

**Area Chairs Forum
Friday 11th September 2012
West Room, Civic Hall**

Attendance:

Councillors: P. Gruen (Chair), G. Hyde, G. Wilkinson, A. McKenna, J. Akhtar, P. Wadsworth, J. McKenna, J. Jarosz

Officers: J. Rogers, K. Kudelnitzky, R. Barke, S. Mahmood, J. Maxwell

Minutes: S. Warbis

Attending for specific items: Cllr J. Blake, K. Morton, D. Allen, H. Freeman, A. McMaster

Item	Description	Action
1.0	Apologies	
1.1	Cllr G. Hussain, Cllr A. Gabriel, Cllr K. Bruce, Beth Logan.	
2.0	Minutes and Matters Arising	
2.1	The minutes of the previous Area Chairs Forum meeting on 13 th July 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.	
2.2	<u>5.5 of previous minutes – Review of Area Working – Next Steps</u> Regarding community engagement, Chris Dickinson is linking in with Matt Lund and Jenny Hill to look at ways of optimising engagement of members of the citizen’s panel within local areas. Recruitment to the citizen’s panel is progressing well however there are difficulties in certain areas of the city and amongst certain demographic groups.	
2.3	<u>6.1 of previous minutes – Equality Improvement Priorities 2011-2015</u> Work is ongoing between Lelir Yeung and the Area Leaders on developing Equality Improvement Priorities for localities.	
3.0	Youth Service Review	
3.1	Cllr. Judith Blake (Lead Executive Member Children’s Services), Ken Morton (Head of Service Young People and Skills) and Damian Allen (Consultant - NOHA Associates Ltd) attended to provide an update on the review of Youth Services.	
3.2	Cllr Blake introduced the item by saying that although some members are pleased with youth service provision, some members have expressed concerns. The aim is to provide the widest youth provision within the resource envelope and Area Committees and Area Support Teams will be key in bringing proposals forward. Leeds City Council is committed to maintaining it’s influence over youth services, which is not the case in all authorities, and it is hoped that a report will go to Executive Board in November detailing proposals.	
3.3	Damian Allen has been brought in as a consultant to carry out an independent assessment of challenges facing the Leeds “Youth Offer” to be used in developing proposals for a review of the service.	
3.4	Damian Allen gave a comprehensive presentation detailing a series of findings and propositions drawn from interviews with a range of stakeholders including; elected members, senior council officers, youth offer partners, providers, staff, secondary and primary school councils and young people in youth offer settings.	
3.5	Areas covered within the presentation included:	

- Universal and targeted provision
- In house and external commissioning
- Age range for the Youth Offer
- Links between Area Committees and Clusters
- Local devolvement of funding
- Performance and quality monitoring
- Review of service structure and job roles

3.6 In the debate that followed Area Chairs expressed an interest in having more access to funding at a local level but that they needed more details over what funding is available and what can be devolved. There was general support for increasing the use of school facilities but it also needed to be recognised that this would not meet the needs of all areas.

3.7 The question was raised as to which budgets were being considered as part of the review. It was stressed that all youth offer budgets were on the table, although it needed to be recognised that a large proportion of resources are tied up in staffing and it may take longer to implement changes in this area, as part of any recommendations. It was hoped that some funding for “places to go, things to do” activities could be reorganised by April 2013 but that wider restructuring is unlikely before 2014/15.

3.8 It was felt that Area Committees would need to have further influence over the review and any proposals emanating from it. It was suggested that a working group of selected Area chairs should be set up to look at the youth offer.

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4.0 Environmental Delegation SLA2 Feedback

4.1 Helen Freeman attended with a report summarising feedback from Area Committees around the approval of SLA2 by all Area Committees in June / July.

4.2 While SLA1 gave changes to street cleaning schedules and the focusing of resources locally, the discussion has now moved from cleansing to enforcement. Locality managers are having conversations with Area Chairs regarding the restructuring of enforcement teams, and discussions are ongoing with staff and unions.

4.3 The aim is to strengthen the approach locally to include cleansing, enforcement and education. There is also evolving work to strengthen links with parish councils, voluntary groups and businesses and build a joined up approach to environmental issues locally.

4.4 SLA2 shows a maturing of SLA1 but it was acknowledged that this was an evolving picture. The ability for Area Committees to hold the service to account relies on good performance information from the service, and this is better in some areas than in others. There is also an expectation that there should be better coordination between partners within the local authority. There is the potential that findings from the budget plus exercise currently being carried out may lead to service reorganisations and potentially more services becoming devolved.

4.5 The ongoing restructure of environmental enforcement is wide and deep and is causing some concern amongst staff members. It was pointed out that the review was not about saving money, would not impact on the locality team budgets and would not lead to a reduction in frontline staff. The review is looking at the roles of local staff. Currently there are 7 differing job descriptions and the intention is to streamline this to 2 roles that will be able to carry out a wider range of duties including enforcement. There will also be increased supervisor capacity to quality assure performance and have more contact with staff.

