

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Inquiry into Street Cleaning

Summary report of the working group meeting held on 14th January 2009.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A working group of the Board met on 14th January 2009 with officers from Environment and Neighbourhoods, local Area Managers, local Area Committee Chairs, ALMO representatives, and representatives from ENCAMS. The main purpose of this meeting was to explore methods of community engagement used to reflect local priorities for street cleaning in Leeds and how the various stakeholders can work more closely together.

1.2 The following Members, officers and external witnesses had attended this working group meeting:

- Councillor Barry Anderson, Chair of the Scrutiny Board
- Councillor Ann Blackburn
- Councillor Graham Hyde
- Councillor Mohammed Rafique
- Councillor Brian Cleasby
- Councillor David Blackburn, Chair of the West (Outer) Area Committee
- Dave Richmond, Area Manager, South East Leeds
- Steve Crocker, Area Manager, West and North West Leeds
- Rory Barke, Area Manager, North East Leeds
- Stephen Smith, Head of Environmental Services
- Claire Warren, Chief Executive, West North West Homes Leeds
- Phil Hirst, Housing Services Development Manager, Aire Valley Homes Leeds
- Mike Holdsworth, Operations Manager, Aire Valley Homes Leeds
- Tony Saynor, Head of Estate and Support Services, East North East Homes Leeds
- Brian Johnson, Director of Strategic Projects, ENCAMS
- James Holmes, ENCAMS

1.3 During the meeting, the following personal declarations were declared:

- Councillor Anderson in his capacity as Chair of the West North West Homes;
- Councillor Blackburn in her capacity as a Director of West North West Homes;
- Councillor Hyde in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes

1.4 The Chair ensured that each attendee was given the opportunity to share with the working group the general views of their representative body on the provision of street cleaning services in Leeds, including any areas of concern, best practices and opportunities for further development.

1.5 A summary of the main issues raised during the meeting is set out below.

2.0 Main issues raised

Establishing closer links with local Area Committees, Town Councils and Parish Councils

- 2.1 During the working group's discussions, it was agreed that all Area Committees would benefit from receiving more information in relation to the street cleaning services provided in their respective areas. Such information would include clarification of the different street cleansing services they could expect to receive within their areas along with details of work schedules indicating at least the minimum frequencies for service provisions. Whilst acknowledging that the service has adopted a more responsive approach which encourages officers and operatives to exercise their discretion to determine levels of street cleanliness and service need, it was felt that Area Committees would also benefit from understanding how such decisions are made and subsequently monitored.
- 2.2 In terms of improving communication links with the public, it was suggested that the service would also benefit from linking into the community engagement plans of the Area Committees and also their joint tasking arrangements, which encourages closer working with key partners.
- 2.3 It was also noted that where Area Committees are currently holding themed debates as part of their meeting cycles, one of the themes could be around environmental cleanliness and could be used as an opportunity to open up a dialogue with other key stakeholders. Particular reference was made to local Town and Parish Councils.
- 2.4 In developing closer working links with local Town and Parish Councils, it was felt that this would help existing services to further engage with local residents and maximise on such a valuable resource, particularly as some Town and Parish Councils have previous experience of the inspection regimes for street cleanliness. It was highlighted that within the North East area, some Town and Parish Councils had already expressed an interest in playing a key role in monitoring street cleanliness and helping to improve standards.

The need for more local baseline data around street cleanliness needs

- 2.5 As previously raised by the Scrutiny Board during its inquiry, importance was again placed on gathering baseline data around street cleanliness needs at a more local level. During the meeting, examples of street cleanliness standards across the city were shared with the working group and it was stressed that even within neighbouring areas there can be significant differences in terms of cleanliness standards.
- 2.6 However, where particular hotspot areas across the city have been targeted with more intensive resources, importance was placed on ensuring that other areas across the city do not receive a reduced service as a consequence of

this.

- 2.7 During the meeting, references were made to the successes behind local Environmental Action Teams, Local Area Management Plans (LAMPs) and Intensive Neighbourhood Management (INM) programmes in terms of focusing on the needs of a local area and thus making marked improvements in terms of the Streetscene services provided.
- 2.8 As discussed in a previous inquiry session, the working group referred again to the District Local Environmental Quality Survey (DLEQS) which the Council had adopted within areas of Intensive Neighbourhood Management (INM) where the focus is on improving services in the most deprived communities in the city. The DLEQS monitors cleansing issues (litter, detritus, leaf fall); cleansing related issues (weeds and staining of roads); environmental crime (flytipping, flyposting and graffiti); litter bins and wastes placed out for collection; landscaped areas (litter and maintenance); grading of environmental elements; and the location of problems within the transect.
- 2.9 It was clear that such detailed survey data had meant that more accurate information was provided to enforcement and streetscene services and helped to identify any need for targeted education campaigns, which the working group acknowledged to be vital and recognised the need for more education campaigns. However, it was reported again to the working group that whilst the intention is to roll out this process across the city to achieve baseline data on a more local level, the problems around funding this resource intensive exercise still remains.

