

Think Big, Act Local In Narrowing the Gap

Draft

Scrutiny Inquiry Report

Introduction and Scope



Introduction

"How well is Leeds City Council working with a range of public and private sector partners in 'Narrowing the Gap'?"

That is the question behind our Inquiry.

How can we improve what we do together to address this longstanding problem which means that so many individuals, families and neighbourhoods in different parts of Leeds fail to share in its progress and prosperity?

Our inquiry was undertaken in the belief that we are in a time which presents remarkable opportunity to tackle effectively the inequality and exclusion which blights the lives of up to a third of the city's population. Our concern at the onset of the inquiry was to seek evidence that the best use is being made of the resources available to 'narrow the gap' wherever it is possible to do so.

Our intention in this report is to put forward recommendations that will help to establish connectivity between the strategies at the highest level, through area delivery plans to service based activity. The subtitle '**Think Big, Act Local**' aims to capture the ideal of strategy-driven local activity.

In deciding to undertake this inquiry we began with the premise that the 'narrowing the gap' priority is accepted

as a fundamental driver to all the Council's activities. We have not challenged the ethos of this priority, nor have we systematically linked it to 'Going Up a League', though we believe there is a strong correlation between these two priorities. Whilst the city is strong in its economic development (and its associated cultural and social benefits) it is possible to argue that the 'gap' is relative. However, whilst our commitment is to narrowing this gap, the more successful our approach to 'going up a league', the more we are in danger of seeing the 'gap' widen.

Whilst we have not explicitly studied this, we feel that it makes sense to consider the two aims as being interrelated. The notion of all ships rising on the same tide can be seen as particularly apt. A prosperous and developing city is essential to the regeneration of previously struggling areas.

The impression the Committee has is of an unprecedented amount of money being made available from the Government for regeneration related projects. At the same time Leeds as a whole is going through a period of economic growth. This presents the Authority and its partners with an array of opportunities to achieve significant success in 'narrowing the gap'.

The Council's task must be to ensure that the city's success is felt in all areas. We feel it is important to

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mention the larger projects in which the city is and will be involved and we recommend that the decision makers operate from the 'narrowing the gap' perspective. Setting aside the controversy, the proposed casino should be carefully sited in order to provide the greatest positive impact in terms of employment and spin off economic benefits to the areas most in need of such activity. Similarly, the proposed arena will bring economic advantages and should be considered as a 'narrowing the gap' opportunity.

We need to capitalise on this boom period. What we wish to avoid is failing to make these resources and our activity count in the long term. We do not want to look back at a string of failed schemes as is sometimes the case with waves of investment.

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Getting to grips with the gap

Whilst the narrowing the gap agenda clearly relates to issues around poverty (or more precisely relative poverty,) to focus simply on the economic status and activity within designated 'deprived' communities would be to take a short cut to economic answers. If this were possible, we could narrow the gap by simply providing more money in a given area. Regeneration press has shown that this can bring the exercise into disrepute. We recognise, however, that the gap represents a complex mix of factors relating to people and places such as prevailing cultures and subcultures, the ability to access services, economic activity, migration patterns, educational achievement and perceptions around life chances.

The fact that public services are by their nature intended to serve all within a given area makes 'the gap' all the more difficult to see as a tangible entity and therefore more difficult to narrow. Moreover, we have wondered if there is a boundary issue involved, particularly regarding the layers of structures we are currently developing – Area Management is an issue we discuss further. If, for example, we see access to education as a fundamental building block for social and economic advancement, on a simplistic level we can say that Education Leeds offers free education to every single child in the city. The

variations in the provision and in the take up of this service are then subject to factors such as the make up of the school roll; the ability to attract individually effective staff; environmental factors within the area; the environmental factors within a child's home; access to additional resources such as books and computers; cultural tensions acting against educational achievement; individual awareness of, and ability to take advantage of, opportunities and access to role models who can demonstrate the link between education and economic success. The question for us is to try and determine how much of this is within our power to affect and therefore whether our current policies are aiming at the right elements. We use education as an example here as it links into discussions around holistic approaches to increasing attainment levels in low achieving year 9 pupils which featured in our inquiry. 'Holistic' is the operative word, whilst being aware of the factors that are not immediately changeable.

