

SCRUTINY BOARD (SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors B Chastney, R Grahame,
K Groves, M Hamilton, P Harrand, G Hyde,
J Jarosz and J Marjoram

43 Declarations of Interest

Councillor R Grahame declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8, Reform of Council Housing Finance – Comments from Scrutiny on the draft new HRA Business Plan and Agenda Item 9, Response to the Scrutiny Review of the ALMO Business Centre Leeds due to his position on the East North East Homes ALMO.

Councillor B Chastney declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8, Reform of Council Housing Finance – Comments from Scrutiny on the draft new HRA Business Plan and Agenda Item 9, Response to the Scrutiny Review of the ALMO Business Centre Leeds due to his position on the West North West Homes ALMO.

44 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Hardy, C Townsley and N Walshaw. Councillor B Chastney was in attendance as substitute for Councillor C Townsley.

45 Minutes - 10 October 2011

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October be confirmed as a correct record.

46 Dog Control Orders - Phase 2 Project - Scrutiny Comments

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development included the Board's comments for inclusion into the Executive Board report regarding the Review of the Phase 2 proposed Dog Control Orders.

The Chair welcomed Tom Smith, Locality Manager, Environment and Neighbourhoods to the meeting.

Separate to the proposals set out in Phase 2 of the Dog Control Orders project, the Scrutiny Board had explored the potential use of the Dog Control (Dogs on Leads at All Times) Order in relation to parks and playing pitches that are used by schools that have no on-site green space and are, as such,

secondary facilities. A particular example cited was Calverley Park (Victoria Park) used by Calverley Park Side School. The Board learned that after seeking legal advice, the Project Board had concluded that whilst the use of this Order may assist with enforcement action, the stated purpose of this Order is one of public safety rather than to prevent fouling. The Order would also need to be enforced at all times and not just when schools are using the specified areas. In view of this, it was considered that the Order would be seen as disproportionate to enforce on safety grounds where there is no safety issue. The Scrutiny Board agreed that further work was needed to accurately assess the extent of the problems encountered in such areas in relation to dog fouling in particular and explore the best use of the full range of powers available to the Council in promoting responsible dog ownership in such areas that would be deemed proportionate to enforce and thereby be subjected to public consultation.

The review and consultation process for implementing the orders was discussed and the Board was informed that areas that had problems with fouling could be targeted by enforcement officers. It was also reported that approximately half of schools in Leeds had responded to the consultation on the Phase 2 Project and a reminder would be sent.

Further issues discussed included the following:

- Members received more complaints on fouling rather than safety issues.
- As there were only six Dog Wardens that covered the whole City, other enforcement staff could be used to issue fixed penalty notices in relation to breaches of Dog Control Orders and fouling in particular.
- There would be a publicity campaign regarding the Dog Control Orders arising from the Phase 2 Project.
- Fixed penalty notices were currently £75. Members discussed the possibility of raising this to act as more of a deterrent. However, it was felt that more robust enforcement of repeat offenders was needed in order to act as a greater deterrent. The Scrutiny Board also recognised the need to ensure that non-payment of fixed penalty notices are actively pursued and for further legal action to be taken where required.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted and the Scrutiny Board's comments for inclusion into the Executive Board report be amended to reflect today's discussion.

47 Reform of Council Housing Finance - Comments from Scrutiny on the draft new HRA Business Plan

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presented the draft report summarising the observations, conclusions and recommendations of the Board in relation to the draft Leeds Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan.

Councillor Gruen, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration and John Statham, Head of Housing Partnerships were in attendance for this item.

The following amendments to the report were suggested:

- Recommendation 6 – That the narrative surrounding this recommendation makes it clear that whilst a City Wide Investment Standard should be reflective of the Council's aspirations in terms of the quality and sustainability of housing in the city, it also needs to be informed by sustainable funding solutions.
- Recommendations 7 and 11 – that the narrative surrounding these recommendations makes it clear that the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration had already supported the actions proposed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and amended as suggested.

48 Response to the Scrutiny Review of the ALMO Business Centre Leeds

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presented the response to the Scrutiny Review of the ALMO Business Centre Leeds .

Claire Warren, Chief Executive of West North West Homes ALMO and David Heels Director of Corporate Services, ALMO Business Centre Leeds joined Councillor Gruen and John Statham for this item.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following issues were discussed:

- Merging of back office services – this would ensure that work was not duplicated and be more efficient and effective.
- That further savings would be achieved through process reviews in areas such as contract management and procurement.
- Performance issues – it was reported that service delivery needed to be measured against the Leeds City-Wide Service Offer and the ambition was to become an excellent performing organisation that measured risk well.
- Local Letting Policies – these would be reviewed annually and the latest review took account of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 relating to age will come into force in April 2012. It was noted that a local lettings policy based on age will have to be justifiable – meaning there must be sufficient evidence to justify the continued or new policy. It was not yet known what the financial impact would be and it was suggested that Local Letting Policies may be an issue that Scrutiny would like to look at. Local Letting Policies would be made by delegated decision and would not be signed off until full consultation had taken place.

- People unable to get on the housing ladder and unable to get housed in the areas where they currently lived.
- Accommodation for the ALMO Business Centre – discussion was held regarding the decision to locate at Navigation House and questions were asked about the transparency behind the decision. It was reported that the process had been done through the Asset Management Board.
- Reference was made to the summary of savings identified to date, as set out in the report. A schedule of how these would be achieved was requested by the Board.
- Staffing issues – Early Leavers Initiative, external recruitment freeze and staffing issues relating to reduced stock.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

49 Third Sector Review - Update

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development introduced an update on the Council Review of Third Sector Relationships.

Kathy Kudelnitzky, Chief Officer, Leeds Initiative and Partnerships and Pat Fairfax, Community Issues Co-ordinator were in attendance for this item.

The following issues were discussed:

- The Board welcomed the review and emphasised the importance of having more robust systems for monitoring the work of the third sector, particularly where services are being delivered to vulnerable groups across the city
- That where best practice is identified within particular directorates, there is a need to share this across the whole of the Council
- It was reported that the Review was currently a work in progress and that further input from Elected Members would be sought via a Members seminar.
- That further work needs to be undertaken in identifying service delivery outcomes as part of the commissioning process
- The Board requested more detailed information regarding the level of consultation already undertaken as part of the review

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and a further more detailed report be brought to the Board in the new year.

50 Financial Health Monitoring 2011/12 - Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate

The report of the Head of Member and Scrutiny Development informed the Board of the financial health of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate after six months of the 2011/12 financial year. Attached information had been included by the Directorate's Head of Finance.

Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods and Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environment and Neighbourhoods were in attendance for this item.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following issues were discussed:

- Vehicle repair costs – these were mainly associated with landfill damage and it was hoped that through using different landfill options this would be reduced. Work was ongoing with Fleet Management to investigate the balance between vehicle renewal and repair.
- Income from parking, the possibility of discounted parking to attract more users over the Christmas period was discussed.
- Recycling – it was reported that prices for metals and textiles was currently increasing whilst paper was decreasing.
- Dog fouling enforcement - reference was made to the potential use of other officers such as Parks and Countryside Officers and Police Community Support Officers.
- Scrutiny involvement in the budget process. It was noted that an Outline Budget report was due to be submitted to Executive Board in December 2011.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

51 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development detailed the Board's work schedule. Also attached were copies of recent Executive Board Minutes and a copy of the Forward Plan relating to the Board's portfolio.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

52 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 12 December 2011 at 10.00 a.m. (Pre-meeting for all Members at 9.30 a.m.)