

Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods)



Councillor Barry Anderson
Chair of Scrutiny Board
(Environment &
Neighbourhoods)

Membership of the Board:

Councillor Barry Anderson (Chair)
Councillor Alan Barker – from February 2010
Councillor Ann Blackburn
Councillor Ann Castle
Councillor Ryk Downes
Councillor Jane Dowson
Councillor David Hollingsworth
Councillor Graham Hyde
Councillor Josephine Jarosz
Councillor Joseph Marjoram
Councillor Lisa Mulherin
Councillor Mohammed Rafique

The Chair's summary

It is my pleasure to present the 2009/10 annual report of the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods). This report provides an overview of the Board's extremely busy work programme over the last 12 months as we have continued to address issues which remain key priorities for local people.

The Scrutiny Board oversees a wide range of services within the Environment and Neighbourhoods directorate. However, this year we have also welcomed the expansion of the Board's portfolio to act as the Council's 'Crime and Disorder Committee' as set out within the Police and Justice Act 2006. This involves scrutinising the work of the local Community Safety Partnership and the partners who comprise it in relation to its crime and disorder functions.

To help provide guidance and a common understanding of how crime and disorder scrutiny will operate in Leeds, a protocol has been developed jointly between the Scrutiny Board and the local Community Safety Partnership (Safer Leeds). In line with this protocol, we very much look forward to working more closely with the Partnership in future in ensuring that Scrutiny remains a positive and challenging process.

The Board has conducted seven separate pieces of Scrutiny work this year. These have focused on improving the long term recycling infrastructure for Leeds; improving the allocation and management of social housing tenancies; strengthening procurement practices within housing services and across the Council; reducing worklessness; delivering effective integrated offender management; procuring a future grounds maintenance service which best meets needs of local residents; and delivering the Council's most significant area based regeneration programme commitment to date, the EASEL Programme.

In view of what the Board has achieved this year, I sincerely thank my fellow Board Members, officers and other witnesses for their commitment and contribution to the Board's work.

I am also proud to acknowledge that the work of this Scrutiny Board continues to be recognised nationally. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has cited the Board's earlier inquiries into Private Rented Sector Housing and Older People's Housing as case study evidence within its publication 'global challenge, local solutions: the role of scrutiny, audit and inspection in tackling the recession'. In addition to this, references to the Board's inquiry into Older People's Housing will also feature within a forthcoming guide, commissioned from the CfPS by the Department for Work and Pensions, to help overview and scrutiny committees review how local areas are addressing the needs of older people.

Cllr Barry Anderson, Chair of Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods)

Inquiry into the EASEL Regeneration Programme

Summary

The East and South East Leeds (EASEL) programme is the Council's most significant area-based regeneration programme commitment to date. However, in February 2009, the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) received a request for a Scrutiny inquiry to be undertaken into the EASEL regeneration programme following concerns that there had been delays in progress with the programme and that people living in the EASEL area were not being kept informed of what was happening.

In taking forward this inquiry, the main focus was about identifying opportunities for strengthening communication links with key stakeholders and the EASEL communities around the programme. However, since session one of our inquiry in April 2009, when we received an overview of the initial programme objectives and timeline, we have observed a significant shift in direction for the EASEL programme in light of the current economic climate.

The Council is faced with the existing challenge of working within a completely different economic climate where delivery models dependent on raising funding from land sales and speculative property development are no longer considered viable in the short to medium term. We therefore acknowledge that the Council and its partners have been forced to radically rethink its plans for bringing investment into the EASEL area. Consequently the timing and scope of the neighbourhood planning exercise and resultant community consultation remains under review. In view of this, we felt that effective communication with stakeholders and the public was even more relevant now that the recession has forced the Council to reassess the overall direction of the EASEL programme.

Whilst we do plan to continue with our inquiry and monitor progress with the EASEL programme through to the neighbourhood planning stage, we considered it appropriate to produce an interim report setting out our findings and recommendations at this stage.

Anticipated service benefits

Our recommendations have been formulated to assist the Council and its partners to move forward and provide assurance to the relevant stakeholders and the EASEL communities that the programme will remain a priority and that there will be effective community involvement in shaping the regeneration plans in neighbourhoods in the EASEL area.

Our main recommendations

To be added once finalised.

Inquiry into Recycling

Summary

Recycling continues to be an area of interest for Scrutiny. At the beginning of the municipal year, we received a referral from the Executive Board Member for Environmental Services to conduct a further inquiry into recycling that focuses on improving the long term recycling infrastructure for Leeds.

Whilst acknowledging that over 90% of residents have access to kerbside recycling, there remains significant scope for improving the recycling infrastructure and making recycling facilities more accessible to everyone. Based around the principle that 'one size does not fit all', the focus of this particular Scrutiny inquiry was to explore the different options available for collecting recyclables, taking into account the diverse range of communities and housing types that exist in Leeds. Attention was also given to producing high quality material streams to encourage the long term development and sustainability of secondary material industries.