We are not dealing with absolutes (which might be easier to identify and deal with). We are dealing with areas and people where a complex range of factors present barriers to accessing the full benefits of a thriving city. This cannot be solved simply by enhanced street cleansing for example (though it may certainly provide one piece of the jigsaw), but needs to be approached with the tool box containing the widest range of services and measures and

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with a built in flexibility that allows some local variation and response to community engagement. Services tend to be set up to serve the norm. In our view the narrowing the gap agenda requires services that can respond to non-normative conditions, i.e. those found on the wrong side of the gap. This is how we can avoid simply compensating for the gap.

Recommendation 1

That Directors, when commissioning services to meet their strategic objectives, actively consider differentiated service responses to neighbourhoods

Data used for decision making

In our discussions we focussed on the data on which narrowing the gap activity is based and who sets the parameters within which the Council and its partners base their narrowing the gap activity.

In January 2001, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government published the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal setting out the Government's vision that within 10 - 20 years no one would be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. The strategy is underpinned by Public Service Agreement (PSA) Floor Targets that cover a range of activities

across government departments. The targets create minimum standards for public service delivery and aim to deliver improved outcomes for the most disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods in the six key areas of health, education, crime, worklessness, liveability and housing.

The PSA Floor Targets are reflected as local targets in the Leeds Regeneration Plan, the City's neighbourhood renewal strategy. Performance against these targets is the key element of the annual accreditation process for the Local Strategic Partnership and the outcome is explicitly linked to the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) resources by Government. The implementation of the NRF programme is monitored and evaluated to ensure that resources are directed to the achievement of national and local floor targets.

The Government continues to ensure that public service improvement plans maintain a focus on the most disadvantaged areas by identifying PSA Floor Targets as mandatory targets for inclusion in Local Area Agreements.

There are a number of other local and national data sets that can be brought together to create a statistical profile for specified areas to assist with service planning and delivery of services. The Leeds Statistics website is an interactive, geographical, web based resource developed under the

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umbrella of the Leeds Initiative that includes data from a range of organisations and agencies about Leeds and its neighbourhoods and communities. The site provides access to a range of aggregated statistical information and maps for a pre-defined geographical area (such as a political ward, Primary Care Trust, Police Division etc) and also includes the facility for users to create their own boundaries and obtain bespoke data pertinent to particular areas. The site has been designed to link as closely as possible to the key domains and targets that are detailed in the Leeds Regeneration Plan.

The amount of information available to direct narrowing the gap activities is immense and credit must go to the Regeneration Team in collating the majority of this.

We recognise the Government's role in setting the basic parameters, but we also wish to emphasise the need to ensure the alignment of the Council's own targets and those of its partners to mirror the direction of travel, in the same way that budgets should be aligned to follow strategic statements.

We must ensure that all energy, resource and goodwill is properly focused on local people, their needs and concerns in a way which really will make a positive difference.

We acknowledge that the quantitative measures and statistical profiles of areas can be extremely useful to

highlight differences and disparities between and within areas. Similarly the quantitative measures and area profiles can be used by strategic planners and operational managers to:

- better understand the communities that they serve and the key problems within them
- provide a robust evidence base from which to plan more effectively
- support funding applications and funding decisions
- provide a baseline against which to track progress over time, and
- benchmark and evaluate the impact and success of interventions against those adopted elsewhere.

These targets are designed to measure progress towards the achievement of the plan objectives and provide an indication of the impact of actions on the target communities. Whilst we accept the importance of basing actions on such empirical evidence, we would also stress the need to tailor any activity around the tangible requirements of individual areas.

We also believe that these quantitative measures alone are fairly narrow measures of the quality of life experienced by communities and we discuss in more detail how such data can be enhanced through well executed community engagement.

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We wish to stress the need for complementing statistical data with qualitative information gathered through the extensive service provider network. As organisations, the Council and its partners have at their disposal a source of rich and detailed intelligence which must be used alongside the formal indicators.

We would like to underline the importance of having data that is complete and up to date. The dynamics of shifting trends and moving populations will be missed if decisions are made on data that is not current.

