt Industry Alliance in 2024, is £16.3bn. The backlog in Leeds is estimated in 2024 at £288m.

Potholes are an ever-present issue and tackling them is a high priority for all. Recent years and particularly last year, have seen an increase in the number of potholes reported and this is likely because of the second wettest year since records began.

Potholes can quickly form, increase in size, and can often be found in clusters occurring in a similar time frame. It is acknowledged that the weather and particularly the freeze/thaw effect and wet or standing water pushed by the action of traffic into cracks in the surface, can significantly accelerate the deterioration of roads and the subsequent pothole formation.

A review is currently ongoing looking at how both planned and reactive maintenance might be adjusted to take account of the increasing adverse effects of the climate on our road network and the prevalence of potholes. The details and recommendation from this review will be presented to the Executive Board later this calendar year, with an initial report going to Scrutiny Board (Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth) later this month.

**Q56** Councillor B Anderson – Does the Executive Member responsible for grass cutting accept that their service is causing concern to residents, who do not understand their “relaxed mowing policy”?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

The areas of relaxed mowing introduced across the city are now maturing well with an attractive, healthy diversity of species appearing, providing food and habitat for insects and small mammals helping to support biodiversity across the city in response to the declared climate emergency. In addition to the support for wildlife, these areas help tackle pollution, reduce urban heat extremes, slow down rainfall flows entering drainage systems and lock away atmospheric carbon below ground. To inform residents of the benefits of the approach we have placed information on the council’s website as well as posting information on social media. To help raise awareness further we have also placed out on sites involved numerous attractive signs that inform the travelling public of the ‘relaxed mowing’ initiative in place. We are always looking at opportunities to introduce further relaxation to mowing activities as we consider the changes made to grass maintenance across the city provide long term environmental and ecological benefits and we would welcome suggestions from residents for other areas to add to the approach.

**Q59** Councillor B Anderson – Will the Executive Member responsible for grass cutting apologise to the residents in Adel & Wharfdale Ward for the exceptionally poor verge cutting service they have had?

**A** Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space

High rainfall throughout the winter of 2023 continued into the current mowing season and has impacted mowing activities in all parts of the Leeds and across the wider region.  To provide context the UK Met office have provisionally recorded rainfall levels at 129% of the 1991-2020 average. There is normally an expectation that sloped areas cannot be cut during wet conditions however, the amount of water present in the ground this year has meant some level plots were also too soft to mow. To maintain operator safety and avoid the risk of machinery sinking and causing damage to grass surfaces some grass plots were intentionally left until conditions became more favourable.  Cooler than normal spring temperatures had initially supressed grass growth rates, but as temperatures have now risen consistently, grass growth rates have increased and combined with the wet ground to pose significant mowing challenges. Inevitably when cut, long grass surfaces produce large volumes of mown arisings that adds to the appearance of a lower quality finish however this is unavoidable in the circumstances. In response to these issues our verge mowing contractor has been working overtime on weekdays and Saturdays at no additional cost to the city to address the issues seen.