“Engaging the public in their local recycling scheme has been shown to be essential to the success of a scheme. Whichever scheme is chosen it is important that it is designed to fit the needs of the local population and the houses they live in”.

WRAP. Guide to choosing the right recycling collection system (June 2009).

As part of our inquiry, particular attention was given to those areas across the city which do not have access to appropriate and convenient recycling facilities. However, we also considered the challenges presented by different property types across the city, which included flats, back to back properties, terrace housing and any other property types that have limited access to recycling facilities. Particular attention was also given to student properties within the private sector and during our inquiry we welcomed the contribution and advice provided by representatives from UNIPOL and the local Student Unions in terms of existing best practice for targeting this particular population group.

Whilst acknowledging the wide range of materials currently recyclable at household waste sorting sites and bring sites, we also explored opportunities to expand this range further (including more reusable materials). In doing so, we considered other regional and national approaches towards recyclable collection methods and sought the advice of external experts in this particular area of work. These included representatives of the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP), the Waste Regional Advisory Group (WRAG), CO2Sense and Leeds Friends of the Earth.

As part of our inquiry, we also considered the relationship between Environment and Neighbourhoods and City Development in ensuring that future recycling service proposals are reflected in planning policy and guidance and that developers are making adequate provision for recycling within their planning proposals.

Our main recommendations

To be added once finalised.

Anticipated service benefits

The findings and recommendations arising from our inquiry seek to complement the Council's Recycling Improvement Plan and highlight where long term improvements to the recycling infrastructure for Leeds can be made.

Inquiry into Integrated Offender Management

Summary

At the beginning of the municipal year, particular concerns were raised about the rise in serious acquisitive crime in Leeds and most notably domestic burglary. In 2008/09, there were 9,248 recorded domestic burglaries in Leeds, which is equivalent to a 9.5% increase (799 more offences) when compared with the previous year. It was therefore clear that reducing burglary would be critical to realising the overall target for serious acquisitive crime. In view of this, particular importance was placed on embedding local processes as part of the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme and therefore we agreed to explore this further.

Integrated Offender Management is the process of developing and delivering a range of interventions for those individuals identified as of most concern to police and communities. With the overall aim of reducing or stopping such individuals offending, the 3 strands of the IOM model are based around the existing national Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO) Strategy, which are Prevent and Deter; Catch and Control; and Rehabilitate and Resettle. In its broadest sense, the IOM model of working can be used to identify and deliver interventions for individuals, families or neighbourhoods and it is the Safer Leeds Partnership that is accountable for the overall development, delivery and performance of the Leeds IOM model.

As part of our inquiry, we considered the current IOM framework in Leeds, identifying any barriers or gaps in relation to the range of partners, interventions and resources available. Particular attention was also given to the role of Offender Health in Leeds.

In particular, we explored mechanisms for improving information sharing between partner agencies to ensure a successful IOM process in Leeds. In doing so, we welcomed the contribution of a wide range of services and organisations during our inquiry. These included Leeds Community Safety; NHS Leeds; Leeds Youth Offending Service; West Yorkshire Probation Service; Leeds Offender Management Unit; Crown Prosecution Service; DISC; and the West Yorkshire Drugs and Offender Management Unit. Whilst many of our meetings were held within the Civic Hall, we also took the opportunity to conduct a visit to the Leeds Integrated Offender Management hub, which is based at Mabgate Mills.



Visit to the Leeds IOM hub at Mabgate Mills

Anticipated service benefits

The term 'integrated' offender management suggests end-to-end management of an individual's case and whilst our inquiry has highlighted some excellent work arising from the Leeds IOM scheme, our recommendations seek to strengthen further existing partnership working and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. We hope to publish our final report and recommendations in June 2010.

Our main recommendations

To be added once finalised.

Other work of the Board

Call-In

A Call In meeting of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board was held on 3rd June 2009. This was to consider an Officer Delegated Decision of the Chief Housing Services Officer relating to a request to enter into a framework contract with Cascade Homes, Care Solutions and Green Investments (Jump) for the supply and management of temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and families for a period of 12 months, commencing in May 2009 at a cost of £2.6m per annum.

In consideration of this decision, we raised a number of concerns about the processes that were followed for this particular contract. In view of this, we referred the decision back to the Chief Housing Services Officer for reconsideration and were pleased to note that our recommendations were taken on board. Following this Call In, we also agreed to conduct a wider review into the procurement of housing contracts.

Review into the procurement of housing contracts

During this review, we welcomed the contribution of representatives from Environment and Neighbourhoods, Supporting People, Corporate Procurement, Legal Services and Internal Audit. In recognition of the strategic move towards adopting a more joined up approach for the procurement of housing provision for vulnerable clients, we also invited contributions from the Adult Social Care and Children's Services directorates.

