

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 12TH OCTOBER, 2015

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, C Campbell,
C Dobson, R Grahame, G Hyde,
J Illingworth, J Jarosz, K Ritchie and
M Robinson

30 Late Items

There were no late items.

31 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

32 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors A Carter, M Harland, K Maqsood, K Wakefield and N Walshaw. Notification was received that Councillor C Dobson was substituting for M Harland; Councillor J Jarosz was substituting for Councillor K Wakefield; and Councillor K Ritchie was substituting for Councillor K Maqsood.

33 Minutes - 14 September 2015

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2015 be approved as a correct record.

34 Migration and Refugee Update - Leeds Position

Last month, the Board requested information about the current position in Leeds in relation to migration generally, but to also have an informed discussion about the Leeds response to the current Middle East refugee crisis.

The report submitted by the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided background information on a range of issues relating to migration in Leeds and how services are addressing the issues and the implications arising. The report also explained the Leeds response to the current Middle East refugee crisis. Appended to the report was a copy of the Executive Board report dated 23rd September 2015 which also included the Council's response to the Home Office consultation 'Reforming support for failed asylum seekers and other illegal migrants'.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Board Member for Communities
- Shaid Mahmood, Acting Chief Officer Communities
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer Partnership Development and Business Support, Children's Services
- Rob McCartney, Head of Housing Support, Housing Leeds
- Mick Ward, Head of Commissioning, Adult Social Care
- Pria Bhabra, Commissioning Officer (Migrant Access), Adult Social Care
- Inspector Nick Berry, West Yorkshire Police
- David Brown, Migration Yorkshire

Given the complexity of this issue, the Chair explained that he had also extended an invitation to other Scrutiny Board Chairs to attend, or nominate a Board representative to attend, and contribute to the discussion. The following Members were in attendance in this regard:

- Councillor Hayden – Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Ghulam Hussain – Adult Social Services, Public Health, NHS Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Catherine Dobson – Children and Families Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Ritchie – Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board

The key issues raised during the Board's discussion were as follows:

- Definition of terms used in relation to migration – a simplified definition of terms used had been appended to the report which Members welcomed. However, a suggestion was made to make clear within the definition of Asylum Seekers that once granted asylum, those individuals will also have the right to work as well as claiming benefits.
- Migrant Access Project – the Board welcomed the initiatives linked to this project, particularly in training community people who speak the same language of new arrivals to help inform and empower them to successfully settle and integrate. Particular importance was also placed on delivering more drop-in and outreach services.
- Syrian refugees – Members were pleased to learn that Leeds has offered to take an additional 200 Syrian refugees over the next two years, equating to approximately 20 families for each of the next two years.
- Housing for the Syrian refugees – it was highlighted that less than 10 council houses are expected to be used to house the Syrian refugees as the Council is also working closely with the private rented sector and housing associations.
- Addressing housing misconceptions – the Board discussed the number of applicants on the council housing waiting list (following the meeting, the directorate verified the figures to be approximately 25,000 applicants currently on the council housing waiting list, of which only approximately 6,000 have been awarded priority status (Band A or B) and that very few

are without any form of accommodation - approximately 15 rough sleepers). Acknowledging that refugees would be granted priority status under the same processes, the Board agreed that greater clarity was needed to help address particular misconceptions about refugees 'queue jumping' the housing waiting list.

- Local welfare scheme funding – the Board welcomed the allocation of £100k to support third sector organisations in providing assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. The principle of enabling numerous organisations to access this funding was also welcomed.
- Application of the asylum process – the Board sought further clarification of this process and concerns were raised about refused asylum seekers becoming destitute as they will have very little incentive to stay in touch with the authorities once support is withdrawn.
- Reforms to asylum support – the Board also shared the concerns expressed by the Council to the Home Office consultation on the proposed reforms to asylum support. Members were informed that local MPs had also been consulted in this regard.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children – the Board welcomed the positive response of Children Services in already assisting Kent County Council in accommodating 8 children as part of the Council's looked after children arrangements, with the possibility of taking more. It was also noted that additional assistance would be offered to those schools that offered placements for these children.
- Child friendly welcome pack for new children in the city – the Board praised the development of a new initiative with Migration Yorkshire aimed at helping children to express themselves by providing a welcome pack that will include a variety of art tools.
- Access to English language learning – the Board recognised the importance of providing assistance to those individuals needing to improve their written and spoken English to enable them to access further education and employment. The Board therefore welcomed the launch of the 'Learning English in Leeds' website which signposts individuals to where they can access lessons.
- City of Sanctuary – acknowledging that Leeds is part of the UK wide network of Cities of Sanctuary, the Board was informed that a progress report was due to be produced in 2016 and would be shared with Scrutiny.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked everyone for their positive contributions and explained that the Scrutiny Board will continue to monitor the broader issues surrounding migration in Leeds and will schedule a specific update on the Middle East refugee crisis in January/February 2016. In the meantime, the Chair requested that the comments and suggestions raised during the meeting are reflected as part of the ongoing work surrounding this matter.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Scrutiny Board notes the report
- (b) That the comments and suggestions arising from today's meeting are reflected as part of the ongoing work surrounding this matter.

- (c) That the Board will continue to monitor the broader issues surrounding migration in Leeds and will schedule a specific update on the Middle East refugee crisis in January/February 2016.

35 Poverty Truth Commission Leeds

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) presented information on the Poverty Truth Commission run by Together for Peace and supported by the Council.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Board Member for Communities
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Andrew Grinnell, Together for Peace

A report on the activity and conclusions of the Commission, which was produced in the form of postcard packs, was also distributed to Board Members during the meeting for information. The innovative format of this report was praised by the Board.

The Chair invited Andrew Grinnell to summarise the key outcomes arising from the Commission. In doing so, it was also noted that Together for Peace, in conjunction with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Scottish Poverty Truth Commission, were exploring opportunities to roll out the Poverty Truth Commission across the country as well as expanding it further in Leeds. This was welcomed by the Board.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

(Councillor C Campbell left the meeting at 11.40 am during consideration of this item).

36 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development invited Members to consider the Board's work schedule for the municipal year. The Chair highlighted that the work schedule would be updated to reflect today's discussions and reminded the Board of forthcoming working group meetings linked to its inquiry on Universal Credit.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be updated to reflect the Board's discussions today.

37 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 9 November 2015 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am).

(The meeting concluded at 12.00 pm).