

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER, 2006

PRESENT: Councillor G Driver in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, P Grahame,
B Lancaster and T Leadley

40 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Anderson declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 9 and 10 (Minute Nos.44 and 45 refer) – Scrutiny Inquiry – Narrowing the Gap (Lead Member on Narrowing the Gap).

41 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bale, Cleasby and Pryke.

42 Minutes - 9th October 2006

The Chair reported that there had been an amendment to the version of the minutes that had been submitted to Council on 1st November 2006 in that the word 'casinos' had been replaced with 'gambling' in paragraph 6 of Minute No.37 – Council's Statement of Gambling Policy.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th October be confirmed as a correct record.

43 Scrutiny Inquiry - Safety, Wellbeing and Attendance - IDeA Review

The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report regarding the Committee's inquiry into Safety, Well Being and Attendance. Attached to the report was an executive summary and headline recommendations of the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) review of sickness absence within Leeds City Council.

The Chair welcomed Lorraine Hallam, Chief Officer, Human Resources and Chris Ingham, Human Resources Manager to the meeting.

It was reported that in addition to the scrutiny inquiry, the IDeA had been commissioned to carry out an independent review of attendance management. The review had been followed with a range of positive comments, however it was noted that there was still some room for improvement. The Council was commended for its holistic approach, innovative practice and the leadership from Corporate Human Resources.

Members attention was brought to the IDeA's recommendations and the Council's progress made. Issues highlighted included training, trade union involvement, occupational health provision and performance management.

In summary, it was explained that the IDeA review had complemented the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the recommendations had reflected the findings of the Committee's inquiry and the review. Levels of sickness were still reducing and it was hoped that these would be on target by the end of 2006.

In response to comments on how future arrangements would be monitored, it was reported that it would be a long term concern and there was a need to address cultural issues within the Council. There was also a need for accountability and strong leadership.

The Chair thanked Lorraine Hallam and Chris Ingham for their attendance and contributions, who in turn thanked the Committee for their work on the inquiry and gave a reassurance that the findings would be used to shape their work.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Scrutiny Inquiry for Safety, Wellbeing and Attendance be formally concluded.

44 Scrutiny Inquiry - Narrowing the Gap

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report regarding the Narrowing the Gap Scrutiny Inquiry. Attached to the report was a summary of the discussion held at the Committee's October meeting.

RESOLVED – That the summary of the discussion held at the Committee's October meeting be received and noted.

45 Scrutiny Inquiry - Narrowing the Gap - Leeds Local Area Agreement

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report which provided Members with information about the Leeds Local Area Agreement and how it contributed to the Narrowing the Gap agenda. Members were reminded that Local Area Agreements were still a relatively new approach to relationships between local authorities, their key partners and Central Government.

The Chair welcomed Jane Stageman, Senior Project Manager and Maggie Gjessing, Neighbourhood Renewal Manager to the meeting.

A presentation of the contribution of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) to Narrowing the Gap was given. The presentation focussed on the following:-

- Key Areas

- Narrowing the Gap Measures
- Good practice Examples
- Added Value of LAA
- Local Government White Paper Considerations

- Narrowing the Gap Focus
 - The Vision for Leeds and the Regeneration Plan provided the consultation base for the 3 year LAA.
 - Local Enterprise Growth Initiative bids and how these could meet some of the Narrowing the Gap target priorities.
 - Delivery of key priorities and change programmes.
 - Super Output Areas

- Narrowing the Gap Measures
 - The Board was informed of a range of floor targets and performance indicators with a detailed mid year review on the LAA mandatory outcomes.

- Good Practice Examples
 - Children and Young People – project to improve attendance, reduce exclusion and improve standards.
 - Healthier Communities and Older People – Employability project – health and voluntary sector involvement.
 - Safe and Stronger Communities – Intensive Neighbourhood Management Programmes – a good example of multi-agency working
 - Economic Development and Enterprise – financial inclusion, reducing debt, providing financial advice and affordable credit.

- Employability Project – working with key partners such as Job Centre Plus, NHS and the voluntary sector this will assist people from targeted groups into employment and reduce the numbers of incapacity benefit claimants to meet a Narrowing the Gap objective.

- Local Government White Paper –
 - New duties for partners to co-operate – on consultation and achieving targets
 - A greater emphasis on community cohesion.
 - Wider role for scrutiny – a wider range of service providers could be called in, community able to call in items for scrutiny, more dialogue with Executive Board.

Further issues discussed included the establishment of working groups to investigate different parts of the inquiry, the suggestion of co-opted members to assist with the inquiry and contributions from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector.

The Chair thanked Jane Stageman and Maggie Gjessing for their attendance.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

46 Performance Management and Financial Health Monitoring

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report regarding the performance management and scrutiny of the budget. The report outlined proposals to strengthen the existing performance management and financial health monitoring undertaken by Scrutiny Boards.

Members were reminded that under current arrangements the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received performance management information twice yearly and budgetary information once a year. It was proposed to increase this to quarterly reporting with departmental performance being made available to the relevant Scrutiny Boards.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reaffirms its support for proposed arrangements for monitoring the performance and financial health of the Council.

47 Request for Scrutiny

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development had prepared a report following a request for scrutiny from Councillor Illingworth regarding Council Policy on Access to Information.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Illingworth to the meeting to outline his request.

Councillor Illingworth informed the Committee about a request he had made for information that had been refused and subsequently overturned on appeal by the Independent Commissioner. He felt that Leeds City Council had not correctly implemented Freedom of Information (FOI) rules and that information had been held back without good reason. He also had a number of other cases that were due to be decided on appeal. He further mentioned that he had been refused access to information that had already been in the public domain although this had been through external bodies to the Council.

In summary, Councillor Illingworth wished the Committee to scrutinise the following :-

- Whether or not the Council is operating within the FOI Rules;
- Whether documents are held back without good cause;
- Whether there is a conflict between the FOI Rules and the Access to Information Rules;
- Whether or not the Council publishes records on its web pages.

The Chair thanked Councillor Illingworth for his attendance.

RESOLVED – That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development prepares a report to address the key points raised by Councillor Illingworth.

48 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which contained a copy of the Committee's current Work Programme, the Forward Plan of Key Decisions and minutes of the Executive Board held on 18th October 2006. In addition to the Work Programme, it was suggested that the Committee also consider the Local Government White Paper.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted and the Work Programme accepted.
- (b) That the Forward Plan be noted.
- (c) That the minutes of the Executive Board held on 18th October be noted.

49 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

Monday 4th December 2006
Monday 8th January 2007
Monday 5th February 2007
Monday 5th March 2007
Monday 2nd April 2007

All at 10.00 a.m. (pre-meetings at 9.30 a.m.)