Overall, this review enabled Scrutiny to observe how the lessons learned from the Call In had led to significant improvements within Environment and Neighbourhoods in terms of its procurement and contract management processes for housing and housing support services. However, it also presented opportunities to identify where procurement practices across the Council could be strengthened. Our recommendations therefore focused on improving data sharing on prospective contractors; sharing best practice models around contract management; and conducting more timely contract reviews.

Our main recommendations

- That the Chief Procurement Officer leads on developing a robust internal data sharing system/protocol to complement the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire process as part of any procurement exercise.
- That, as part of the ALITO system used by the Procurement Unit, all contract managers across the Council are prompted to conduct a review of a contract at least 12 months before the contract expiry
- That the Council's Monitoring Officer and Chief Officer of Human Resources explore ways in which the requirement for all Members and officers to formally register and declare any interests/relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors or potential contractors can be made more transparent as part of any contract review process.

Other work of the Board

Review into Housing Lettings Process

At the April 2009 Council meeting, concerns were raised about the current housing lettings policies. In response, the Executive Board considered a number of proposed options for change aimed at improving the management and allocation of tenancies and requested that these be developed further into recommendations for change to be incorporated into a revised Lettings Policy and guidance.

In acknowledgement of this, we also agreed to take a broad look at the housing lettings process, from the housing application stage through to tenancy management, to explore where improvements in partnership working and data sharing can be made to improve the allocation and management of tenancies. In doing so, we recognised the importance of ensuring that Scrutiny complements the wider piece of work being undertaken.

A wide range of services and external partners contributed to our review, including tenant representatives from the local ALMOs, BITMO and Leeds Tenants Federation. Overall, the findings from our review emphasise the valuable role that all key partners have in the housing lettings process in terms of sharing data that will help determine and address the housing support needs of prospective and existing tenants. Our recommendations therefore seek to strengthen such partnership working in the future.

Our main recommendations

To be added once agreed

Review into Worklessness

Helping people find work and stay in work is recognised as a priority both nationally and locally. However, within this policy area, we noted that both strategy and delivery is fragmented, with responsibility spread across a range of agencies and providers. In terms of the impact on employers in particular, they would often be approached by a variety of different agencies and this consequently leads to confusion and frustration by the employer. It was therefore considered appropriate and timely for Scrutiny to focus its review around the development of the new delivery model for work with employers – 'Employment Leeds'. In doing so, consideration was given to the overall 'journey to work', from preparing individuals for work through to job retention.

It is clear that the way in which services are delivered and planned can have a substantial impact in helping workless people find and sustain employment and therefore our review findings and recommendations are based around the principles of adopting a more holistic approach towards worklessness, embedding a culture of partnership working both internally and externally, and delivering value for money through smarter targeting and improved coordination of services/resources.

Our main recommendations

To be added once agreed

Other work of the Board

Procurement of the Grounds Maintenance Contract for 2011

In June 2009, a working group of the Board was established to oversee the procurement process for the new grounds maintenance contract for 2011. We set out to ensure that the recommendations arising from the earlier Scrutiny inquiry around grounds maintenance had been taken forward and that lessons learned from the existing contract were also being reflected in the new specification.

In January 2009, we produced an interim statement setting out our initial findings and recommendations relating to the procurement of the new contract for the attention of the Executive Board and the Grounds Maintenance Programme Board at that particular stage of the procurement process. Many of our recommendations sought to address concerns raised about the overall level of engagement with Elected Members and also local Parish and Town Councils throughout the procurement process. Local councils were invited to contribute to our review and as a result, we ensured that their views and concerns were reflected within our interim Statement.

We are pleased to note that our Statement was considered and welcomed by the Executive Board in March 2010. We will therefore be monitoring the implementation of our initial recommendations as we continue to oversee the procurement process for the new contract.

Our main recommendations

- That the Chair of the Grounds Maintenance Project Board ensures that the relevant client groups actively engage with all Elected Members at key stages of the current grounds maintenance procurement project. We would advise that such engagement continues to be conducted through Area Committees.
- That the tendering process for the new grounds maintenance contract encourages a localised approach towards the delivery of the new service, and particularly if the service is to be packaged as one city-wide contract.
- That the Grounds Maintenance Project Board ensures that each of the ALMOs and Highways Services works in partnership with Elected Members and local Parish and Town Councils to develop a framework for delivering more robust and consistent monitoring arrangements for grounds maintenance as part of the current procurement project.

