

Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)

Report to: Citizens & Communities Scrutiny Board

Date: 14th March 2016

Subject: Role and work of the Communities Board

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides information on the role and work of the Communities Board. The report provides details of the membership and the terms of reference and summarises the review of its role and function leading to its current work programme.
2. The Communities Board spent some time in 2015 reviewing its role and function. Members of the board had felt that it could become more purposeful and add greater value to the work of those involved and to partnership working on community issues. A revised set of terms of reference (appended) and new ways of working were agreed to facilitate greater learning, participation and discussion focussed on real issues facing front line staff and communities. The current work programme is seeking to identify a set of principles that can be agreed on by partners to help govern our relationship and work with residents, neighbourhoods and communities. Such a set of principles can support future joint investment in community development, the sharing of resources and an enhanced voice and better outcomes for local residents.

Recommendations:

3. That the information supplied in this report is noted and discussed.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Scrutiny Board with summary information on the role and work of the Communities Board. The report invites members of the scrutiny board to comment on the Communities Board revised terms of reference and current work.

2. Background information

- 2.2 In the context of a new administration for Leeds City Council with a new council Leader, Cllr Judith Blake, articulating a policy framework for Leeds being a compassionate city with a strong economy and the 'best city for communities', 2015 saw the Communities Board reviewing its work and role. The board wanted to play its part, as a set of partners, to these challenging ambitions and to make its contribution to this agenda.
- 2.3 Workshop style meetings were held with wide ranging discussions on what the board should be doing, what it didn't want to do and on how the board could add value to our work with communities. There was broad agreement that the board's work needs to be more targeted, that the board needs to get under the skin of the issues that frustrate improvement, that create division and inequality in our communities and to better understand what works well and not so well.
- 2.4 The board considered the council's community committees and recognised their role in terms of local engagement in a new social contract with the citizens of Leeds. Likewise, how the new community hubs are starting to improve community access to services, support and joint working. Other examples of good practice were also discussed. In conclusion the board agreed that the challenge for the board is to understand and really listen to communities themselves, to front line providers and community based organisations about what works for them and learn together from what is going right.
- 2.5 The Communities Board agreed a new set of terms of reference (see appendix 1) and agreed that the style of future meetings needs to facilitate discussion and learning, to hear directly from residents and those involved in working with communities and to start to identify the principles upon which we can work collaboratively with communities to secure better outcomes.
- 2.6 A summary of the future role of the Communities Board is well articulated in the following note sent out to board members by the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities), James Rogers last year:

"Some things are clear: we want Leeds to be the best city for communities; we want our ambition in this regard to be clearly expressed; and we want it to be clearly linked to a set of values that underpin why Leeds is the best city for communities.

Together, as a set of partners, we want to provide leadership for our joint ambition; we want to adopt new ways of working together as partners and with communities; and we want to provide opportunities to listen carefully and to co-produce initiatives and agree on interventions with people and communities.

We have talked about not wanting to overreach and take too much on thus frustrating our ability to deliver. We have also spoken about understanding key parts of our community's infrastructure that will support us in our ambition, e.g. community cohesion and community development, to provide focus. We discussed the need to get a more detailed understanding of what stops some neighbourhoods from improving and to link any such locality work closely with the work of community committees."

3. The work of the Communities Board

3.1 The Communities Board had already initiated three locally focussed projects that fit well with the new role and purpose of the board. These projects are working with three communities, namely: East End Park, Holbeck and Little London. The objectives of the projects are to:

- Develop a model of how LCC (and the wider public sector) can work more collaboratively with communities in a way that increases community voice and influence and results in more empowered communities. Implicit within this is the need for a cultural change by public bodies to listen, hear and take action as a result of increasing the voice of communities.
- Understand the ways in which the public sector can promote and encourage community led development
- Share learning across the city leading to the models developed being embedded where appropriate in mainstream services. The evaluation and sharing of learning will be ongoing throughout the lives of the projects.
- Result in clear local outcomes.

3.2 The key questions the projects are exploring are:

- In what ways are communities able to express their collective and diverse views?
- To what extent are their views heard and understood by public/third sector staff?
- To what extent are community views acted on?
- Do communities have an understanding of how public/third sector agencies operate?
- To what extent do staff in public/third sector agencies have influence in their own organisation and or flexibility to respond to community views?
- What are the opportunities for, and barriers to, collaborative action between agencies and communities?
- Do communities/agencies have the confidence and skills to work collaboratively?
- Has the Partners Project brought about any change in relation to Q 1 – 7?
- Has the process of being involved in the Partners Project been a learning one?
- Are communities and/or agencies doing anything differently as a result of the Project or do they have the intention of doing anything differently?

- How will the long-term aim of influencing Council and other agencies' policy be achieved?

3.3 Each of the projects are at different stages of development and are focussed on issues identified by local residents. The project in Little London focussing on the new Little London Community Centre, how it came about, it's impact locally and it's operation, has progressed the most and the next meeting of the Communities Board will be at the centre meeting directly with local residents and local agency workers to hear from them first hand.

3.4 At recent meetings the board learnt about Asset Based Community Development work being progressed through Adult Social Care and about the experience of introducing the 'managed approach' for street prostitution in South Leeds.

3.5 The rest of the forward work programme includes:

- Identifying the key principles of community development and empowerment that the board can agree on as partners. An agreed set of principles could form the basis for future joint investment.
- A focus on cohesion/ migration – listening to the experiences of new and established migrants. Learning about what builds resilience and cohesion. Investigating this will expose other linked issues such as racism, access to employment, etc.
- Acting as a critical friend to others working on the shared communities agenda e.g. work of the Young Foundation, City of Sanctuary – also input to real local place based issues as a friend to local Community Committees

3.6 The agreed new ways of working will include:

- A move away from the set piece committee style meeting format.
- More workshop discussions
- Improved communication between meetings and possible interaction between members
- More opportunities to listen to the experiences of those affected in a similar style to the Poverty Truth Challenge
- Building trust as a network of leaders and the behaviours to support this.

4. Membership

4.1 The current membership of the Communities Board is provided as appendix 2 to this report. It has been agreed that the membership should follow the prioritised functions of the board from year to year and new membership proposals are yet to be made. However, it is accepted that invitations to join the board should be made to the CCGs, Voluntary Action Leeds and relevant community based organisations. Equalities considerations also need to be taken into account in regard to future membership.

5. Corporate Considerations

5.1 Consultation and Engagement

The membership of the Communities Board has been fully engaged and consulted as it has considered its future role and function.

5.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

The Communities Board has a significant role to play in promoting community cohesion and equality. In exercising its work under the new terms of reference specific consideration will be given to equality and diversity as well as community cohesion and integration.

5.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

The developing role of the Communities Board fits with the Best Council objective of 'supporting communities and tackling poverty' and is directly aligned to the ambition for Leeds to be 'the best city for communities'.

5.4 Resources and value for money

In considering the work of the Communities Board due consideration will always need to be taken to ensure the ambitions of the board can be matched with appropriate levels of resources. There are no resources issues to consider directly as a consequence of this report.

5.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.6 Risk Management

There are no significant risk management issues arising from this report.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the information supplied in this report is noted and discussed.

7. Background documents¹

None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.