4.6 Concerns were raised by Area Chairs over the speed of the restructure and the

impact that this is having on staff. There were also concerns expressed about a potential reduction in environmental health officers. Helen Freeman stated that staff had been given a full month for consultation and had been given notice when this would commence. Trade Unions had been involved in the process which was still ongoing. Environmental Health Officers did not fall within the remit of the restructuring of local teams, however there may be amendments to their job descriptions going forward, although they would still have an environmental health remit.

- 4.7 There was praise for the links that have been established with the environmental service Locality Managers but it was felt that some of the Environmental Sub Groups could be more effective. This was a matter for individual Area Committees and particularly Area Chairs to address.
- 4.8 There was a general satisfaction with the direction of travel for SLA2 and there was a feeling that the service had been transformed. There was a feeling that there was more honesty within the service regarding service provision, but it was also stressed that the Area Committees needed to individually hold the service to account and maintain their monitoring role.

5.0 Community First Update

- 5.1 Anne McMaster attended with a report providing an update on the development of the Community First programme in Leeds.
- 5.2 Community First panels have been set up in all of the areas that they should have been and are receiving good support from elected members and area teams. Local Authorities are not encouraged to become too involved with panels however they can provide assistance if the panels request this. In most cases panels are linking with the local authority.
- 5.3 For year one all panels have accessed practically all of their funding. Year two funding is starting to be available but future funding will be dependant on panels having a Community First Plan in place by 31st March 2013. Guidance on developing these plans is expected shortly.
- 5.4 Community Organisers are now in place and should be deployed to support communities shortly.
- 5.5 Area Chairs commented on the differing involvement of elected members with panels in different areas. Some panels had invited members onto them, some had established links with members, and some had excluded members entirely. It is down to the discretion of the panels themselves how much contact / coordination with elected members and council departments they have.

6.0 Wellbeing Mid-Budget Update

- 6.1 Cllr Gruen stated that the levels of under-spend of wellbeing funds at the end of last year will not be acceptable this year in the current climate. Area Chairs and Area Leaders need to have discussions about how to utilise their budgets this year.
- 6.2 There needs to be an understanding of what is happening to existing commitments and where blockages are occurring in releasing funds. There also needs to be a plan in place to re-assign committed funding where it is clear that it will not be spent in the current financial year.
- 6.3 It was pointed out that some Area Committees had used wellbeing funds to support posts dealing with new emerging areas such as neighbourhood planning and this might be a route that other Area Committees might want to take.
- 6.4 It was suggested that there needed to be a detailed look at all individual cases where funds have been allocated and not spent and that action plans needed to

be put in place to resolve issues.

- 6.5 It was pointed out that in some areas there are issues over funds allocated to wards not being spent, and that Area Chairs had a role in encouraging those wards to release money. It was stressed that wellbeing funds needed to be spent wisely and appropriately.

7.0 Area Working Review

- 7.1 James Rogers gave a verbal update on progress to date for the Review of Area Working.
- 7.2 Many issues had been raised during the series of member drop in sessions held in August and early September. These included areas relating to geography, finance and service delegation / influence. These had been fed into the All Party Working Group (APWG) who had come to a view on a number of options.
- 7.3 The APWG have recommended that the current formula for distributing wellbeing funds based on 50% per capita and 50% on deprivation is the appropriate formula and that this should remain in place. Work is continuing regarding other funding streams to identify how a locality perspective should influence the distribution and control of new funding streams.
- 7.4 The view from the member consultation, and confirmed by the APWG, is that current boundaries are appropriate and that there is no need to make changes where they are not needed. There was however an issue identified with the West Inner Area Committee covering only 2 wards and proposals are being developed to tackle this issue.
- 7.5 There were also issues raised regarding the links between Area Committees and clusters and a need was identified to strengthen the role and influence of Area Committees in this respect.
- 7.6 The issue of influence over services at a local level has been high on the agenda and there is a desire among members to increase influence over a number of services. The APWG discussed this at some length and felt that some prioritisation was needed. The areas given priority were:
- Youth Services
 - Jobs and Skills
 - Neighbourhood Planning

There was also a recognition that the existing delegation for community centres was in need of some attention and that the current review of community centres needed to be closely linked with the review of area working.

- 7.7 Concerns were raised that only 35 members had attended the drop in sessions, although it was pointed out that consultation with members will also take place through other routes. It was pointed out that certain wards had not had any member participation in the consultation so far. The APWG had so far formed a consensus on most of the issues being addressed.
- 7.8 A set of recommendations are due to be taken to the executive board in November with the aim to implement in April 2013.

8.0 Any Other Business

- 8.1 There was no other business.

9.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 Friday 2nd November 2012, 09:00 – 11:00, West Room - Civic Hall