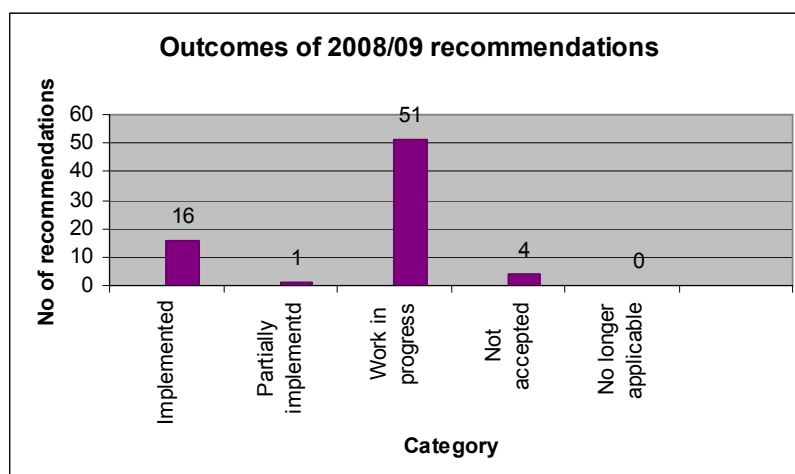
Crime and Disorder Scrutiny – Development of a joint protocol

Provisions in the Police and Justice Act 2006 further extend the remit of local authorities to scrutinise the local Community Safety Partnership in relation to its crime and disorder functions as from April 2009. As a result, the Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board was assigned to act as the Council's 'Crime and Disorder Committee'. In view of this, a protocol was developed jointly between the Scrutiny Board and the local Community Safety Partnership to help provide guidance and a common understanding of how crime and disorder scrutiny in Leeds will operate in practice.

Outcome of recommendations made in 2008/09

The Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods) carried out 5 inquiries in 2008/09, which resulted in 72 recommendations. This section highlights some key examples of where these recommendations have resulted in service benefits, or otherwise added value.

- As part of our inquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing, one of our main recommendations was to establish a single point of contact within the Council to act as a conduit for both private landlords and tenants to gain access to accurate and timely advice, information and assistance. As a result, the Leeds Housing Options Service became the central contact service for both landlords and tenants, with an e-mail address also set up (landlordandtenant@leeds.gov.uk).
- With regard to our inquiry into Older People's Housing, we were pleased to note that many of our recommendations were taken forward and incorporated within the revised Housing Strategy and Action Plan for Older People 2009-2012. In response to a particular concern raised by the Leeds Older People's Forum, we recommended that its work on tackling social isolation amongst older people is embedded into existing training mechanisms for all relevant front line staff delivering services to older people. This has also been taken forward.
- Following our inquiry into Asylum Seeker Case Resolution, we learned that the UK Border Agency has developed a closer working relationship with the Council and that improvements have been made in communicating detailed projections and baseline data. UKBA also gave a commitment to developing project plans in partnership with the authority for the future of case resolution.
- As a result of our review into Dog Fouling Enforcement, we recommended that a Dog Control Strategy is developed for Leeds. In response, a Dog Warden Service Strategy was produced in October 2009 with a commitment to develop a more detailed Dog Control Strategy along with other key partners. A Multi Agency Project Board was also established to take forward our recommendations around additional Dog Control Orders for Leeds. Dog Control Orders are now to be implemented in two stages to help facilitate early delivery of the overall project. A full consultation will be undertaken following the Advertisement of Intent on 21st May 2010. This includes an online consultation and a dedicated web address has been set up to facilitate this (www.leeds.gov.uk/dogs). The consultation is due to close on 31st August 2010.
- We noted that the refuse collection strike action last year had consequently affected progress in implementing the recommendations from our Street Cleaning inquiry. In view of this, the Chair has continued to discuss progress with the Chief Environmental Services Officer and the Board will be closely monitoring this in the new municipal year.



The Board's full work programme 2009/10

Review of existing policy

- Integrated Offender Management
- EASEL Regeneration Programme
- Procurement of Housing Contracts

Development of new policy

- Dog Warden Service Strategy
- Recycling
- Response to the CLG Consultation around social housing allocations
- Worklessness
- Procurement of the Grounds Maintenance Contract for 2011
- Integrated Waste Strategy for Leeds 2005-2035 – Revised Draft Action Plan
- Protocol for Crime and Disorder Scrutiny in Leeds

Monitoring scrutiny recommendations

- Street Cleaning
- Asylum Seeker Case Resolution
- Private Rented Sector Housing
- Older People's Housing
- Dog Fouling Enforcement

Performance management

- Quarterly performance management reports
- Performance Monitoring and Food Standards Agency Food Service Audit Update

Briefings

- Roseville Door Factory Closure – Update
- Housing Solutions/Mortgage Rescue
- Fuel Poverty

Call Ins

- Supporting People Request to enter into a framework contract with Cascade Homes, Care Solutions and Green Investments (Jump) for the supply and management of temporary accommodation for a period of 12 months