We would also like to stress the need to shed the data that is unhelpful or that is being collected for its own sake. Practitioners will be more aware of the specifics and data collection is both too important and too costly to be diluted with facts and figures unrelated to significant outcomes.

We have noted that different partners may well be collecting data that is duplicated or collected in a different way that is not conducive to cross referencing. This is a major issue to resolve, though once a measure and collecting mechanism is in place that is satisfactory to all partners, the data will be of a higher quality, more effectively collected and be of more use.

We also wish to take the opportunity to emphasise the use of micro targets. We agree that these are extremely useful in drilling down to the real

impact of activity in local areas and even in the lives of individuals. This was clearly evident during our site visits. Our caveat would be that these micro targets need to be in line with the perceptions of the local community – if worklessness issues are linked to computer literacy and the community voices the need for access to hardware and training, this provides a clear target which is more likely to succeed. It makes sense that the outputs in this area are measured in these terms.

For the purposes of our inquiry we requested examples of how the statistical information can be mapped and used to identify the key issues to be addressed in narrowing the gap at both the District Partnership and neighbourhood level. The Committee used the East Leeds District Partnership area as an example.

Using PSA Floor Target themes and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004 to highlight the extent and scale of deprivation across the area we were able to see how action plans could be developed that address specific issues that contribute to the current ranking in the IMD 2004.

We chose three areas: Cross Green & East End Park, EASEL Mixed Communities Initiative (Gipton) and Micklefield village.

The three areas reflect communities with different characteristics, challenges and opportunities to be

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addressed and the scale and type of intervention required.

The identified areas highlighted issues and approaches that have a wider relevance and application to similar communities across Leeds.

We used the visits to draw out the following: the effectiveness of the responses, the use of mainstream and discretionary resources, partnership working, opportunities and mechanisms for community engagement and promoting and building community capacity and cohesion.

Richmond Hill/Cross Green – Inner East Leeds

Predominantly a mixed tenure older housing area typical of a number of disadvantaged inner city communities that include a number of Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the 3% most deprived nationally. The area benefits from discretionary funding.

Issues of rising crime, anti-social behaviour and a degraded environment have led to a loss of confidence in public services. Interventions have included multi-agency tasking operations to address the 'crime and grime' issues to demonstrate improvements in basic service provision. This work has been underpinned by concerted efforts to engage local residents and build sustainable involvement mechanisms to move beyond getting the basics

right and developing longer term programmes of regeneration.

EASEL Mixed Communities Initiative - Inner East Leeds

Predominantly an inter war local authority housing area with a number of SOAs in the 3% most deprived nationally. The area benefits from some discretionary funding. The approach being developed is part of a national pathfinder project on Mixed Communities sponsored by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The EASEL initiative aims to deliver transformational change through a longer term programme to diversify the tenure of the area and create a mixed income community through a housing-led renewal programme with a private sector partner.

Micklefield – Outer East Leeds

An out-lying village in East Leeds – predominantly owner occupied terraced properties in a former mining community with pockets of deprivation. Key issues are anti-social behaviour and an increasing number of vulnerable elderly households experiencing higher levels of poverty and isolation. The area does not receive discretionary funding and interventions to address the above issues are resourced from within the existing resources of council services and partner agencies.

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Our visits have, when combined with the micro data provided by the Neighbourhoods and Housing Strategy Team, given us a flavour of the types of activities taking place as part of 'narrowing the gap'. This has allowed us to make some context based judgement as to the appropriateness of specific interventions to improve the quality of life of residents of the target area.

Some of this local evidence, whilst admittedly small scale and individual, gave us the impression that there was a potential for mismatch between what was provided as part of a project and what was actually being used. Micklefield was a good example of this where we saw a highly resourced youth club not used to its fullest potential.

We are concerned that 'narrowing the gap' does not amount to a collection of ad hoc projects following the latest popular themes and driven by a particular service provider, but is a cohesive and connected approach with a long term view. We recognise the attractiveness of quick wins and that sometimes this is important for consolidating community support, but we do not believe quick wins and short term projects alone can be the basis of a strategy.

We would also wish to highlight the usefulness of community engagement.

