

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 13TH FEBRUARY, 2017

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors C Campbell, R Grahame,
M Harland, G Hyde, J Illingworth,
K Maqsood, M Robinson, R. Stephenson,
K Wakefield and N Walshaw

62 Late Items

There were no late items.

63 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

64 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies for absence.

65 Minutes - 9 January 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2017 be approved as a correct record.

66 Update on impact of welfare reform

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) presented a general update on how the Government's programme of welfare reforms was affecting residents in Leeds.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Simon Swift, Service Manager, Environment and Housing

The Chair informed the Board that unfortunately the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Job Centre Plus was unable to provide representation at today's meeting. As such, the Board agreed to arrange a separate meeting with DWP to raise any relevant issues arising from today's discussions.

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Benefit sanctions – the Board acknowledged that the Work and Pensions Parliamentary Select Committee had previously undertaken its own inquiry into benefit sanctions which resulted in a number of recommendations to DWP, including the need to commission a wide-ranging review of the sanctions regime. The Board agreed to explore the outcomes of this inquiry with DWP.
- Impacts of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) – the Board discussed the impacts of the SAR and acknowledged the increasing numbers of young people requiring assistance. However, it was noted that the Council was unable to access relevant data to track the impacts of SAR within the private rented sector.
- Measuring the financial impacts of the reform programme – the Board discussed the estimated financial loss in Leeds and noted the figure of £228m a year as set out in the 2014 report by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research for Sheffield Hallam University. However, in relation to the estimated annual loss per working age adult, the Board acknowledged that this figure would be harder to estimate, but also felt that the reported figure of £450 appeared too low.
- Notice of Intention to Seek Possession (NISPs) – whilst acknowledging an increasing growth in rent arrears, the Board also noted the reductions in the numbers of NISPs served due to the proactive work of the council in working closely with tenants to improve their ability to pay their rent.
- Appeals process – particular concerns were raised regarding the significant increase in appeal cases and the resource pressures placed upon the Council in assisting people through this process. The Board was also concerned that more decisions were being overturned in favour of the customer than were upheld for the DWP. As such, the Board agreed to raise this matter directly with DWP with a view to also escalating this at a ministerial level and writing directly to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee to call for an inquiry into this matter.
- Food banks – whilst acknowledging the increasing demands for food bank provision, the Board also noted the difficulties in ensuring that the data collection methods applied by food bank providers are consistent and accurate.
- Private Rented Sector – the Board acknowledged the need for further scrutiny into the impacts of the welfare reform programme on the Private Rented Sector.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That a separate meeting is arranged for Board Members to meet with representatives from the DWP/Job Centre Plus to discuss the key issues arising from this meeting.
- (c) That the Chair acts on behalf of the Board and writes to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Parliamentary Select Committee setting out the Board's concerns regarding the increasing numbers of appeal cases and the impact this has on individuals as well as the resource pressures placed upon local authorities in supporting people through their appeal process.
- (d) That further scrutiny is required in relation to the impacts of the welfare reform programme on the Private Rented Sector.

(Councillor J Illingworth arrived at the meeting at 10.40 am during consideration of this item)

67 Inquiry into Universal Credit - Tracking of Scrutiny recommendations

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support presented a progress update on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the earlier Scrutiny Inquiry into Universal Credit.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Simon Swift, Service Manager, Environment and Housing

In consideration of the progress made, a position status category was assigned to each recommendation as follows:

- Recommendation 1 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 2 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 3 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 4 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 5 - (Cat 3) – Not fully implemented (Obstacle)
- Recommendation 6 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 7 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 8 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 9 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 10 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 11 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 12 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 13 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 14 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)
- Recommendation 15 – Achieved (Cat 2)
- Recommendation 16 - (Cat 4) - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That the above position status categories against each of the recommendations are agreed.

- (c) That the Board continues to monitor the implementation of the outstanding recommendations as appropriate.

68 Development of a revised Council Tax Support Scheme – formal response to the Scrutiny recommendations

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support presented the formal response to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Board's recent review on the development of a revised Council Tax Support Scheme.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Simon Swift, Service Manager, Environment and Housing

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

69 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Governance and Scrutiny Support invited Members to consider the Board's work schedule for the municipal year.

The Chair explained that a date was yet to be agreed to hold the final working group session of the Board's inquiry into reducing repeat customer contact. It was therefore proposed that this meeting be held on Monday 13th March 2017 in place of the Board's planned pre-meeting. However, this meeting would start at the earlier time of 9 am.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the work schedule be noted.
(b) That the final working group session of the Board's inquiry into reducing repeat customer contact be scheduled for Monday 13th March 2017 at 9 am.

70 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 13th March 2017 at 10 am (There will be no pre-meeting)

(The meeting concluded at 11.45 am)