

Report to: Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee

Date: 20 April 2022

Subject: Design Quality

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To update the Panel on the urban design support programme being delivered by the Combined Authority.

2. Information

- 2.1 Improving design quality of the public realm and of housing has wide-ranging impacts: by creating pleasant outdoor spaces with green infrastructure, we encourage active travel and socialising in those spaces, building stronger communities where everyone feels welcome, and improving physical and mental health as well as reducing carbon emissions and flooding. The urban design support programme was set up in 2019 to address a gap in the Combined Authority's and the wider region's capacity on design.
- 2.2 The programme, funded using an allocation of £180,000 from what was then the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, has achieved the following over 3 years:
- 2.2.1 Carried out an assessment of design capacity across the region's planning authorities, which was detailed in a report issued to the Place Panel members

in early 2020. The preferred routes for design support from the Combined Authority were identified as masterplan review, sharing best practice (through a design network and web forum) and design training. This has informed the programme's work to date.

- 2.2.2 Provided urban design and masterplanning support initially across Leeds City Region and latterly to the 5 West Yorkshire districts including using public sector consultant Place Services to assist with housing sites using £70,000 from the Housing Revenue Fund.
- 2.2.3 Established a Leeds City Region network of design and planning professionals, supported by a LinkedIn group.
- 2.2.4 Delivered online webinar training on design topics chosen by the districts including blue and green infrastructure, street trees, design and masterplanning, low traffic neighbourhoods and design codes, which can be viewed on the Combined Authority's [YouTube channel](#)
- 2.2.5 Guided the Mass Transit Approach to Placemaking and Design Philosophy.
- 2.2.6 Played a key steering role in establishing a Quality Panel to review the design of Transforming Cities Fund schemes, having reviewed a third of the total to date.
- 2.2.7 Established a dementia-ready housing task force to deliver the Mayor's sub pledge to ensure all our older people's housing and related services are dementia friendly.
- 2.2.8 Steered the successful bid to the Home Office's Safer Streets 3 Fund to research women and girls' perceptions of safety in parks and guided its implementation with the policing and crime directorate.

Proposed plan for Urban Design Support Programme

- 2.3 Design quality is a cross-directorate theme that supports many areas of our business plan, including:
 - E4 (Build integrated place-based pipelines and secure funding that furthers our inclusivity and levelling up ambitions),
 - T2 (Continue development and delivery of Transforming Cities Fund programme projects),
 - T4 (Further develop mass transit proposals for West Yorkshire), and
 - S1 (Delivery of the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan: Strategies (including Women and Girls)).
- 2.4 It is the ambition of the support programme to ensure that the CA's projects and programmes are well-designed and that our districts are supported to enable good design. For instance, through applying the 'Streets for People' standard to Transforming Cities Fund schemes, we have been able to collaborate with districts to successfully change layouts to provide more pavement space, trees and seating. We have also been able to make changes

to cycling infrastructure so that it is easier to use, and therefore more likely to appeal to an older and younger demographic.

- 2.5 Through training and knowledge sharing between the districts, we have given planning officers the tools to challenge developers on various issues, including green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and viability. For instance, we have used the Building for a Healthy Life tool and the National Design Guide to help them identify poor design in housing layouts and to use national and local policy to push back against it.
- 2.6 Continuing and developing the programme in line with our business plan's objectives is proposed, as follows:
- Develop a pipeline of sites requiring design support, targeting West Yorkshire Spatial Priority Areas and seeking funding to deliver.
 - Collaborate with colleagues to develop the CA Housing Strategy, including raising design quality standards across all CA funded schemes and aligning with the Climate and Environment Action Plan.
 - Quality Panel – continue to support including building capacity so the panel is ready for City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme.
 - support the development of urban design expertise in the new Mass Transit team.
 - Dementia-ready housing task force – continue to facilitate the task force to deliver targets including dementia champions and a dementia charter (in the short term) and setting standards (in the longer term). Potentially seeking funding to resource research to fill knowledge gaps.
 - Continue to collaborate with West Yorkshire Police on the Parks for Women and Girls project, using the research to develop regional guidance and influence national guidance.
 - Influence national policy development through working with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the emerging Office for Place and Active Travel England.
 - Continue to develop the regional design network, delivering training, collaborating with Homes England on their training programme and helping local planning authorities access placement support from the expansion of the social enterprise, Public Practice, to the north.
- 2.7 The KPIs that relate directly to the above are covered in E4 (Build integrated place-based pipelines and secure funding that furthers our inclusivity and levelling up ambitions): Review 60% TCF schemes by Q4, identify SPA sites for design support in Q3 and complete the safer parks design guidance in Q3.

- 2.8 However, the work will support wider KPIs such as the Housing Strategy, Nature Recovery Strategy, Low emissions Strategy, carbon impact assessments, Connectivity Infrastructure Plan review and the Safety of Women and Girls Strategy.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 The workstreams above align in many ways with climate emergency objectives. For instance, a better-quality public realm encourages active travel and provides green and blue infrastructure which impacts on carbon emissions, biodiversity and climate change adaptation. Improving the thermal efficiency of homes is key to health, especially for older people/those living with dementia. Reducing crime reduces carbon – the [Home Office](#) estimated that assault and sexual offences resulted in a total of over 900,000 tonnes of CO₂e in England and Wales in 2011.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1 Creating an environment that makes walking and cycling easier is fairer to women (who are less likely to drive) and those who cannot afford a car. Urban design and masterplanning can improve access to green space for all, addressing some of the serious health inequalities that have been identified by the Covid pandemic.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 There are obvious impacts on equality and diversity from some of the workstreams, for instance the dementia or parks for women and girls projects. More broadly, urban design and masterplanning has a huge influence on the use of outdoor spaces. Where there are physical barriers, such as uneven surfaces, a busy road or a lack of seating, older people, those with disabilities and children are disproportionately affected. Where there are more nuanced deterrents such as a lack of natural surveillance, landscaping or an active local centre, it is much less welcoming for women, children or anyone who feels vulnerable due to the fear of crime, and can impact on physical and mental health.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 2.2.1 – Housing design pipeline and 2.2.5 – Dementia-ready housing task force have funding implications which are outlined above.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 None.

8. Staffing Implications

- 8.1 Actions outlined in 2.2 would need to be prioritised according to available staff resource.

9. External Consultees

- 9.1 Workstreams of the design support programme have included collaboration with West Yorkshire Police, University of Leeds, local planning authorities from all 10 districts in Leeds City Region, Yorkshire Sport Foundation, Homes England and social housing providers.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the Panel notes and comments on the content of the report. The views and experience of Committee members on any of the above themes are welcomed as part of a panel discussion.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 None.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 None.