

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITY AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS)

THURSDAY, 23RD OCTOBER, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor S Bentley in the Chair

Councillors B Atha, C Campbell, G Driver,
R Harington, J Lewis, R Pryke and
L Yeadon

24 Late Items

In accordance with her powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair admitted to the agenda as a late item of urgent business the minutes of the University Fees Working Group meeting held on 17th October 2008. These were not available at the time of agenda despatch, but were required to be reported under Agenda Item 9 –Update on Board’s Working Groups (Minute No 31 refers).

25 Declarations of Interest

No Member declarations of interest were made under this item (see later Minute No 29)

26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Fox and Kendall.

27 Minutes - 25th September 2008

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

28 Matters Arising from the Minutes

- (a) Regional Governance Arrangements – Subnational Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) (Minute No 19 refers)
In response to the Chair, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser reported that a Government response on the SNR review had not yet been received. When it was, he would circulate copies to Members.

29 Scrutiny Inquiry - Voluntary Community and Faith Sector in Leeds - Session 2

Further to Minute 20, 25th September 2008, the Chair introduced Session 2 of the Board’s Inquiry into issues surrounding the operation of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) in Leeds and welcomed to the meeting

the following witnesses, who gave presentations on the work of their organisations and responded to Members' queries and comments on various issues, including the Council's interaction with the VCFS in Leeds:-

Lisa Wright, Director, Leeds VOICE

Louise Megson, Chief Executive, St Luke's CARES

Judith Hickman, Operations Manager and Richard Lancaster, Priority Neighbourhood Worker, South Leeds Health for All.

In brief summary, the main issues arising during the discussion were:-

- The invaluable work done across the City by VCFS organisations, over 3,000 of which were affiliated to Leeds VOICE;
- The professionalism of those VCFS organisations and the immense involvement of local volunteers in them;
- The marked move in recent years away from a 'grants culture' to a service commissioning and outcomes-based system, with local VCFS organisations recognised and acknowledged as vital partners in a wide range of complex and comprehensive service provision, including the planning and implementation of those services;
- The good relationship which already existed between the Council and VCFS in Leeds, and the valuable support already provided by the Council;
- That in spite of this good relationship and partnership working, there was still more which could be done to break down obstacles and to assist VCFS organisations;
- Although some Council services were already fully engaged and had recognised the value of involving VCFS at an initial state (example Children's Services Commissioning Board), there were other areas, where the VCFS were not involved, or where the degree of involvement and communication were minimal (examples community safety and housing);
- Sustainability of VCFS organisations and projects was raised. VCFS organisations were highly vulnerable to financial variables, even the most professional of them. The Council funding projects for only a period of 12 months was a concern. By the time the project was established and staff recruited and trained, in reality you only got six months useful output from that project. The Council needed to look to 3-5 year funding schemes, with properly thought out and executed exit strategies, and other initiatives such as 'Trusted Partner Status' for certain VCFS organisations which had proved their worth;
- Application processes for access to Council funding needed to be proportionate, and the Council also needed to provide more advice and support for local VCFS organisations wishing to apply;
- The 'Compact for Leeds' provided a useful framework document to outline the respective roles of the Council and the VCFS and the expectations of each relative to the other. All partner organisations could self-assess awareness and compliance with the Compact Codes of Conduct;
- A gap was identified in terms of service provision for 8-13 year olds and this was where consultation with local VCFS organisations was vital, to identify local needs and solutions;

- The national influence of third sector funding;
- The role which Area Committees could play in improving and enhancing links with local VCFS organisations, by promoting initiatives such as the Extended Schools programme, for example;
- A possible visit by Board Members to the Smoothie Bar, established by St Luke's CARES, was suggested, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser to canvass Members;
- The Principal Scrutiny Adviser also undertook to circulate copies of the presentations made to today's meeting, if the witnesses supplied him with an electronic copy;
- It was agreed that the Board should have another evidence-gathering session, involving witnesses representing a faith group and the voluntary sector. It was felt that perhaps a visit to one of their premises by a small Working Group of Board Members might be the most appropriate way to conduct this session, and again, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser undertook to canvass for interested Members.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the presentations be received and noted, and the witnesses be thanked for attending and the manner in which they responded to Members' queries and comments;
 - (b) That the points raised be included in the draft Inquiry report to be submitted to the Board later in the municipal year;
 - (c) That the Principal Scrutiny Adviser be requested to pursue the follow-up actions identified above, and to liaise with Members accordingly
- (NB: 1 Councillor Driver declared a personal interest in this item in his capacity as a Director / Trustee of Leeds Groundwork Trust;
2 Councillor Atha left the meeting at 10.45 am, during the consideration of this item, and Councillors Campbell and Driver left the meeting at 11.45 am at the conclusion of this item)

30 Scrutiny Inquiry - Inquiry into Skills- Session 1

Further to Minute No 21, 25th September 2008, the Chair introduced Session 1 of the Board's Skills Inquiry, and welcomed to the meeting the following witnesses, who set the scene in terms of the Leeds Strategic Plan, the Local Area Agreement, the Leeds City Region Multi-Area Agreement and the current review of Further Education in Leeds:-

Martin Dean, Deputy Director, Leeds Initiative
James Flanagan, Project Manager (Regional Policy)
Jane Stageman, Senior Policy Manager, Planning, Policy and Improvement
Dylan Griffiths, Policy Manager, Planning, Policy and Improvement

In brief summary, the main issues arising during the discussion were:-

- The demise of Learning and Skills Councils from 2010. The future arrangements were in development, but were likely to involve a Young People's Learning Agency for 14 -19 funding, a Skills Funding Agency for

- 19+ funding and a national apprenticeship agency. The new arrangements might involve clusters of neighbouring authorities and FE colleges;
- The ambitious improvement targets contained in the Leeds Strategic Plan, based on the ambitions of the Leitch review, and the part which the evolving economic situation might play in terms of revising targets and the higher level skills plan;
 - The need to ensure links between wider skills issues and specific proposals for higher level skills under the City Region initiative;
 - The need for local consultation and input, at Ward level, to tap into local knowledge and concerns and to ensure that 'solutions' were not imposed which were unrealistic and unachievable.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Assistant Chief Officer (Planning, Policy and Improvement) be received and noted by way of an introduction to the Board's Inquiry, and the Board proceed with Session 2 on 20th November, as proposed in the timetable.

(NB: Councillor Yeadon left the meeting at 12.00 noon during the consideration of this item)

31 Progress Report on the Board's Working Groups

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report outlining the proceedings at recent meetings of the Board's Working Groups on Small Businesses (7.10.08) and University Fees (17.10.08). A minor amendment was agreed in respect of the University Fees Working Group meeting held on 17th October 2008 to delete the word 'excellent' from the final bullet point in Paragraph 4.1.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the minutes of the above Working Group meetings be received and the recommendations contained therein be approved;
- (b) That in respect of the proposed actions identified at Paragraph 5.1 of the University Fees Working Group, 17th October, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser prepare draft statements for proposed approval at the next Board meeting on 20th November.

32 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted the Board'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 October 2008 to 31st January 2009 and the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 8th October 2008.

RESOLVED – That subject to any changes necessary as a result of today's meeting, the work programme be received and approved.

33 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday 20th November 2008 at 10.00 am (Pre-meeting at 9.30 am)

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm