

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 8TH JANUARY, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor G Driver in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, B Cleasby,
B Lancaster and T Leadley

Apologies Councillors J Bale, P Grahame and
R Pryke

61 Late Items

The Chair gave notice that in accordance with his powers conferred under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, he had agreed to accept as a late item of urgent business a revised and updated version of the report of the Director of Development regarding Planning Services Performance, containing information not available at the time of agenda despatch (Agenda Item 8, Minute No 65 refers), in view of the fact that the Leader of the Council and the Director of Development were scheduled to attend the meeting to discuss this issue.

Later other information was also circulated late in connection with the Committee's inquiry into 'Narrowing the Gap' (Agenda Item 7, Minute No 64 refers), which the Chair agreed to accept in order to expedite the Committee's business in the most efficient manner.

62 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Leadley declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 8, Planning Services Performance (Minute No 65 refers) in his capacity as a Member of Plans Panel (West) and the Development Plans Panel.

Councillor Cleasby also declared a personal interest in respect of the same item in his capacity as a Member of the Development Plans Panel.

63 Minutes - 4th December 2006

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 2006 be confirmed as a correct record.

64 Scrutiny Inquiry - Narrowing the Gap

Further to the Committee's ongoing Inquiry regarding the Council's 'Narrowing the Gap' (NtG) initiative, the Committee received evidence from the Leeds Initiative, the Government-approved Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Leeds, concerning its role in helping deliver the 'Narrowing the Gap' thematic

objective outlined in the Vision for Leeds II strategy covering the period 2004 to 2020.

In addition to the reports of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development and the Leeds Initiative circulated with the agenda, Andrea Tara-Chand of Leeds Initiative and Steve Williamson, Chair of the Narrowing the Gap Executive of the Leeds Initiative, attended the meeting, gave a presentation on the work of the Leeds Initiative in this particular area and responded to Members' queries and comments. Apologies were submitted on behalf of Kathy Kudelnitsky, Director of Leeds Initiative, who was ill.

Andrea Tara-Chand and Steve Williamson set out the background and context for the NtG objective:-

- The evolution of the Leeds Initiative and the 'Vision for Leeds' into the Government-approved LSP for the City;
- The three current aims of the partnership – summarised as 'Going Up a League', 'Leeds as a Regional Capital' and 'Narrowing the Gap' – between the most disadvantaged residents and communities and the rest of the City;
- Recent developments such as Local Area Agreements and the emphasis of the recent Government White Paper on 'strong and prosperous communities';
- The index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 statistics and how the NtG Executive was adopting a comprehensive approach to the physical, social and economic regeneration of the worst areas of deprivation;
- The role and objectives of the NtG Executive and its links to other Leeds Initiative Strategy Groups, such as the Leeds Economy Partnership, and also to the District Partnerships working at local level;
- The strong links and partnership between the NtG Executive and the City Council, particularly the Neighbourhoods and Housing Department via its Partnerships, Regeneration and Resources Teams;
- The Achievements of the NtG Executive since its inception in 2004;
- Its future priorities in terms of tackling issues such as worklessness, the development of Intensive Neighbourhood Management Areas, taking forward the community engagement and cohesion agenda and establishing links and developing benefits from the 'Going Up A League' (GUAL) objective;
- How the Council and Councillors might help to achieve the NtG objectives.

In response to Members' queries and comments, in brief summary the following issues were discussed:-

- The effectiveness of District Partnerships, the need to establish stronger links between District Partnerships and Area Committees and the leading role which Area Committees could play in driving forward the community engagement and cohesion agenda;

- Political leadership at both strategic and local level in helping to achieve the NtG objectives;
- The suggestion that the Council needed to establish one Department to tackle worklessness issues;
- Clarity on the part of the Council regarding its role – provider of services, or commissioner of services;
- How the Council might assist to make best use of the services of the voluntary and community sector, say via procurement policies, employment and training initiatives and support structures to encourage sustainable community involvement and initiatives;
- The role of the Council in encouraging greater partnership working;
- The relationship and possible tensions between NtG and the GUAL objectives, the encouragement of the use of local labour and the benefits of the Government making greater resources available to LSPs
- The role of education in tackling worklessness, and the current lack of emphasis nationally on vocational qualifications and training.

The Chair thanked the representatives of the Leeds Initiative for their very useful contribution to the Committee's NtG Inquiry. He was certain that the Committee would be returning to many of the themes and issues discussed this morning.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted for the time being and be incorporated by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development in the final Inquiry report.

