

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITY DEVELOPMENT)

TUESDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor R Pryke in the Chair

Councillors C Beverley, B Gettings,
R Harington, J Jarosz, M Lobley, R Procter,
G Wilkinson, A Barker, J Matthews and
A Ogilvie

59 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Beverley declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item 7 'Consultation on the Draft Vision for Leisure Centres in Leeds' (Minute No. 61 refers) as a close relative was employed in a Council Leisure Centre. Councillor Beverley left the room during the consideration of this item.

60 Minutes of Last Meetings

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2008 and the minutes of the Call-In meeting held on 28th October 2008 be confirmed as correct records.

61 Consultation on the Draft Vision for Leisure Centres in Leeds

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report attaching the report of the Director of City Development which informed Members of the draft Vision for Leisure Centres presented to the Executive Board on 2nd September 2008 and of the consultation process that was being carried out on the draft proposals.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor John Procter, Executive Board Member for Leisure, Jean Dent, Director of City Development and Martin Farrington, Acting Chief Recreation Officer, City Development.

The Acting Chief Recreation Officer presented the report and summarised for the Board the draft vision for the Council's Leisure Centres as outlined in the 2nd September 2008 report to the Executive Board. He also summarised the public **consultation exercise** being undertaken to assess public opinion prior to recommendations being presented to the December Executive Board.

Members were advised that **costs** had risen significantly due in particular to the rise in energy prices. The demand modelling work had also identified an apparent **over provision of swimming pools** in the city. A **managed solution** was required which would make the best use of resources, shaping

them into something sustainable for the long term and which would operate within the Council's budget.

With regard to the **consultation exercise**, Members were advised that as broad a range of views as possible were being sought from a broad range of stake holders. Individual groups were consulted at the request of, for instance, Area Management.

In brief summary the following issues were raised by Members:

- **Funding for school transport** to swimming lessons at leisure centres.
- The **condition of leisure centres and swimming pools** and how this affected usage.
- The **location of Council and private leisure centres** – Officers agreed to provide Members with a map.
- The **closure of the bar and café at Pudsey Leisure Centre** which made it less attractive to visit – Members were advised that these facilities had been heavily subsidised. It was recognised that Pudsey Leisure Centre was in an excellent location but best use was currently not being made of this asset which would make it more sustainable. Members were also advised that there was a marketing team tasked with promotion of sports and leisure facilities.

With regard to the **consultation** exercise, the following concerns were raised by Members:

- The **letter sent to Gipton Residents** – A view was expressed by some Members that this letter had only been sent to the residents network, which was a self selecting group and that it would have been more useful if it had been sent to all the residents on the Gipton estate. Officers responded that the costs of consulting every resident directly was prohibitive and not cost effective. They did however consult with the Council's **Citizens Panel** which has 1,000 residents representing a balanced cross section of the community.
- The amount of effort put into tracking down and interviewing **hard to reach people** who had stopped using leisure centres, particularly in the Gipton area.
- Whether the **Beeston Hill and Holbeck Regeneration Partnership Board** and the **Primary Care Trust** had been consulted.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the proposals for consultation on the Draft Vision for Leisure Centres be noted.
- (b) That a map of Council and private leisure centres be supplied to Members.
- (c) That Members comments and concerns be noted.

62 Publicity and Promotion of Leisure Events

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report as a result of the Board's concerns on the apparent short notice being given to publicise and promote leisure events in the city. Attached was a report of the

Director of City Development which provided Members with information about **Light Night 2008** and in particular **publicity** prior to the event.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor John Procter, Executive Board Member for Leisure, Jean Dent, Director of City Development, and Andrew Macgill, Head of Arts and Events, City Development to present the report and respond to queries and comments from the Board.

Members raised their concerns about the lack of awareness of **Light Night** and the general **advertising of events**.

Members were advised of the **high attendance** at many of the events run by the Council, many of which had a loyal following and were in fact over subscribed. However it was acknowledged that Members could be made aware of events much further in advance than at present, perhaps by developing and making more use of the intranet.

Board Members made various suggestions on **improving advertising of events** and **developing the Council's website**. The Executive Board Member for Leisure and Officers agreed to review the advertising of events and to explore the suggestion that our museums join in future Light Nights and offer free entry.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received and noted.
- (b) That the outcome of the review for advertising events and the proposal that our museums participate in future Light Nights be circulated to all Members of the Board.

63 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report providing Members with a copy of the Board's current Work Programme. The Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st November 2008 to 28th February 2008 and the Executive Board Minutes of 8th October 2008 were also attached to the report.