Public engagement and elected Members

Community engagement, we recognise, is costly in time and resources. It is also a potentially disruptive and 'messy' way of collecting data. However, this must be accepted if activities are truly to take into account the perceived needs of a local area. It was evident when we went to Gipton that worklessness was perceived as an issue. We therefore assessed that it is not necessarily appropriate to present the community with a youth work plan which does not address worklessness.

Community engagement does not always produce the 'right' result, and we cannot undertake it as a mere exercise in gaining approval for predetermined plans. If Ward Members are to be the 'place shapers' then community engagement on the most local level must be the basis of the relationship between the service deliverers and the elected representatives. We do not see community engagement as being an exercise in persuasion, but rather a method of gathering important qualitative data to balance the statistical data we often work with. We discussed this at some length and were in agreement with the Executive Board Member that there is no substitute for face to face engagement with communities. This requires detailed planning, specifically identified outcomes and the ability to be flexible in service delivery.

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Recommendation 2

That a work programme be developed by the Department of Neighbourhoods and Housing setting out a systematic and robust approach to community engagement in the Intensive Neighbourhood Areas in the first instance.

That this be reviewed to assess its effectiveness and then rolled out

Developing actions to narrow the gap

As a model for analysing local areas we would commend to the Intensive Neighbourhood Management Teams the approach the Committee took. The micro data as presented to the Committee enabled us to ascertain immediately the key issues and to start to consider whether interventions were appropriate.

Recommendation 3

That the Regeneration Team adopt the model of data analysis and presentation used by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during this inquiry.

That the draft Neighbourhood Improvement Plans developed in the Intensive Neighbourhood Management Areas are reviewed against the data profiles.

We have asked ourselves whether 'the gap' identified on a physical, geographical basis can be remedied through physical regeneration. Is it linked to individual people's opportunities, where education and access to employment are key? Or is it a combination of environment and economic activity and indeed cultural perceptions?

Our inquiry has explored these challenges and we acknowledge that there is a plethora of activity that includes physically based activity and person centred activity that can be seen to be within the 'narrowing the gap' remit. During the inquiry we wanted to challenge some of the assumptions about the physical basis of some activities we can place under the 'narrowing the gap' umbrella. We can link this into work undertaken by other Scrutiny Boards, and a particularly good example is the inquiry into Regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck. We concur with the positive comments made about this project and the obvious benefits of the regeneration of housing and the physical environment. This is without question good for the area and good for the city as a whole and therefore makes a viable contribution to the 'narrowing the gap' agenda. However, with a proportion of the residents being transient, does this activity wholly satisfy the 'narrowing the gap' agenda? If super output areas are geographically based, how do we create a person-centred approach that

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follows individuals without being constrained to identified areas?

Our initial discussions focussed on the need to enable and encourage physical and social mobility in order to maximise all citizens' opportunities to access the resources of the city. Physical regeneration, whilst important, cannot alone fulfil this ambition.

Plans and Structures

The Leeds Initiative formally launched the Leeds Regeneration Plan 2005 to 2008 in November 2005. Its primary objective is to deliver the narrowing the gap agenda of the Vision for Leeds and as such is the *key policy document of the Narrowing the Gap Executive*.

The plan consists of 1 city-wide action plan and 5 district partnership action plans. The performance management framework requires that quarterly monitoring reports on activity and outputs are made by the District Partnerships and the relevant city-wide partnerships to the Executive. In addition, an annual report has been prepared on the progress towards the achievement of the Plan's targets.

The structure of the district partnership arrangement is an issue that created debate. We have asked whether it is appropriate to continue with the five district partnerships and associated plans. It may be that the district partnerships should be operating on a

smaller, more local level. There are undoubtedly a number of factors that need to be investigated and we recommend that a thorough review of the district partnership structure takes place. However, we are not confident that their role is clearly understood, particularly in the context of other city wide arrangements. We considered the PCT, the three ALMOs and the police divisions and the area management arrangements and questioned the structure of the five district partnerships which seems to be now out of step with current thought. Having different boundaries and management arrangements also lessens the usefulness of data collected across these boundaries. Data cannot be easily synchronised until this issue has been addressed.

