

SCRUTINY BOARD (SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY AND CULTURE)

TUESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2014

PRESENT: Councillor K Groves in the Chair

Councillors A Castle, J Chapman,
D Cohen, P Davey, R Harington,
M Ingham, S McKenna, B Selby and
P Wadsworth

30 Late Items

There were no formal late items of business to consider.

31 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared at the meeting.

32 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Hussain.

33 Minutes - 9 September 2014

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

34 Scrutiny Inquiry - Employment and Skills

The Board conducted the first session of its inquiry on employment and skills. In attendance to address the Board and answer Members' queries were:

- Ian Hunter, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Alison France, Department for Work and Pensions
- Councillor Katherine Mitchell, Lead Member, Digital and Creative Technologies, Culture and Skills
- Jane Hopkins, Head of Employment and Skills
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer (Welfare and Benefits)

Ian Hunter spoke about the recent changes to the way that services are provided through the Job Centres, highlighting the following key points:

- There are 8 Job Centres and about 500 staff across Leeds.
- There are about 59,000 people on key benefits, with around 16,000 claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). Approximately 4,000 of these are young people. All of these figures have reduced from peak levels thanks to partnership working.

- The changes to a digital based service are seen as exciting and equipping the service for the 21st century. It is better for those who can self-serve, whilst face to face resource will be focused on supporting those who are unable or unwilling to do so.
- About 85% of JSA claims are now being made on-line.
- Claimants are shown how to use the public access computers in Job Centres, including how to access key websites and upload their CV.
- The service also increasingly uses text, email and twitter to communicate.
- The Claimant Commitment has replaced the previous Jobseeker's Agreement.
- The Job Centres are not shutting down channels of access and there is a commitment to provide support to ensure people are not digitally excluded.

Councillor, officers and the Lead Member highlighted the following points:

- The Council is taking a similar approach to digital enabling through the community hub pilots, encouraging those who are able to self-serve to do so, and providing support to those unable to do so. There is a role in providing the digital infrastructure and also building capacity and providing support to access it.
- There is wide ranging provision of courses and learning across Leeds to develop on-line skills and this is being promoted.
- People need to be supported with the ability and confidence to use technology.
- It is important not to close down alternative channels of access while people still need them.
- Council officers are working closely with the DWP over the benefit changes and also learning from the experience of other authorities.

The following issues were raised in discussion:

- Face to face support is given to those currently unable to use the PC access at Job centres, with the aspiration that over time people will become able to self-serve.
- The support provided by library staff to members of the public applying for jobs.
- The role of Job Clubs, including operational hours, accessibility, funding and value for money.
- Difficulties for claimants covering the cost of attending centres either for courses or to use computers. It was noted that the DWP reimburses bus fares for attendance.
- The role of the Community Hubs and the piloting of pop-up provision to take services to where people are.
- The need to use mapping information to look more closely at areas of digital exclusion, identify gaps in service provision and consider how to address these.
- The demotivating effect of applying for lots of jobs and getting no feedback from employers.

- The role of Job Centre staff in supporting clients who are being unsuccessful in their applications.
- The proposed further development of community hubs across the city
- The recording of job seeking activity on claimants' universal job match accounts, and the operation of sanctions under the new Claimant Commitment scheme.
- The potential for co-location of Job Centres and council offices, which is precluded at present by the leases on Job Centres. There was a commitment to work in a complementary manner and avoid duplication.
- The need to engage with employers about the skills they require from employees.
- The publication of a leaflet "Get online in Leeds".
- The potential role of the private sector in boosting public wifi access. An example was given where wifi is required in order for smart meters to work in housing tower blocks.
- The lesson from successful local authorities is that staff and councillors need to be champions of computer use and encourage people to embrace digital technology.
- A request for data on any impact on the use of council free phone access following the removal of public access phones from Job Centres.
- Feedback from employers about whether speculative applications are welcome or not, and how this influences the requirements on claimants to submit applications.
- How young people are supported to be job ready.
- The positive impact of work experience.

RESOLVED – That the issues raised by this session of the inquiry be noted.

35 District Heating

The Board considered proposals for the development of district heating in Leeds. Councillor Barry Anderson, Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board, joined the Board for this item.

In attendance to address the Board and answer Members' queries were:

- George Munson, Senior Programme Leader, Sustainable Energy & Climate Change Team
- Tom Knowland, Head of Sustainable Energy & Climate Change

The following issues were raised in discussion:

- The opportunities now available to develop district heating in Leeds
- The purpose of the new feasibility work which is looking at a bigger network
- Developments in the technology associated with district heating schemes which minimised heat lost over distance travelled
- The need for existing heating systems in tower blocks to be overhauled

- A specific request for interim action to be taken in relation to ongoing problems experienced by some residents at Saxton Gardens
- The potential for local jobs and skills opportunities at all levels associated with the development, implementation and operation of district heating
- Clarification of the respective roles of Leeds City Council and Veolia
- Plans for stakeholder consultation as part of the scheme's development
- The need to promote understanding of the positive opportunities offered by district heating now, to respond to people concerned as a result of poor experiences from older schemes. The success of the scheme in Sheffield and also smaller local schemes in Leeds such as Cottingley Heights was referred to, as well as the potential for 10% savings on residents' fuel bills
- Clarification that food waste formed only a very small amount of the overall waste levels, so alternative methods of processing this should not have a significant impact on the proposals
- Planning policies within the Core Strategy and the Aire Valley Action Plan which would support the development of district heating, including the ability to place relevant conditions on planning permissions
- Work to be undertaken by the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board in reviewing the waste strategy
- The ongoing interest of this Board in monitoring activity to reduce the city's carbon footprint

RESOLVED –

- a) That a further report to be provided to the Scrutiny Board, setting out actions and proposals to maximise the jobs and skills opportunities from this project.
- b) That the Board will continue to monitor efforts to reduce the carbon footprint - in line with the Sustainable Economy and Culture Strategic Partnership Board's priority of becoming a low carbon city - as part of the next annual review of the Partnership, due in April 2015.
- c) That officers be asked to explore an interim solution for properties in Saxton Gardens that are experiencing problems with the existing district heating scheme.
- d) That this Board would wish to be represented as appropriate when the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board undertakes work related to district heating.

(Councillor Harington left the meeting at 3.25pm during consideration of this item.)

36 Work Schedule

The Board received a report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which set out the latest version of the Board's work schedule.

The Board agreed to add an item to the agenda for the December Board meeting in relation to the marketing of sports and events services, following discussions at working group meetings on both service areas.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be agreed, subject to the above addition.

37 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 18 November 2014 at 1.30pm (a pre-meeting will start at 1.00pm for Board members.)

The meeting finished at 3.30pm