The following matters were discussed:

- The Chair sought the Board's agreement to **defer the Inquiry on Residents Parking Schemes** to the December meeting, as the draft final report and recommendations were still out for comments and had not been concluded.
- Visits to the **Grand Theatre and City Varieties** – Members would be contacted regarding their availability in January.
- **Update on Traffic Flow and Pinch Points** – Members requested that the sites previously identified by Members be acknowledged in the update report due at the December meeting of the Board.
- **Performance Management Information** – Members requested that a list of previously received performance indicators, which were no longer included in the report, be provided to the Board.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That Item 11 'Inquiry on Residents Parking Schemes' be deferred to the December meeting of the Board.

64 Update on the Strategic Review of Planning and Development Services

The Chief Planning Officer submitted a report providing Members with an update on the progress made on implementing the solutions within the five improvement themes identified in the strategic review of Planning and Development Services.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Jean Dent, Director of City Development and Phil Crabtree, Chief Planning Officer.

The Chief Planning Officer, presented the report and advised the Board that good progress could be demonstrated.

In summary, the following issues were raised by Members:

- **Electronic consultations** – Members were advised that objections and comments would be available for viewing on line in the new year. However personal information would be removed.
- **The clarity of plans on-line** – Members were advised that Officers would still use paper copies and could be consulted if plans were not clear.
- **Consistency of planning judgements** – Members were advised that it was important to achieve consistency in terms of Officers' report writing and being clear and transparent. However, from time to time exceptional circumstances might be identified to justify a departure from policy. The department was seeking to develop training in this area for Members and Officers.
- **Recruitment to vacant posts** – Members were advised that the Department was experiencing difficulties in recruiting to the Head of Planning Services, despite this post being advertised twice. A major factor could be the state of the housing market which was making people reluctant to move. However recruitment to Development Control posts was the second most difficult area to recruit to in Local Government and the salary had been increased to make this post more competitive.
- **The impact of vacancies on the planning section** - Members were advised that there was a budget shortfall across the service due to the significant downturn in property activity. The number of planning applications was down and therefore there was a loss of fee income. A balance therefore had to be struck between coping with the workload and holding posts vacant.
- **The Highways Street Design Guide** – Members were advised that this included the use of shared space which was a request for Scrutiny in 2007/08. It was reported that, whilst disabled organisations nationally had agreed the proposals concerning the use shared space, this was not the case at the local level in Leeds. As a consequence, consideration of this

item had been deferred from the 5th November Executive Board for further consultation.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

(Note: Councillor Wilkinson joined the meeting at 11.12am during the consideration of this item and Councillor R Procter left the meeting at 11.30am at the conclusion of this item.)

65 Progress Report on the Management and Capacity of the Planning Compliance Service

The Chief Planning Officer submitted a report providing Members with an update on the actions being taken to address key issues in the Planning and Compliance Service, focused around the themes of improving the customer experience, developing skills and building capacity.

Jean Dent, Director of City Development and Phil Crabtree, Chief Planning Officer, were joined by Jim Wigginton, Planning Compliance Manager and Caroline Allen, Head of Development and Regulatory, Legal, Licensing and Registration Services, to respond to queries and comments from the Board.

The Chief Planning Officer presented the report and updated the Board on the **latest prosecution and enforcement action figures**. He also advised that the Department would like to extend the successful **training** for Members to Parish Councillors. Members' comments were also sought on the **suitability of the template** to report to Members the current status and intended course of action on enforcement cases.

The Head of Development and Regulatory then outlined for the Board the progress **Legal Services** had made over the last 9 months in assisting the process of planning compliance and improving the relationship between the two departments: for instance, adjusting resources to improve turn round time, producing a joint agreed schedule on enforcement matters, improving the familiarity of prosecution solicitors with the planning process and holding surgeries to improve the dialogue between enforcement officers and prosecution solicitors.

In brief summary, Members raised the following issues:

- **The report on Priority Enforcement Cases** – Members were advised that the department intended to e-mail Members with the first of these reports in December 2008 and then at six weekly intervals.
- Members suggested the possibility of **guidance on typical timescales** being included in the above mentioned report, however Officers advised that this would be difficult, as it was largely out of the department's control.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That a further progress report be received by the Board in spring 2009.

(Note: Councillor Wilkinson left the meeting at 11.40am during the consideration of this item.)

66 Inquiry on Residents Parking Schemes

Due to the draft final report and recommendations still being out for comment and therefore unavailable, the Board had previously agreed to defer this item to the December meeting of the Board (Minute No. 63 refers).

67 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Noted that the next meeting of the Board would be held on Tuesday 16th December 2008 at 10.00am with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.30am.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am.