We recognise that the shared priorities and targets are established by the Local Area Agreement and the District Partnership Plans and that there is work being undertaken linked into both. However, we considered how these partnerships might relate to other structures and whether their size hampered their local effectiveness.

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Recommendation 4

That Leeds Initiative undertakes a review of the district partnership structure alongside appropriate consultation with partners in order to mirror other existing administrative boundaries.

We would also recommend that the connectivity and relationships between the Vision for Leeds, the Local Area Agreement and the Regeneration Plan is explored, thus making possible an integrated framework geared to tackling neighbourhood needs and priorities.

Governance Issues and Decision making

Leadership

Another major theme we wish to discuss is leadership, both political and operational. We believe that only with strong and visionary leadership will the strategic aims within The Vision for Leeds produce a cohesive approach at the community level. We recognise that narrowing the gap presents leaders within the Council and within its partner organisations with difficult issues to deal with, not least of which is the question of how much can individual organisations be subsumed into an agreed narrowing the gap strategy.

Overall leadership is also required to assist departments to work outside the usual silos – a critical cultural change if significant progress is to be achieved. We strongly believe that the narrowing the gap leadership should be in a position to direct service providers to deliver flexibly and locally, within a strategic framework. This means that departments are not acting in isolation, but in co-operation with an agreed narrowing the gap agenda.

We have questioned the role of Leeds Initiative and asked whether there is a stronger, more robust leadership role to be played by this organisation. The impression we have is that Leeds Initiative gathers data, and debates overall issues, but this does not necessarily translate into direct action planning on their part. We have asked the question about the role of Leeds Initiative – is it an action oriented organisation or is it a facilitator of relationships between partners?

We understand that the links between the Vision for Leeds and the Local Area Agreement need to be clarified and other plans need to be reviewed in order to ensure that they reflect the same priorities and the same agendas.

In terms of decision making, our understanding is that the Executive Board along with Leeds Initiative have overall responsibility for the Local Area Agreement. A high level strategy group brings together the chief executives and senior directors from

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partner organisations. Further officer-led groups then provide the operational oversight.

The structure appears straightforward; however, we were concerned about the focus of leadership and where this rested, both politically and at an officer level. Similarly, we wish to warn against any unnecessary bureaucracy that hinders quick and effective decision making.

Recommendation 5

That Leeds Initiative considers how strategic leadership is manifested and whether a more robust leadership model is required, taking into account the distinction between political and operational leadership.

Local Leadership

We are aware of discussions within other Scrutiny Boards regarding Area Management and the level of service delivery at the local level. The argument is that in localities that are identified as being the most deprived of the city, a locally tailored and integrated set of services would be beneficial. If a locality has a recognised need, for example, for more intense youth work activities in league with a graffiti removal team, this might be more responsive if delivered at a local level. We recognise this is a controversial debate, however, we feel that it should

be considered within the context of 'narrowing the gap'.

Recommendation 6

That Executive Board have a debate on the levels of devolving services to area management, including the corresponding capacity of area management arrangements.

We are anxious that local leadership carries more weight in the decision making process. It has been suggested at a national level that the amount of funding allocated to regenerating areas has not achieved the objective and this is, it is suggested, a sign of the distance between the 'regenerators' and the receiving community. We have discussed the issue of quality public participation. We wish to add to this the need to allow local leadership (through ward Members, the locally based structures and the communities themselves) to influence the decision making process.

Local elected Members should have a seat at the table in the design of bespoke services for neighbourhoods.

It is important to make mention of the Community Call for Action mechanism introduced in the Police and Justice Act and the Local Government Bill. This will, potentially, allow the community to help establish its own

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priorities at the most local level. We recommend that a mechanism be introduced that will allow all relevant Community Calls for Action to be fed into the data gathering and decision making processes. These Community Calls for Action are a direct link into the perceived needs of a community which could be used in shaping 'narrowing the gap' activities.

An interesting suggestion has been made to redirect some of the money allocated to regeneration activities to local frontline services such as parks, street cleaning and youth work. We have some sympathy with this view and whilst we recognise the complexities of 'narrowing the gap', communities see the value in money being spent on their immediate environment. Much confidence is being placed in Local Area Agreements to reinstate the reputation of regeneration funding and we ourselves hope that this will be case in Leeds.

