

SCRUTINY BOARD (NEIGHBOURHOODS AND HOUSING)

WEDNESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor R Pryke in the Chair

Councillors P Ewens, R Finnigan,
A Gabriel, G Hyde, M Phillips, M Rafique
and D Schofield

79 LATE ITEMS

The Chair indicated that additional comments to be added to agenda item 14 (Monitoring Report) in relation to the anti-social behaviour monitoring report had been circulated to Members following the despatch of the agenda papers.

80 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

81 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armitage and Atkinson.

82 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 10TH JANUARY 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th January 2007 be agreed as a correct record.

83 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8TH JANUARY 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th January 2007 be noted.

84 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented the Board with a report detailing performance information in relation to the Best Value Performance Indicators for the department in quarter three. Neil Evans, the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing attended the meeting to present the information and respond to Members' questions.

Board Members first asked the Director general questions around the following areas:

- Progress on the merger of Leeds ALMOs and the fact that Executive Board were not seeking to impose any restriction Elected Members being appointed as Chairs;
- Reported changes in the service charge levied on some Council flats and the consultation process undertaken before any changes were implemented;
- Issues surrounding the capacity of Area Committees to take on more responsibilities within their wards and the resource implications of any further devolution;

- Concerns over plans to reduce the number of Area Managers from five to three to bring into line with the new ALMO structure and Primary Care Trust boundaries.

During consideration of the Performance Report, discussion ensued on the following topics:

- BV-203 (the percentage change in the number of families placed in temporary accommodation) and the moves being made to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency;
- Moves being made by the Authority to release land in order to encourage the delivery of more new build social housing and affordable housing;
- The progress of work undertaken by the Empty Property Team to tackle the number of houses previously let to students in Headingley which were now falling empty and encourage them back into use;
- A request for more detail on the indicators listed at the end of the report which currently contained no data;
- Whether CP-CS50 (Reduce overall crime levels in Leeds by 35% in 2008) which was currently not on target to be achieved, was a fair indicator, given that the Scrutiny Board currently had no function to scrutinise the performance of the Police and the indicator had been accepted by the wider Safer Leeds Partnership, not the department itself;
- The many successes the department had achieved over the past four years as part of the Safer Leeds Partnership in reducing crime levels in the city but the recent negative effect of the release of a number of prolific offenders on the performance figures;
- The work of the Crime and Disorder Team in tackling prolific offenders through drug treatment programmes to get them back into work or more constructive activities.

Following on from the discussion, the Chair suggested that the Chair of the Safer Leeds Partnership and the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police be invited to an additional meeting to further discuss the issues raised. It was agreed that the viability of an extra meeting be investigated.

RESOLVED –

- a.) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b.) That the Principal Scrutiny Officer investigate the possibility of an additional meeting in order to invite the Chair of the Safer Leeds Partnership and the Chief Constable to an additional meeting to further discuss the issues raised.

(Councillor Hyde joined the meeting at 10:10 am and Councillor Gabriel joined the meeting at 10:35 am, both during consideration of this item.)

85 DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATIONS

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report which provided an outline of the range of publications being produced across all divisions within the department and the associated costs of these publications. The Board heard that the majority of publications within the department were for external distribution for the benefit of customers and to support service delivery. Members were reminded that the matter had been referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to all Boards for them to investigate practices within the departments.

Debra Scott, Head of Service Improvement, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members' comments and questions.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

86 SAFER LEEDS PARTNERSHIP PROSTITUTION STRATEGY

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report setting out the contents of the draft Safer Leeds Prostitution Strategy. The Board were informed that the draft document was due to be reported to the Safer Leeds Partnership the following day for final ratification. The report outlined the strategy which broadly followed the national model in tackling the sensitive issue of street-based prostitution. Members heard that the areas around Chapeltown and Holbeck which currently suffered from high levels of activity were earmarked to be targeted as part of a forthcoming Home Office initiative which would focus on a high visibility response to the problem.

Keith Lawrance, Policy and Strategy Lead, Safer Leeds Partnership, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members comments and queries.