Distinguishing accountability for street cleaning services across the city

- 2.10 The Scrutiny Board was previously made aware that it is the Environment Protection Act 1990 that imposes a duty on land owners and duty bodies to keep specified land clear from litter and refuse. For local authorities, this includes all publicly maintained highways, housing estates, open spaces for which they are responsible.
- 2.11 Historically this responsibility has been delegated to a number of different departments who have been vested with the responsibility to look after individual areas of land. For example, Parks and Countryside are responsible for all parks and open spaces over 0.2 hectares in size; Education Leeds is responsible for all school grounds and associated land; the ALMOs are responsible for all land forming part of Leeds City Council's housing stock; Highways Services have the statutory responsibility for maintaining the adopted highway across Leeds in a safe and clean condition; and Streetscene Services is responsible for keeping clean all adopted Highways as notified by Highway Services.
- 2.12 The working group again questioned whether this fragmented approach towards street cleaning services was causing wider confusion and that in view of the fact that the duty place upon local authorities is not transferable (i.e. the Council as a whole remains accountable despite such delegation

arrangements in place), whether it would be sensible to simplify the process and allow for one department to have the budget for street cleaning and become the responsible lead to undertake the Council's duty to keep the city clean?

- 2.13 As the accountable body, it was felt that all employees of the Council should also be encouraged to report back any street cleaning or other environmental problems to the relevant department and for this reporting mechanism to be made as easy as possible.
- 2.14 During the meeting there was a general acknowledgment of the current arrangements for street cleaning services being very complex and therefore confusing to the public, particularly when trying to establish the boundaries between private land and ALMO land. However, there were some reservations expressed, particularly from ALMO representatives, in terms of transferring responsibilities and resources to a single department.
- 2.15 Firstly, it was explained to the working group that apart from the grounds maintenance budget, there is no core funding source for street cleaning activities carried out by the ALMOs and therefore any resources to be transferred would be in the form of existing staff that carry out such activities, such as the Estate Caretaking Teams.
- 2.16 It was also highlighted that a lot of time and effort had been invested in working with local tenants in terms of carrying out estate walkabouts and inspections to help identify particular environmental hotspots. Each ALMO has in place their own service standards, some of which have been agreed with tenants to reflect local priorities, and therefore a question was raised about whether the transfer of ALMO staff to a larger single department would detract from the local service standards already achieved by the ALMOs? It was felt that this would very much depend on any new management processes put in place and the level of influence that the ALMOs would have in terms of services provided within their specific areas.
- 2.17 Concerns were also raised about whether a single department would be able to replicate the innovative approaches adopted by the ALMOs to address local needs. For example, the use of ALMO staff and also commissioned staff from local social enterprises to provide an enhanced garden maintenance service for their more vulnerable tenants, which has received recognition as part of the audit inspection process and is deemed invaluable to those residents that receive this service.
- 2.18 In acknowledging the importance of maintaining such services, the working group questioned how such enhancements could be managed and funded if the responsibility for street cleaning services was to be transferred to a single department. It also highlighted again the importance of clarifying a baseline service in order to establish what would constitute as an enhanced service.
- 2.19 Questions were then raised as to whether existing tenants would be prepared to pay a service charge to help subsidise any enhanced services provided

within their areas? However, it was highlighted that since such services are currently responsive and not regarded as routine services, tenants may be reluctant to pay charges towards a service without clarification of what exactly it is they will be receiving in return. Also, in view of the costs of managing and collecting such service charges, it was felt that a cost/benefit analysis would need to be carried out before considering such a proposal.

Improving communications and the coordination of existing street cleaning services

- 2.20 Representatives from ENCAMS acknowledged that street cleaning standards within Leeds have improved over recent years. However, it was also acknowledged that there are still areas across the city that require further improvement. It was highlighted that Leeds was not alone as other Metropolitan Authorities have also struggled to try to address problems around street cleanliness standards. It was also recognised that the legacy of Competitive Compulsory Tendering had contributed towards the complexity of the arrangements now in place for delivering street cleaning services.
- 2.21 During the meeting there was an acknowledgement that communication links between the different departments and ALMOs needed to be strengthened in order to achieve a more co-ordinated and coherent service across the city. In moving forward, ENCAMS representatives explained that if the Council did decide to bring all the different service elements together into one department or remain with the existing arrangements, the key element to success is to establish a robust monitoring system that everyone can link into. Reference was made to a system already developed by ENCAMS that seeks to promote greater equity in terms of benchmarking the standards of cleanliness that all residents should expect to receive regardless of their housing tenure. Such a system defines grades of cleanliness for street cleaning and includes accompanying illustrations showing examples of what constitutes as a particular grade of cleanliness. However, it was acknowledged that the Council's current Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse 2006 also uses this approach.
- 2.22 Towards the end of the working group meeting, there was a general acknowledgement that the existing services do the best they can with the resources available. It was highlighted again that Leeds' performance is considered to be average when compared to other comparable core cities, yet has one of the lowest spends per head of population.
- 2.23 It was therefore recognised that significant additional resources would be required in order to deliver a standard of service that meets with the expectations of all residents in Leeds. It was also highlighted that in order for Leeds to compete with other core cities in attracting new developers and investors to the city, particularly within the current economic climate, then it needed to demonstrate to such developers and investors that Leeds is a clean and vibrant city for which they and their staff would wish to come and work and live. It was felt that street cleansing therefore needed to be regarded as a priority for further improvement and investment.