Partnership

We discussed the role of partnership working arrangements and considered whether the partner organisations truly reflected the agreed priorities. We wish to highlight the importance of underpinning agreed priorities with aligned budgets. Both the Council's and the partner organisations' spending should be in line with the 'narrowing the gap' strategy where appropriate.

The Local Area Agreement themes are becoming more embodied into the Council's operations. The Local Government Bill encourages a strategic commissioning approach by local authorities and their partners to deliver improved outcomes. We are keen therefore to see Leeds Initiative mirror the LAA themes more explicitly. We feel that this would provide further coherence to the partnership approach.

Recommendation 7

That Leeds Initiative reviews its own structures to respond to the themes of the local area agreements.

Our concept of partnership, derived from this Inquiry, is however more than an exhortation for public and private organisations to work more closely.

In our view it is essential to create local, organic units composed of service specialists tailored to local needs working to plans that can be monitored and managed to achieve critical local targets. This needs to be complemented with shared resources and leadership able to engage in local dialogue.

This will certainly require some hard thinking and hard work in terms of management if such 'neighbourhood

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task forces' are to carry out the strategic and tactical work which can undercut local patterns of social exclusion. But we believe it can, and should, be done.

Recommendation 8

That the Narrowing the Gap Executive draws together the most influential partners and council service providers to plan, monitor and bring coherence and connectivity to the numerous activities that take place at a local level.

Summary

In summary, while we believe that much that is positive is being achieved through growing understanding and cooperation between agencies, our evidence suggests there is still a long way to go - and much to do as a matter of urgency.

We noted that in the case of each area we visited and studied, there was an immediate need to make radical decisions about the use of staff and resources to respond to the key needs of neighbourhoods and communities - often clearly

expressed by local residents individually or collectively.

We believe that much more can be achieved when these needs are properly prioritised and targeted through integrated multi-service teamwork - whereas at present, despite inter-service meetings, effort on the ground remains largely segregated into departmental and agency 'silos'. There is a serious risk of failing to tackle the complex problems of individuals and groups whose problems go far beyond the scope of any single service.

Again local people are quick to identify the limitations and frustrations they have with partial and short-term initiatives - and to call for more local response and control systems to bring together all the resources needed at their local level.

Much of this points to the need to review leadership and structures. We believe that only with strong and visionary leadership will the aims within Vision for Leeds produce a cohesive approach at the community level. Overall leadership must establish a connectivity between the

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*strategies at the highest level,
through area delivery plans to
thoroughly integrated service based
activity - that is to Think BIG
and Act LOCAL.*

Evidence



Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Committee's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Measuring and planning to Narrow the Gap – paper from Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing
- Leeds Regeneration Plan 2003-2008-Annual Report on Targets September 2006
- East District Partnership Area Profile – October 2006
- Paper and presentation from Leeds Initiative – Narrowing the Gap Executive
- Vision for Leeds – LSP Accreditation Template
- Leeds Local Area Agreement: contributing to narrowing the gap – paper from the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing
- Local Data/Statistics for Cross Green and East End Park, EASEL Mixed Communities Initiative (Gipton) and Micklefield Village – Strategy Team, Neighbourhoods and Housing

Evidence



Witnesses Heard

- Councillor Mark Harris – Executive Member responsible for Narrowing the Gap
- Sue Wynne – Regeneration Partnership Manager
- Steve Williamson – Leeds Initiative
- Maggie Gjessing – East Area Regeneration Manager
- Jackie Pruckner - Geographic Research Officer
- Andrea Tara-Chand – Programme Manager
- Jane Stageman – Senior Project Manager
- Inspector Graham Archer – West Yorkshire Police
- East End Park Community Association
- Anne Sherriff – Re’new
- Councillor Michael Auty – Micklefield Parish Council

Dates of Scrutiny

- 9th October 2006 – Civic Hall
- 6th November 2006 – Civic Hall
- 8th January 2007 – Civic Hall
- 11th December 2006 - Cross Green and East End Park
- 16th January 2007 - EASEL Mixed Communities Initiative (Gipton)
- 13th February 2007 – Micklefield Village