

SCRUTINY BOARD (RESOURCES AND COUNCIL SERVICES)

MONDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors S Bentley, J L Carter,
N Dawson, J Hardy, A Khan, A Lowe,
C Macniven and R Wood

23 Late Items

There were no late items.

24 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting, however, in relation to the item entitled, 'High Cost Lenders', Councillors P Grahame, N Dawson, S Bentley and A Lowe drew the Board's attention to their membership of Leeds Credit Union. (Minute No. 28 refers)

25 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies for absence.

26 Minutes - 29 July 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

27 Executive Board Minutes - 4 September 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board held on 4 September 2013 be noted.

28 High Cost Lenders

The Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer provided a report setting out the Council's campaign to tackle high cost lenders in the city. Board Members noted that the key elements of the campaign were:

- Co-ordinate activity across public, private and the third sector to deal with high cost lending
- City Wide High Profile campaign
- Local Neighbourhood promotion and education campaign
- Build Capacity for alternative affordable credit
- Reduce dependency on and use of HCLs
- Provide direct support for those caught up in HCL and reminding people that there are alternatives

The following officers and external witnesses were in attendance and responded to Board Members questions and comments:

- Councillor Josie Jarosz (Representing Scrutiny Board, Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Steve Carey, Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer
- Dave Roberts, Financial Inclusion Strategy Manager
- Chris Smyth, Chief Executive, Leeds City Credit Union
- Bob Ward, Spokesperson for a deputation to Council on this issue considered last year
- Marilyn Banister, Money Advice Supervisor, Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau.

In summary, the main areas of discussion were:

- The extent of the use of high cost money lenders and the reasons for such use
- The Council's High cost lenders action plan as agreed by Executive Board
- The campaign to stop payday loan companies advertising in football
- The role and influence local planning authorities have in restricting the proliferation of high street, high cost, money lenders
- The role of Leeds Credit Union in providing alternative sources of loans and their ability to compete with high cost lenders
- The role of schools and children's services in raising awareness of money management
- The role of debt advice and the need to remove the stigma associated with discussing debt
- The need to adopt innovative schemes to compete with the perceived attractiveness of high cost lenders
- The pressures on the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) budget and the ability to use underspends from the Local Welfare Scheme to support the DHP budget.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To endorse the Council's high cost lenders action plan
- (ii) To invite Planning officers to the October meeting to discuss the role and influence local planning authorities have in restricting the proliferation of high street, high cost, money lenders.

29 Community Centre Charges

Board Members received in April 2013 a report which provided information on current charging arrangements for the use of the Council Community Centre portfolio that is delegated to Area Committees and overseen on their behalf by Environment and Neighbourhoods directorate.

The report highlighted the complexity of the current arrangements and the wide range of factors that influenced the levels of charges/subsidies awarded.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion in April were:

- The complicated and bureaucratic arrangements in place for the use of community centres
- The apparent lack of transparency in how charging subsidies were provided to some organisations
- The numerous charging rates and their complicated application
- The involvement of numerous Directorates in the process and the consequential lack of accountability and plethora of bureaucratic recharges
- The need for continued involvement of Area Committees in the process.

The Board resolved to request that officers come back to a future meeting of Scrutiny to report on progress made to address the identified failings in the current process.

Councillor Peter Gruen, the responsible Executive Board Member and Martin Dean, Head of Partnerships, attended the meeting to provide Board Members with a verbal update.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were:

- The transfer of the letting process to Citizens and Communities as of 1st October 2013 and the arrangements in place to address the identified failings in the current process
- The need to ensure that proper management of the council's property portfolio takes place which could include the disposal of surplus assets
- The need to embrace available ICT to speed up and streamline existing booking arrangements.

RESOLVED – To request a further update in January 2014

(Councillor JL Carter left the meeting at 11.05 am and returned at 11.25 am during this item)

30 Community Right to Challenge

The Chief Officer PPPU and Procurement submitted a report which provided detail on how the community right to challenge processes have been put into place locally.

The following officers were in attendance and responded to Board Members questions and comments.

- Andrew Eaton – Executive Manager, PPPU & Procurement

- Keri Wilkins – Initiatives & Project Manager, Corporate Procurement Unit.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were:

- The publicity given to the scheme locally and nationally
- The fact that the Council had not received any formal expressions of interest since the community right to challenge came into force and the fact that this mirrored the national position

RESOLVED – To note the contents of the report and the current position.

(Councillor Jarosz left the meeting at the commencement of this item.)

31 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presented the draft work schedule for the forthcoming municipal year.

The Board agreed to the establishment of two Working Groups in relation to Late Night Levy (a referral from Executive Board) and translation services. The following Members agreed to sit on the working groups;

Late night levy

Councillors P Grahame, S Bentley, Hardy, Wood and Macniven

Translation services

Councillors P Grahame, Wood and Lowe.

RESOLVED – That the Board's work schedule be updated to reflect the work areas identified during today's meeting.

32 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 14th October at 10.00 a.m. (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 a.m.)

(The meeting concluded at 11.35 am).