

Scrutiny Board (City and Regional Partnerships)

Inquiry into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sectors (VCFS) in council led community engagement

Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At the first meeting of this new Scrutiny Board, members agreed to carry out an inquiry into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sector in community engagement.
- 1.2 In particular Members were keen to establish what opportunities exist to improve voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) participation and influence, including:
 - exploring what opportunities exist to strengthen the voluntary, community and faith sector infrastructure which supports engagement, and
 - exploring what, if any, changes are necessary in the Council's culture, policy and practice to strengthen voluntary, community and faith sector engagement.
- 1.3 The context of and drivers for the inquiry are complex:
 - Members have their own experiences of voluntary, community and faith sector participation and views about strengths and weaknesses and the potential for improvement.
 - There is a Central Government agenda promoting greater levels of engagement, including the recent publication of the Community Empowerment White Paper, 'Communities in Control', which will increase requirements for Councils to promote, facilitate and deliver a wider range of engagement activity, with demonstrable impacts on services and other decisions.
 - The Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011 includes an improvement priority and a national indicator on increasing the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.
 - The Council has legal obligations it must meet in respect of Equality legislation. It is required to evidence appropriate arrangements for engaging with all communities.
 - The Council is a signatory to the Compact for Leeds, where community participation and equal partnerships are key areas of focus.
 - Area Committees are about to significantly strengthen their community engagement responsibilities, including a brief to agree Area Community Engagement Plans with the goal of delivering better outcomes from local services.
 - Other partners and partnerships across Leeds have their own drivers and arrangements for engagement and many of these are also in transition.
 - Within the VCFS there are some well established and some newly emerging networks and structures facilitating effective engagement, but as the Council and other partners undergo transition to new structures and systems, so the VCFS sector is required to adapt to meet changing needs as well as respond to changing resourcing opportunities.
 - Finally, the recent wave of new accession state migration that Leeds has experienced has highlighted the need to engage with new communities as they

move to the City, to enable them to establish themselves and to ensure that services are aware of and can respond to changing demands. In reality we need to identify routes to engage with all of the communities in Leeds for the same reasons. The VCF sector may have a key role to play in delivering on this goal.

- The drivers and context exemplify the challenges and opportunities of the engagement agenda for Leeds at this time. The scrutiny focus is timely and provides an opportunity to draw together a number of issues, whilst spotlighting some specific areas of focus.

2.0 The Scope of this Inquiry

The scope of this inquiry is to identify:

- a the opportunities and barriers for engagement that exist for the VCFS and wider community as the Council and others work towards achieving the LAA targets set for Leeds.
- b what good practice exists in Leeds and beyond that can be used and developed.
- c what resources and other support is required by the VCFS in order to play a full role in delivering on the engagement and other targets for Leeds.
- d some of the changes that may be necessary in the Council's policy, practice and culture to deliver improved engagement outcomes for Leeds.

3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Board Member

3.1 The Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods, and the relevant Executive Board Members have been requested to comment on these terms of reference.

4.0 Timetable for the Inquiry

4.1 The inquiry will take place over three sessions with a view to issuing a final report in November 2008.

5.0 Submission of evidence

5.1 The following formal evidence gathering sessions have been scheduled:

5.2 Session One – 25th September 2008

The purpose of this session is to hear evidence about:

- current and emerging consultation obligations;
- the arrangements in place within the Council for community engagement at strategic, service and area level; and
- the strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches and opportunities and barriers to improve practice.

In particular the Board will consider:

- An overview of Council community consultation obligations, performance requirements and commitments;

- An overview of current Corporate Consultation Policy and processes, including: Place Survey; Citizens Panel and Corporate arrangements to facilitate more effective community consultation across services and in neighbourhoods, e.g. the Corporate Consultation Portal, emerging Equalities Forum and Hubs;
- An overview of Service based engagement practice, including examples of good practice;
- An overview of Area based engagement and the emerging role of Area Committees in respect of community engagement as a tool for shaping Area Delivery Plans, local services and activity;
- An overview of the opportunities for and practice of engaging with the VCFS at a strategic level e.g. on the development of key strategies like the LAA/LSP or in key Leeds Initiative Partnerships;
- Consideration of issues relating to reach, impact and opportunities for coordination and improvement in practice.

5.3 **Session Two – 23rd October 2008**

The purpose of this session is to:

- hear evidence of examples of good practice in Leeds and other areas.
- hear a VCFS perspective on the opportunities and barriers to participation with the Council and others.
- hear evidence from the VCFS and others about the capacity and infrastructure for engagement within the VCFS

In particular the board will consider:

- information requested from the last session;
- a VCFS perspective on the opportunities for and barriers to, effective participation at strategic, service and area level;
- a VCFS perspective on the effectiveness and impact of engagement activity at a strategic, service and area level;
- views from VCFS and others on the strengths and weaknesses of the capacity / infrastructure within the VCFS to support effective engagement.
- evidence of examples of good practice from Leeds and other local authority areas;
- the changes that may be necessary in Council policy, practice, culture and elsewhere to deliver the desired improved engagement outcomes.

This Session should use specific Case Studies in order to give practical illustrations to the issues identified.

The Board is asked to consider at this session any emerging recommendations from the inquiry to date.

5.4 **Session Three – 20th November 2008**

The purpose of this session is to consider:

- Any information requested from the last session.
- The Board's draft inquiry report and recommendations.

6.0 Witnesses

6.1 The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Leeds Voice
- Faith Community organisation
- Connecting Communities/Leeds BME Network
- Volition, the Advocacy Network for people with Mental Health issues
- Individual resident/s who have participated in community engagement activity
- Leeds City Council's Corporate Consultation Manager
- Environment and Neighbourhoods Officers, including: Area Management and Chief Regeneration Officer
- Director of Adult Social Care
- Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Planning and Improvement) Performance /Equalities/ LAA development etc
- Director of Children's Services / Partnerships Manager

7.0 Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Following the completion of the scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.

7.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the Board's recommendations.

8.0 Measures of success

8.1 It is important to consider how the Board will deem whether its inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.

8.2 The Board will look to publish practical recommendations.