

NORTH WEST (INNER) AREA COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor J Akhtar in the Chair

Councillors J Walker, N Walshaw,
G Harper, B Atha, J Illingworth, S Bentley
and J Chapman

13 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Hamilton, C Towler, L Yeadon and J Bentley.

15 Open Forum

In accordance with Paragraphs 6.24 and 6.25 of the Area Committee Procedure Rules, the Chair allowed a period of up to 10 minutes for members of the public to make representations or to ask questions on matters within the terms of reference of the Area Committee. The following was discussed:

- Royal Park School – Members were asked for their support for the former school building to be used for a community project and prevent the future demolition of the building. Councillor Harper reported that he had been involved in facilitating meetings regarding the future of the building and an offer had been put forward to the Council for its future use subject to proof of funding. It was further reported that meetings had been held with Asset Management regarding a potential transfer of the building. All Members present supported the scheme.

16 Minutes - 27 June 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

17 Minutes of Area Chair's Forum - 3 May 2013 and 28 June 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Area Chairs' Forums held on 3 May and 28 June 2013 be noted.

18 Children's Services Area Committee Update Report

The report of the Director of Children's Services provided an update on performance at Area Committee level, with a broader acknowledgement of city level performance. Key issues for Children's Services were highlighted including Ofsted inspection, basic need and child friendly city.

Issues highlighted from the report included the following:

- Ofsted – an inspection across Leeds schools was due.
- There was significant pressure on availability of places in Leeds schools.
- Reducing the number of looked after children – there had been a nine percent drop in the Inner North West Area over the past year and a significant drop of fifty percent entering care.
- There had been a slight increase in the number of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) but this correlated with a reduction in rates of 'not known' young people.
- There had been an overall improvement in school attendance.
- There had been a twenty percent reduction of young people committing offences.

In response to comments from Members further discussion included an increase in the number of Common Assessment Frameworks undertaken and Elected Member representation on Clusters.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

19 Update on Welfare Benefit Changes

The report of the Chief Officer, Welfare and Benefits provided an update on the impact of the welfare reforms at both a citywide and ward level basis. It also provided information on arrangements that had been put in place to support tenants. Further information in the report referred to the introduction of the Universal Credit and the programme of work aimed at tackling the issue of high cost and payday lending.

Steve Carey, Chief Officer, Welfare and Benefits presented the report.

Further issues highlighted from the report included the following:

- Following changes introduced in April, including rules relating to under occupancy, more tenants had fallen into arrears.
- Council Tax arrears had also risen following changes to council Tax benefits.
- Introduction of a benefit cap would affect approximately 350 families across Leeds. Those most affected had been visited.
- Extra funding available from Government.
- The ambition is to prevent anyone from being evicted due to the benefit cap.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following were discussed:

- Tenants affected by the benefit cap would still be expected to make some contribution to rent.
- Funding from Government would reduce and there would be further work required around discretionary housing payments. A further report was expected to be considered by Executive Board by the end of the year.
- Concern that if any families were to be evicted, this could be more costly to the Council than if they weren't evicted.
- Taira Kayani of Better Leeds communities addressed the Area Committee and reported on work they were carrying out supporting people affected by Welfare Reform.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the information about the impact of the welfare reforms be noted.
- (2) That the information about the campaign against high cost lenders be noted.
- (3) That the following priorities be championed:
 - High interest money lending and debt
 - Better connecting local people to Leeds job opportunities and training through the planning process, sector based work academies and apprenticeships
 - Continuing to support local communities through localised employability, learning and advice provision

20 Community Planner Update Report

The report of the Community Planning Officer gave the Area Committee an update on the Community Planner Work Programme since the previous report in February 2013.

Jenna Riley, Community Planning Officer presented the report.

Issues highlighted included the following:

- Neighbourhood Planning – update on support work with community groups; area wide planning event scheduled in January
- Far Headingley/Weetwood Design Statement – Work has been carried out to review this with the steering group and Leeds Metropolitan University. A consultation draft was being prepared and a 6 week consultation period would commence in October
- Emerging Policy – Site Allocation Plans; draft Core Strategy

Members thanked Jenna for her work.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

21 Wellbeing Commissioning 2014/15 and Funding Update Report

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens & Communities) provided members with an update on the budget position for the Wellbeing Fund for 2013/14 and identified additional capital funding available for allocation. The report highlighted the current position of the Small Grants and skips pots and those Small Grants and skips that had been approved since the last meeting. It updated the Area Committee on the Youth Activity Fund and those projects seeking support through this pot. The report also sought approval for the process and timescales for the Wellbeing commissioning round for 2014/15.

Zoe Tyler, Area Support Officer presented the report.

Members attention was brought to the following:

- Additional capital funding available – Members were asked to consider how this could be spent
- Current Wellbeing Fund budget position
- Capital Receipts Programme
- Small Grants & Skips funding
- Youth Activity Fund
- The 2014/15 commissioning process and timescales – including ward meetings with Members to discuss possible projects they would like to see..

Weetwood Members expressed dissatisfaction regarding a recent Back Yard Breeze held in their ward and the lack of consultation, publication and subsequent poor attendance.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the current position for the Wellbeing Fund for 2013/14 be noted.
- (2) That the current position of the Small Grants and skips pots and those Small Grants and skips that had been approved since the previous meeting be noted.
- (3) That the additional £22,610 capital available be noted and consideration be given to how this should be spent.
- (4) That the current position of the Youth Activity Fund and those projects supported through this fund be noted.
- (5) That the process and timescales for the Wellbeing commissioning round for 2014/15 be approved.

22 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 24 October 2013 at 7.00 p.m.

23 Open Forum

The Chair allowed a further submission for the Open Forum from a member of the public who was not present earlier in the meeting.

Concern was raised regarding the number of mature trees that would be lost as part of the New Generation Transport scheme. It was felt that this had been an undemocratic procedure and disappointment was expressed that this had not been included on the Agenda for this meeting. It was reported that there would be significantly more planting to replace any lost trees and replacements would be trees between 3.5 and 5.5 metres in height and not saplings.