

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, S Bentley,
J Chapman, B Gettings, T Hanley,
A McKenna, W Hyde, E Minkin and
R Pryke

88 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

89 Minutes - 5th February 2008 - and Matters Arising

- (a) **Leeds Half - Marathon** (Minute No 82 refers)
In response to a Member's query, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development confirmed that the officers original decision to cancel the Leeds Half Marathon (subsequently re-instated) should have appeared on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions, and this fact had been drawn to the attention of the relevant officer.
- (b) **ALMO Working Group** (Minute No 84 refers)
Further to Minute No 84, 5th February 2008, the Chair instructed the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development to arrange a meeting of the ALMO Working Group at the earliest possible opportunity, to consider the recently circulated information.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

90 Minutes - Executive Board - 8th February 2008

- (a) **Wharfemeadows Park, Otley – River Safety Management** (Minute Nos 165 and 166 refer)
Councillor Hanley referred to the Inquiry carried out by Scrutiny Board (Culture and Leisure) on this matter, and the recommendations referred to, and accepted by, the Executive Board on 8th February 2008.

The only exception had been in respect of Recommendation 2 of that Scrutiny Board which read as follows:

'That all legal advice obtained by the Council is publicly available, save in circumstances to be determined by the Council's Monitoring Officer.'

The reasons for any non-disclosure should be made clear by the Monitoring Officer.'

This recommendation had not been accepted to date by the Executive Board, which had referred this issue to Nicole Jackson, the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) (and also the Council's Monitoring Officer) for further consideration and a report back to the Executive Board.

This matter had not been the subject of further discussion with Councillor Hanley, in his capacity as Chair of the Scrutiny Board (Culture and Leisure), and he was also disappointed to note that it was not on the agenda for the next Executive Board meeting on 12th March 2008.

Councillor Hanley also felt that the Scrutiny Board (Culture and Leisure) had a useful role in the proposed overall review of Water Safety Policy across the City, and expressed the hope that the Board would be given an opportunity to get involved in that Review.

The Chair instructed the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development to e-mail Nicole Jackson regarding the issues raised by Councillor Hanley.

(b) **Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011**

Councillor W Hyde expressed concern at the scheduling / timing of the consultation with Scrutiny Boards on this draft document vis a vis the dates of Executive Board meetings. On more than one occasion, the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) had met the day after Executive Board had considered the Plan. He was also concerned that although Children's Services issues were contained in the draft Strategic Plan, they were spread out across the Priority Themes and not given the specific prominence and importance they deserved.

Similar concerns were expressed regarding how this Committee's comments made today were to be fed into and taken account of by the Executive Board at its meeting tomorrow.

It was agreed to consider these matters as part of the consideration of Agenda Item 8, which dealt with the Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above comments, the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 8th February 2008 be received and noted.

91 Leeds Strategic Plan 2008 - 2011

Further to Minute No 73, 8th January 2008, the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) submitted a report regarding a revised

draft version of the Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011 prior to its consideration by the Executive Board on 12th March 2008 and full Council on 9th April 2008.

Dylan Griffiths and Jane Stageman, Chief Executive's Department, attended the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments. In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- The **timescales** for producing the Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011 (LSP) had been problematical. It was a time-consuming process, involving discussions with, amongst others, Members, local partners and the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, against a backdrop of Government timescales for the production of such Plans;
- **Targets** – the lack of specific, time-limited targets and an associated action plan was commented upon. It was reported that up to 35 specific targets, covering all 43 improvement priorities, would eventually be included in the final Plan and these would have to be agreed with the Government. Proposed targets for this City-wide plan would be consulted with Executive Board Members, and would be reported to the Executive Board and Council. Local targets and initiatives to support the LSP would be discussed by Members at local level via the Area Delivery Plan process at Area Committees.

Committee Members felt that all Council Members should have an input at the City-wide strategic level, not just at local level. It was reported that proposed targets should be clearer by the time of the April full Council meeting, and could if desired be reported back to OSC subsequent to that.

It was important to emphasise that as far as was known, the Government would not be '**passporting**' specific funds to tackle specific issues or meet specific targets, but would be providing funding for the LSP package as a whole. One of the assets of the new system was its flexibility in this regard. There was also an expectation that the Council's local partners would make specific resources available to support the LSP;

- '**Every Child Matters**' – This theme had been picked up throughout the LSP, and effort had been made to keep children's issues at the forefront of the LSP priorities, with links to all the Priority Themes contained in the Plan;
- Comment was made that there was still not enough emphasis placed on the importance of the **quality and sustainability of the built environment** in Leeds. This was a crucial thread which should run through the whole document, linked to priorities and targets. Reference was also made to annual reviews of the LSP;
- Concern was expressed regarding how OSC's comments were to be conveyed and taken into account by the Executive Board, which met tomorrow? The officers undertook to ensure that the Committee's views were conveyed.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That, subject to the above comments, the revised draft Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011 be received and noted.
- (b) That the officers ensure that OSC Members comments and reservations are conveyed to the Executive Board.
- (c) That scrutiny of the LSP be a key element of all Scrutiny Board work programmes throughout 2008/09.

92 Local Petitions and Calls for Action - Consultation

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report regarding Government consultation on the provisions relating to local petitions and Councillor calls for action contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the proposed responses contained in the report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development be forwarded to the Government as the Council's official response to its consultation paper.
- (b) That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development take up the point raised by a Member regarding gauging local satisfaction with the manner in which local petitions are currently handled, and report back in due course.

93 Financial Health Monitoring 2007/08 - Quarter 3 Report

The Committee considered the 2007/08 Quarter 3 financial monitoring report of the Director of Resources, recently submitted to the Executive Board on 8th February 2008, to ascertain whether or not there were any matters considered to be in need of more detailed scrutiny.

Doug Meeson, Chief Officer – Financial Management, was present at the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments. In brief summary the main issues discussed were:-

- Reference was made to the Committee's previous request for details of the **costs of previously approved retirement packages**. It was reported that the ongoing costs of staff early retirement packages was £8m p.a., of which £4.2m related to the costs of the added years incentive associated with these early retirements;
- Members requested detailed information regarding the projected savings associated with the **merger of ALMOs in Leeds**, whether these forecast savings had in fact materialised and what were the estimated ongoing savings associated with this initiative? Reference was also made to the cancellation of previously proposed housing improvement schemes following these mergers, for alleged financial reasons
- **School budget deficits and surpluses**, how these were tackled and in reality how much control the Council actually had over semi-autonomous school governing bodies.

- An explanation of the **Swarcliffe PFI sinking fund**.

RESOLVED – That subject to the above request for additional information, the report be received and noted.

(NB: Councillor Anderson left the meeting at 11.27 am during the consideration of this item)

94 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a copy of the Committee's work programme, updated to reflect decisions taken at previous meetings, together with a relevant extract from the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st March to 30th June 2008.

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development reported that in addition to those items previously identified for the 8th April meeting – the **Annual Report 2007/08** and a **Planning Performance Update Report** – other likely items now as a result of today's meeting were a report back on the outcomes of the proposed **ALMO Working Group** meeting, report on progress on the **LSP 2008-2011**, and an item on staffing of the **Group Offices** (Min No 75, 8th January 2008 refers).

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development also undertook to pursue enquiries into two items on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions – the proposed sale of **Quarry Hill** and **under-occupation in Council housing** – which did not appear now to be going to the 12th March meeting of the Executive Board, and to notify Members separately of his findings.

95 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 8th April 2008 at 10.00 am (Pre-meeting at 9.30 am)