

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors C Campbell, C Dobson,
R Grahame, M Harland, G Hyde,
J Illingworth, M Robinson, R. Stephenson
and N Walshaw

28 Late Items

There were no late items.

29 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

30 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

An apology for absence was submitted by Councillor K Wakefield.
Notification had been received that Councillor C Dobson was to substitute for
Councillor K Wakefield.

31 Minutes - 25th July 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th July 2016 be
approved as a correct record.

32 Scrutiny Inquiry into Migration in Leeds - Formal response and update

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
presented the formal response and general update on the progress made in
implementing the recommendations arising from the recent Scrutiny Inquiry
into Migration in Leeds.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Anne McMaster, Citizens and Communities
- Martin Dean, Area Leader
- Simon Foy, Head of Policy and Intelligence
- Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer Partnership Development and Business Support, Children's Services
- Dave Brown, Migration Yorkshire

The key issues raised were as follows:

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Monday, 10th October, 2016

- Members discussed the availability of mapping information relating to migration and particularly acknowledged the difficulty of mapping EU migration as the Census data is primarily used in this regard.
- The Board was pleased to note the training courses being provided to front line staff by Migration Yorkshire to help raise awareness of migration and the needs of migrants. It was suggested that these be made accessible to Elected Members too.
- The Board requested further details surrounding the Young Interpreters Scheme.
- Particular reference was made to the provision of ESOL and the impact of reduced funding streams. However, it was noted that Migration Yorkshire was exploring the availability of additional funding for ESOL provision following the recent Government announcement.
- Members acknowledged recent national reports indicating that numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children were going missing from the care of local authorities. Clarification was therefore sought in terms of the Council's own procedures to help avoid this happening in Leeds.
- Reference was made to the mapping of attainment levels for vulnerable migrant children and the need to proactively promote success stories in this regard.
- Members acknowledged the current joint working with Migration Yorkshire on the development of the new Controlling Migration Fund.

In conclusion, the Board welcomed the positive work being undertaken by the Council and its partners in relation to Migration and acknowledged that the Scrutiny recommendations would continue to be tracked.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That a further recommendation tracking report is scheduled within the next 6 months.

33 Scrutiny Inquiry into the development of Community Committees - Formal Response

The report of the Head of Governance Services presented the formal response to the recommendations arising from the recent Scrutiny Inquiry into the development of Community Committees.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Martin Dean, Area Leader

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Members welcomed the work underway in developing a mechanism to share information on a range of funding being spent in localities. Importance was also placed on sharing best practices. Linked to this, reference was made to the Community Committees Annual Report as a valuable source of information.
- Particular references were made to the on-going work aimed at strengthening relationships between Community Committees and Highways and Transportation. It was noted that some Committees have appointed local Transport Champions to assist in this regard.
- In relation to the development of flood management schemes, it was noted that the Environment Agency had been involved in this work and Members reiterated the need for Community Committees to be engaged in this work too.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That a further recommendation tracking report is scheduled within the next 6 months.

34 Performance report (Q1)

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided information on the Citizens and Communities Directorate's contribution to the delivery of the Best Council Plan under the Board's remit, alongside service performance information in relation to the 2016/17 quarter 1 period.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- John Mulcahy, Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access

The following key areas were discussed by the Board:

- The Board acknowledged and welcomed the revised format of the report in providing a more comprehensive overview of performance issues.
- Members discussed the range of factors affecting visitor numbers to Job Shops across the city and on-going efforts to extend the range of facilities and actively promoting this service.
- Members discussed the Council's security procedures linked to postal voting and also acknowledged that Leeds had the highest number of postal votes in the country.
- Reference was made to the recruitment of Welfare Rights Workers. It was noted that such posts are difficult to fill as funding is often not guaranteed for more than one year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

(Councillor M Robinson left the meeting at 11 am during the consideration of this item)

35 Leeds Advice Consortium

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided an update on services linked to the Leeds Advice Consortium and invited the Board to comment on options relating to the future of such services.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Joy Wetherill, Executive Officer, Advice Services
- Diane Lyons, Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau

The following key areas were discussed by the Board:

- The role of the Leeds Advice Consortium and details of the current contract
- Details surrounding the significant increase in the number of clients assisted since the start of the contract.
- Overview of the funding contributions to the service for 2016/17.
- The role of the in-house Welfare Rights Service and the rising demands placed on this service.
- The work undertaken to improve access to advice services.
- The on-going pressures faced by the Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Board was also invited to provide comment on specific options set out within the report. Briefly, these were as follows:

- *Encouraging more people to use self-help options e.g. websites, helplines* – Members acknowledged the benefit of this approach and recognised the need for this to be encouraged.
- *Encouraging more people to seek advice by phone or email* – Members made specific comment on the need to provide a flexible out of hours service. The Board also recognised the benefits of web chat technology.
- *Reducing or removing drop-in facilities for those wanting a face-to-face service and replacing the service with surgery appointments only; reducing the number of surgeries provided* – Members acknowledged that many individuals may not have access to internet services or may require translation services and therefore will continue to benefit from a drop-in service.

- *Further reducing or removing home visits* – concerns were expressed by the Board in terms of reducing this particular service.
- *Reviewing the provision of interpretation where this is a cost to the service* – Members acknowledged the increasing demands on this service and whilst acknowledging the value of this service, it was considered unfair for local authorities to be burdened with this cost alone.
- *Limiting the issues/areas where help will be provided e.g. limiting help with PIP or DLA appeals* – Members acknowledged the rising number of appeal enquiries primarily linked to new welfare reforms and discussed the need to better utilise the Council’s website to provide step by step guides, particularly to address more straightforward enquiries.

In conclusion, the Board reiterated the need for transparency in terms of communicating the impact that any future changes to the service is likely to have. Linked to this, the Board raised concerns that whilst the Council is required to respond to associated budget pressures, the demand for advice services continues to increase. It was therefore agreed that the concerns raised by the Scrutiny Board is communicated in writing to the Government’s Welfare Rights Select Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the above comments of the Scrutiny Board are taken into consideration in the development of proposals for the future provision of advice services.
- (c) That the concerns raised by the Scrutiny Board in relation to the Council’s budgetary pressures against increased demands for advice services is communicated in writing to the Government’s Welfare Rights Select Committee.

36 work schedule

The report of the Head of Governance Services invited Members to consider the Board’s work schedule for the municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be noted.

37 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 10th October 2016 at 10 am (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am)

(The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm)