

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 9TH JULY, 2020

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, J Bentley,
A Blackburn, D Collins, P Grahame,
A Khan, P Gruen, M Harland, N Sharpe,
K Brooks and T Smith

11 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

12 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

13 Late Items

There were no formal late items.

14 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

15 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M Dobson and A Gabriel.

16 Minutes - 18 June 2020

RESOLVED – That, subject to an amendment to minute no. 8 to read “concerns regarding the financial aspect of the *proposals*... It was requested that information *contained within the business plan be made clear and available to Members*” the minutes of the previous meeting held 18 June 2020, be approved as an accurate record.

17 Referral to Scrutiny: Nitrous Oxide Use and Abuse

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented a referral for Scrutiny, alongside some background information to help inform the Board’s consideration.

The following were in attendance for this item:

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday, 24th September, 2020

- Councillor M Robinson, Referrer
- Paul Money, Chief Officer Safer Leeds

The referral for Scrutiny was submitted as follows:

To consider an inquiry to look at the use and abuse of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and how the council work alongside/support the Police, help users, educate people, tackle the health problems and work to eradicate the empty canisters we find left within our communities.

Councillor M Robinson addressed the Board highlighting his concerns in relation to the use and distribution of nitrous oxide as follows:

- Littering of canisters in public spaces including road sides;
- Distribution of 'laughing gas' across the commercial sector in terms of its uses as a legal high;
- Risks associated with health, particularly when used in conjunction with alcohol.

Councillor Robinson suggested Scrutiny work on this matter on an educational basis to raise awareness to gain a greater understanding on the risks associated with the legal high. Additionally, to understand whether there would be any scope to restrict the purchasing of the substance commercially.

In response to the submission, Paul Money (Safer Leeds) addressed the Board. It had been acknowledged that although there had been a relatively small number of deaths in relation to the use of nitrous oxide, this was considerably fewer compared to the use of most controlled drugs. It was confirmed that it was not illegal to be in possession of the substance but is a criminal offence to supply or possess with intent to supply a psychoactive substance. As a consequence of recent events regarding Covid-19, the use of the substance had become more prevalent with users typically being young people. In terms of targeting resources, West Yorkshire Police will deal with breaches of the law concerning the use of nitrous oxide but are also focusing on priority issues such as the impact of Class A drugs on communities and it was confirmed that nitrous oxide had not been deemed to be so harmful as to warrant control under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Members heard of the remedies available to Local Authorities in terms of Anti-Social Behaviour Legislation, the use of Public Space Protection Orders and the powers available in terms of littering. In summarising, the Board noted there was an opportunity to look at legislation, and how the Government could work nationally with the industry and retailers in understanding the supply change.

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

- The legalities of supplying canisters in local shops – nitrous oxide is illegal to sell if it is known or believed to be intended for use as a psychoactive substance, but broadly speaking not illegal to sell. Members noted the opportunity to work with retailers on the rules around selling the substance;

- The biggest and most visible impact on communities was the littering of canisters;
- Understanding the impact on users specifically when the substance is taken in conjunction with alcohol;
- Prioritising the allocation of police and other public resources – work is on-going with Public Health colleagues and Children’s Services, as well as the neighbourhood policing teams. There is opportunity to develop community intelligence around the use of the substance, and targeting areas where hot spots can be mapped.

Councillor Robinson agreed that in comparison to Class A drugs the substance is not as damaging but it also was acknowledged that there is the possibility of this being a gateway drug, as well as being detrimental to communities in terms of littering. Councillor Robinson was mindful of police resources, and encouraged a conversation around educating and increasing the awareness particularly in schools and environmental teams.

Whilst the Board were keen to explore the impacts on health and explore anti-social behaviour remedies as part of a working group, it was agreed the remit would not be taken forward as a formal inquiry in the first instance. A suggestion was made to lobby government on national legislation, and to consider the work undertaken by Safer Leeds on drugs and alcohol including legal highs as part of a detailed report so that Board members can take a view on further action on the basis of understanding activity that is already underway.

The Chair confirmed an update would be provided prior to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board, as to how this piece of work would be taken forward.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the contents of the report, along with Members comments;
- b) Agreed that, in consultation with the Chair, the Principal Scrutiny Advisor seeks to commission an update report at an upcoming Scrutiny Board for members to consider in more detail, with a view to determining whether a further working group would be required.

18 Responding to the COVID 19 Pandemic - The Volunteer Response

The report of the Chief Officer Communities sets out the work that Leeds City Council (LCC), Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) and other organisations undertook to respond community needs in the initial phase of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The following information had been appended to the report:

- Tier 1 numbers, activities and organisations supported (Appendix 1)
- Participant organisations (Appendix 2)
- Referral data (Appendix 3)
- Case studies (Appendix 4)

The Board noted of an amendment to Appendix 2. The Chapel Allerton Hub coordination lead had been listed as 'Feel Good Factor', but should read "The Orion Partnership and Touchstone".

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Shaid Mahmood, Chief Officer Communities
- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Councillor Hayden, Scrutiny Chair Adults Health & Active Lifestyles
- Martin Dean, Area Leader, Communities & Environment
- James Woodhead, Head of Commissioning Integration
- Rachael Loftus, Head of Regional Partnerships
- Vic Clarke-Dunn, Programme Manager Service Transformation
- Gary Blake, Voluntary Action Leeds
- Richard Jackson, Voluntary Action Leeds

Front Line Volunteering Leadership

- Bernie Gahan, Centre Manager Leeds Mencap
- Alisa Rhodes, CEO Older People's Action (OPAL)
- Debbie Forsyth, Avsed
- Shanaz Gill, Hamara
- Vicar Richard Dimery, Pudsey Parish

The Chief Officer Communities introduced the report and provided some context on the role of local authorities, the Third Sector and volunteering arrangements to help support and meet the needs of citizens in Leeds. Arrangements had been set up at short notice and learning had been taken from workshops with the Third Sector and the Faith Sector, following the role of volunteering post flooding.