The Board discussed the following issues in relation to the report:

- The similarities of the new strategy with past approaches to the problem;
- The move away from criminalising women on the streets towards offering support and treatment;
- The successes of drug treatment programmes, exit strategies and housing support;
- The problems inherent in monitoring and engaging women involved in prostitution in brothels and saunas;
- Whether there was any evidence of immigrants, particularly those of Eastern European origin, being forced into prostitution;
- Recent press coverage in the Yorkshire Evening Post of the work undertaken by *Genesis* in supporting and offering advocacy to women working on the streets;
- The feeling that whilst no community wished to see the problem of prostitution and kerb crawling on their doorstep, that the issue only received publicity when it moved into more affluent neighbourhoods;

- Whether the fact that there had been no significant increase in prosecutions for kerb crawling could be attributed to failure by the Crown Prosecution Service to follow matters through;
- Some successes as a result of issuing Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders as a deterrent to those involved in prostitution;
- Anecdotal evidence from the Chapeltown area of the positive effects of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in reducing the visibility of the street trade, but the acknowledgement that this could have a negative effect upon other areas of the city.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and strategy be noted.

(Councillor Finnegan joined the meeting at 11:10 am during consideration of this item.)

87 NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report updating Members on the Neighbourhood Wardens Service in Leeds. The report gave an overview of the service, outlined recent achievements and detailed a week in the life of a neighbourhood warden. The Board heard that there was now a dedicated post within the department to deal with issues surrounding wardens such as equipment and recruitment.

Martyn Stenton, Partnerships Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to points raised by Members.

The Board discussed the following issues arising from the report:

- The progress of tasking teams across different areas of the city;
- The influence of neighbourhood wardens on local community safety issues;
- The need for information regarding wardens and their performance to be shared by the department with the relevant Ward Members.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the current position regarding the Neighbourhood Wardens Service be noted.

88 ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEE SERVICE UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report providing Members with an update on the new Asylum Support and Accommodation Contract. The Board heard that the service was currently in a period of change, with a new target contract having been issued since the last update. Members were informed that the numbers of individuals coming into the city

had recently seen a slight reduction and this, coupled with the new contract, gave greater opportunity to examine the distribution of asylum seekers in Leeds.

Tom Wiltshire, Housing Needs Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, and Sharon Hague, Asylum Services Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members comments and questions.

The Board discussed the following points in relation to the report:

- The affect on asylum seekers of a negative Home Office decision and the likely slide into destitution for those individuals who no longer have recourse to support services;
- The role of voluntary / church organisations in supporting failed asylum seekers;
- The work of the Destitution Steering Group and John Battle MP in lobbying central government on the issue of failed asylum seekers;
- The importance of seeing the issues facing Leeds as a reflection of a national problem;
- The difficulty inherent in monitoring the number of illegal immigrants in the city;
- The work undertaken by Social Services with those asylum seekers classed as unaccompanied minors;
- The provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses by Education Leeds;
- The fact that ESOL courses were now offered only to those with confirmed refugee status rather than asylum seekers as a result of a change in Government policy;
- The concentration of the majority of asylum seekers within a small number of areas within the city and moves being made to tackle this sensitive issue;
- The need to educate the general public as to the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants from the EU.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

89 THE LEEDS SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

The Chair indicated that Bridget Emery, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Neighbourhoods and Housing, was unable to attend the meeting to present the report to Members and respond to questions. It was therefore proposed to defer consideration of the report until the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That consideration of the report be deferred.

90 MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which provided Members with monitoring information in relation to two previous inquiries, Anti-Social Behaviour Interventions and Affordable Housing. The inquiries had been undertaken during the previous Municipal Year by the Environment and Community Safety and the Neighbourhoods and Housing Scrutiny Boards respectively.

Members were reminded that provision was made for the Board to monitor the implementation of any agreed actions and recommendations on a six-monthly basis.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

91 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the current work programme of the Board, including scheduled and unscheduled items.

Appended to the report for Members' information was a copy of the Forward Plan for February to May 2007.

It was reported that an item had been omitted from the agenda in error, however Members were informed that the DEMOS report would be available at the March meeting for consideration.

The Chair sought Members views on the possibility of scheduling an additional meeting before the end of the Municipal Year in order to discuss area management with Councillor J L Carter, Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing. The Board agreed to look into this as a possibility.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the revisions to the Work Programme be noted.

92 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 7th March 2007 at 10:00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9:30 am.)