65 Quarter 2 Performance Highlight Report - Planning Services Performance

Further to Minute No 58, 4th December 2006, the Committee considered in more detail the issues surrounding current planning performance levels, in particular the speed with which applications were dealt with by the Development Department, the number of times applications were referred back by Plans Panels for further consideration and the number of Plans Panels decisions subsequently overturned at appeal.

In attendance at the meeting were Councillor Andrew Carter, Leader of the Council, whose portfolio was Development, Jean Dent, Director of Development, Phil Crabtree, newly appointed Chief Planning and Development Services Officer and Steve Speak, Chief Strategy and Policy Officer, Development Department, who all responded to Members' queries and comments.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were:-

- The background to the situation whereby the Department had been failing to meet Government targets for the time taken to process major, minor and other planning applications, and what had been done and was being done to tackle that situation;

- The fact that in the main, the situation was improving and the Department was now meeting those targets, although there remained some areas where the situation remained fragile, and had the potential of undermining the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) position;
- The consequences for the Council of possibly being designated as a Planning Standards Authority (i.e. in need of improvement) and the effect this could have on the Council's CPA rating;
- The high percentage of appeals allowed against decisions of the Plans Panels and measures being taken or contemplated in this regard, including compulsory training for Plans Panel Members, a possible reduction in the numbers of Members on Plans Panels and other possible constitutional changes, in an effort to achieve a balance between the need for a level of local democracy and the requirements for the Panels to operate in an efficient and consistent manner.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and the officers of the Development Department for their attendance, and for the information which they had imparted. It was clear that fundamental issues were being addressed. Nevertheless, the Chair felt that the Committee would still wish to meet with Plans Panel Chairs to further explore the issues highlighted and how these might be addressed. The Leader of the Council welcomed the continued involvement of OSC in these matters.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted for the time being, and arrangements be made to invite the Chairs of Plans Panels to attend a future meeting.

66 Performance Management and Financial Health Monitoring - Report to Executive Board

Further to Minute No 46, 6th November 2006 and Minute No 58, 4th December 2006, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted the Committee's proposed submission to the Executive Board containing the Committee's recommendations regarding the performance management and financial health monitoring process, and OSC's role in this process.

RESOLVED – That the proposed submission be approved and submitted to the Executive Board as this Committee's input to the scrutiny of the budget, in line with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

67 Scrutiny Commission - Avoiding Alcohol Misuse in Leeds - Recommendation Monitoring

Further to Minute No 17, 3rd July 2006, and Minute No 46, 4th December 2006, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a progress report on the work of the Working Group established by the Committee to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of this Scrutiny Commission.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

68 The Registration of Requests to Waive or for Exceptional Use of Contracts Procedure Rules

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report regarding instances of the waiving or exceptional use of Contracts Procedure Rules. It was a requirement of the Rules that this information was periodically reported to a Scrutiny Board.

Members raised several queries during the consideration of this item:-

- The need to ensure that service users were consulted, as appropriate, before officers took delegated decisions;
- The extensive use of particular, or one contractor, in some instances e.g. by Connexions for support services to young people, the reasons behind this and whether or not it represented value for money;
- Why the Leeds Youth Service did not appear to commission the provision of any of its services from outside organisations;
- The need for the Council's List of Approved Contractors to be sufficiently robust to avoid the necessity to use only one or a limited number of contractors;
- A request for the Committee to be supplied in future with an explanation of the standard waiver rules or reasons, e.g. Para or Category 1 etc;
- Members sought assurances regarding the safeguards in place to ensure probity on the part of officers in awarding contracts or waiving Contracts Procedure Rules.

In summary, the Chair felt that the Committee required the presence of Procurement Unit officers, and possibly others, at the meeting in order to respond to Members queries before the report could be signed off.

RESOLVED – That a decision be deferred.

69 Request for Scrutiny

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development drew Members attention to a request from Councillor Harris, Joint Leader of the Council, for the Committee to scrutinise an Audit Report carried out by Leeds City Council auditors on a Bradford MDC contract to secure an external partner to help with their asset and facilities management service, to ascertain whether there were any possible project management lessons which Leeds might benefit from as a result of this audit investigation.

RESOLVED – That a report be submitted to the February OSC meeting.

70 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted the Committee's current work programme, updated to reflect decisions take at previous meetings, together with a relevant extract of the Council's Forward Plan of

Key Decisions and a copy of the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 13th December 2006.

Further to Minute No 65, the Committee agreed to invite the Chairs of the Plans Panels to a special OSC meeting, to be arranged by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development.

RESOLVED – That subject to the above, and any other changes necessary as a result of today's meeting, the Committee's work programme be approved and accepted.

71 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

Monday 5th February 2007

Monday 5th March 2007

Monday 2nd April 2007

All at 10.00 am (Pre-meeting at 9.30 am)