Leeds City Council (LCC) and Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) colleagues were invited to address the Board on the Volunteer Programme. The following information had been highlighted:

Tier 1

- Tasks were to be undertaken to provide more intensive support, including driving people to medical appointments and providing support inside their homes;
- 485 volunteers confirmed to having enhanced DBS requirements for this type of work and has been a joint effort;
- Work from colleagues whom have been re-deployed volunteers have supported other organisations and services in Leeds such as the Age UK Hospital to Home scheme, Forward Leeds and the Leeds & York Partnership Foundation Trust (LYPFT).

Tier 2

- The programme attracted nearly 8,000 across Leeds signing up and of those 5,400 completed their induction ready to be deployed;
- Complexities with identification badges;
- LCC telephone helpline to receive requests from the public;
- Welfare support offer;

- Third Sector organisations in Leeds have responded to the Pandemic by supporting their communities.

Tier 3

- Thousands of people stepped up to help support neighbourhoods and communities;
- VAL produced the 'Being a Good Neighbour Pack' providing guides and materials to help offer safe support;
- Blogs sought to continuously highlight ongoing activity;
- Volunteers that have not yet been deployed, have been encouraged to help neighbours.

The Board were provided with an update on the development of the "RUOK?" befriending service, with oversight by the Leeds Older People's Forum. The service was currently in the process of standing down, whilst ensuring service users receive their wellbeing calls.

The Chair invited Front Line Volunteering partners to provide an update on work that had been undertaken during the Pandemic. The following key information had been highlighted:

Hamara

- Staff had conducted wellbeing sessions from home;
- The Hub provided 70 hot meals per day, as well as supporting existing service users;
- Cultural food tailored pack and working with families;
- Challenges identified with language barriers;
- 20-25 food parcels was distributed per day, and up to 90 on a Friday;
- Worked closely with organisations across the city.

OPAL

- Support from LCC and VAL staff;
- Partnerships with other organisations strengthened to meet the needs of local people;
- Supporting the elderly cohorts emotional needs;
- Challenges with the LCC food purchasing system / pre-paid vouchers;
- Distribution of food parcels.

Avsed

- Challenges surrounding no offers from other organisations to form a partnership;
- Large numbers of volunteers;
- Food and prescription distribution;
- LCC voucher scheme worked well, and enabled bespoke shopping;
- Challenges with staff stress and limited capacity of staff dealing with numerous calls;
- Longer-term challenges in terms of service users' wellbeing.

Leeds Mencap

- Good volunteer response and partnerships;
- 600 food parcels had been distributed in the first week, and over 3 thousand food parcels distributed from partners;
- Identified the good working partnerships, and encouraged these carry on long-term.

Pudsey Parish

- Experience of dealing with the elderly cohort and volunteers;
- Received a large number of referrals;
- Church activities moved to an online method;
- Main source of work has been food parcels, shopping, prescriptions and be-friending services;
- Clothes bank for younger children had been set up;
- Considerations as to how local organisations are promoted – joined up approach.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- *Distribution of cultural food* – Members expressed concern regarding the range of cultural food distributed in local communities, to help support diverse communities. Members were assured that a range of large quantities of cultural food had been distributed, and offered to pick separate issues outside of the meeting with local ward councillors.
- *Quality of food for shielded citizens* – Members expressed concern on the quality of food being provided in the food parcels and the complexities around registering as a volunteer. In response, Members were informed a high volume of residents required assistance with food and a local approach had been taken to assist with dietary and cultural requirements due to the national food offer not providing those. Additionally, Members heard that following the shielded cohort not receiving their priority deliveries, community hubs assisted in providing food parcels.
- *Liaison with Government on communications* – Members expressed concern regarding the previous issues with vulnerable citizens being unable to online shop and the coordination of volunteers. Members were informed close collaborative work had been undertaken with the Government nationally, however it is the role of the local authority to contextualise matters for Leeds. Preventative work would be on-going with supermarkets, and encouraging residents to register online for priority deliveries.
- *Financial concerns in local communities* – Members raised concern on the long term impacts in communities regarding the furlough scheme and money spent. A suggestion was made to lobby Government on providing additional income to help support communities.

The Chair thanked everybody for their contributions.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the contents of the report, together with comments raised by the Board;

- b) Requested that, a statement report be circulated reflecting the contributions made by councillors, officers and volunteers on the refining of current volunteer hub arrangements and a longer term coordinated volunteering arrangement.

19 Work Schedule

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board's schedule for the 2019/20 municipal year. Copies of the Board's draft work schedule were appended to the report, as well as the remote minutes of the Executive Board meeting held Wednesday, 24th June, 2020.

Members discussed the items on the upcoming work schedule, including:

- A potential working group for the fireworks inquiry; and
- To receive an update on the Covid-19 response and how that has developed over the coming months.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the items listed for consideration and agreed the overall work schedule;
- b) Noted the Executive Board minutes.

20 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting as 24 September 2020 at 10 a.m. (with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 9:30 a.m.)

The meeting ended at 13:10.