

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, N Buckley,
R Grahame, M Harland, G Hyde,
J Illingworth, J Jarosz, K Wakefield and
N Walshaw

56 Late Items

In relation to item 7, the Board received a draft inquiry report following its inquiry into Universal Credit.

57 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

58 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors C Campbell, M Robinson and K Maqsood. Notification was received that Councillor J Jarosz was substituting for Councillor K Maqsood.

59 Minutes - 18 January 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2016 be approved as a correct record.

60 Inquiry into Universal Credit - draft scrutiny report

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presented the draft report of the Scrutiny Board following its recent inquiry into Universal Credit.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Alison France, Customer Services Operations Manager (Leeds), Jobcentre Plus
- Simon Betts, Partnership Manager (Leeds), Jobcentre Plus

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Transitional Protection arrangements – whilst acknowledging that issues surrounding Transitional Protection arrangements do not currently affect Leeds, Members reiterated the need for DWP to still address this matter with urgency as it will be relevant to other local authority areas that are administering Universal Credit to couples and families.
- Impact of further welfare reforms – reference was made during the meeting to an article within the Independent which implied that single parents entering into a relationship with someone claiming Universal Credit could potentially have their own benefits reassessed at a lesser rate in line with new reforms. Representatives from DWP agreed to seek further clarification of this and report back to Scrutiny.
- Training of DWP staff – whilst acknowledging that the draft inquiry report emphasises the importance of training frontline staff on Universal Credit, the representatives from DWP also shared details of training programmes currently in place for their staff too.
- Close working with Citizens Advice – Members reiterated the importance of working closely with Citizens Advice as part of the roll out for Universal Credit.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the Board's inquiry into Universal Credit and particularly welcomed the input of DWP throughout the course of the inquiry.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Board's draft inquiry report on Universal Credit be approved.

61 Scrutiny Inquiry into Community Committees - session 2

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided information as part of the Scrutiny Board on-going inquiry into the development of Community Committees. This focused on the extent to which Community Committees are engaging with other established community forums/partnerships such as Cluster Partnerships; Parish and Town Councils; and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Appended to this report were documents setting out details of all the various partnership arrangements operating within the 3 main locality working areas (South East; East North East; West North West).

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer for Communities
- Rory Barke, Area Leader (Corporate)
- Martin Dean, Area Leader
- Baksho Uppal, Area Leader
- Lucy Jackson, Consultant in Public Health
- Joanne Davis, Health Improvement Principal, Public Health
- Tim Taylor, Health and Wellbeing Improvement Manager, Public Health

- Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer Partnership Development and Business Support, Children's Services
- Mary Armitage, Targeted Services Area Lead, Children's Services
- Councillor Claire Hassell, Barwick & Scholes Parish Council
- Councillor Nick Fawcett, Clifford Parish Council

The key issues raised were as follows:

- The important role of Community Committee Champions in engaging with local partners and providing regular updates to their Committee.
- The need to establish effective methods of communication between Community Committee Members and their respective Communities Teams to give assurance that any action points arising from meetings or workshops are being progressed.
- The need to establish a robust reporting mechanism between the Cluster Partnerships and Community Committees and to work closely with Children's Services in this regard.
- The need to strengthen communication links between Community Committees and their respective Parish and Town Councils.
- The importance of identifying key priority issues that will encourage greater interest from local communities.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to this inquiry session and also acknowledged that Rory Barke would be retiring from the Council next month. As such, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Rory for support he has provided to Scrutiny over the years and wished him well in his retirement.

RESOLVED – That the Board notes the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities).

(Councillor J Illingworth arrived at 10.30 am during consideration of this item).

62 Syrian Refugee Relocation Programme update

At the request of the Scrutiny Board in October 2015, the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided an overview of the current Syrian Refugee Relocation Programme and how this has been implemented in Leeds.

The following individuals were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer for Communities
- Anne McMaster, Communities Team, Citizens and Communities
- Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer Partnership Development and Business Support, Children's Services

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Members noted that since the agreement, 7 Syrian families (25 people) arrived in Leeds on 8th December 2015. These families have been accommodated through a local housing association. It was highlighted again that less than 10 council houses are expected to be used to support the relocation of up to 200 Syrian refugees as the Council continues to work closely with the private rented sector and housing associations.
- Reference was made to a funding bid by Migration Yorkshire as part of a ‘vulnerable and marginalised new migrants’ programme which includes both Big Lottery and ESIF funding.
- 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. Linked to this, Members acknowledged the challenges surrounding the provision of ESOL programmes.
- Members welcomed the efforts being made locally in providing specific support to Syrian refugee children.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) be noted.

63 Performance Update

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided an update on performance areas relevant to the Board’s remit.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer for Communities
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Susanna Benton, Electoral Services Manager

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Registration of deaths within 5 days of death – Members were assured that the Council was performing above the national average rate, which was 78%, and that the national target of 90% for registering deaths within 5 days is not easily achievable due to uncontrollable external factors before the customer contacts the Council. However, efforts continue to be made to help improve the local performance rate.
- Call answer rates – it was highlighted that the customer wait time to speak to a member of staff in the Contact Centre had fallen by almost half from 6m7s in quarter 2 to 3m31s in quarter 3. This was linked to recent recruits completing their training programmes and taking up their positions in their new teams.
- The Living Wage – reference was made to the Council’s on-going engagement work with other local employers in promoting the Living

Wage. Members therefore requested further detail of responses received from other employers in this regard.

- Claims affected by under occupancy – Members discussed the use of Discretionary Housing Payments in assisting individuals affected by under occupancy and the potential impact of future DHP grant reduction.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) be noted.

64 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.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be noted.

65 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 14th March 2016 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am).

(The meeting concluded at 11.55 am)