

**Area Chairs Forum
Monday 13th January 2012
Committee Room 4, Civic Hall**

Attendance:

Councillors: P. Gruen (Chair), G. Hyde, G. Hussain, G. Wilkinson, K. Parker, R. Finnigan, G. Latty, T. Hanley, D. Blackburn

Officers: J. Rogers, R. Barke, S. Mahmood,

Minutes: S. Warbis

Officers attending for specific items: J. Harwood, C. Dickinson, M. Lund, H. Freeman

| Item | Description | Action |
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| 1.0 | Apologies | |
| 1.1 | Cllr A. Gabriel, J. Maxwell, B. Logan | |
| 2.0 | Minutes and Matters Arising | |
| 2.1 | The minutes of the previous Area Chairs Forum meeting on 11 th November 2011 were agreed as an accurate record. | |
| 2.2 | <u>3.0 of previous minutes – Implications of the Welfare Reform Bill</u> An update paper was provided by Steve Carey, Chief Officer Revenues and Benefits. It was noted that elected members will be kept informed through monthly welfare reform briefing bulletins commencing in February. | |
| 2.3 | <u>6.0 of previous minutes – Community First Programme</u> It was noted that the Executive Board had been critical of the way that the funding had been calculated and allocated. It was raised that the funding was not aligned and provided little additionality and that the executive board were looking at ways of mitigating this. | |
| 3.0 | Localism Act – Feedback from Area Committee Meetings | |
| 3.1 | Jane Harwood, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer, attended to discuss feedback from Area Chairs regarding the discussions around the Localism Act at the previous round of Area Committees. | |
| 3.2 | The act received royal assent on 15 th November 2011. A number of Area Committees had indicated that they felt it was too early to discuss the implications of the act and were looking to set up working groups to monitor and discuss its implications. | |
| 3.3 | A paper will be going to Corporate Leadership Team, hopefully in February, which will incorporate views and comments from the Area Committee meetings. | |
| 3.4 | It was stated that some aspects of the act will come into effect in April, with other aspects likely to be delayed, and that there is need for clarity on the Authority's response and approach to the act. | |
| 3.5 | There was a view expressed that the Area Committee structure did not allow them to react quickly and may not be best placed to lead on the response to the localism act. Area Committees were however able to be facilitators and may be able to help local people take a lead. | |
| 3.6 | It was pointed out that various initiatives and structures were in place in neighbourhoods which had potential links to the localism agenda but that these | |

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| | needed to be linked in more closely to the authority's thinking. | |
| 3.7 | It was pointed out that the Outer North East area has funded a Localism Officer who is working at a parish level, particularly on neighbourhood planning issues. It was mentioned that costs for neighbourhood plans were prohibitive and that the Community Infrastructure Levy is not yet accessible at a local level and would not cover the costs for neighbourhood plans. | |
| 3.8 | It was mentioned that details of the regulations in the localism act are not explicit and that this makes it difficult to plan and determine how the authority will operate. There are uncertainties around how groups will react to the Community Right to Challenge and how central planning regulations will affect local regulations. The council will need to be in a position to respond when these issues become clearer. | |
| 3.9 | It was mentioned that the length of time between Area Committee meetings sometimes made it difficult for Area Committees to respond as issues such as new regulations were developing. It was suggested that the political parties needed to be developing their own response to the localism act. | |
| 3.10 | The question was raised as to how prepared Leeds City Council was in comparison to other local authorities. The view was that all authorities were having to wait for the detail to come out, but in fact Leeds has been looking at the localism agenda for over 10 years and is in some ways ahead of the game, although there was still work to be done to embed this across all services. It was suggested that the authority could have bid earlier for the Neighbourhood Planning pilots, but actually had not had a response to the 4 bids that it did submit in December, which was frustrating. | |
| 3.11 | Officers need to be looking at how existing processes can cope with the proposed changes without adding in more bureaucracy. Area Committees are well placed to deal with neighbourhood related issues and need to facilitate cohesion and participation in neighbourhoods. | |
| 3.12 | Neighbourhood Forums and Parish Councils will have more influence / power as a result of the localism act and the local authority should take the opportunity to steer and guide this process of change and Area Committees could be the channel and link to these groups. Area Committees do not have a formal role in Neighbourhood Planning but could potentially have a scrutiny role in the process. | |
| 3.13 | Local planning has caught the imagination of local people and groups and it was suggested that councillors should in some sense be distanced from this and that it should be people that are the driving force. It was mentioned that Leeds is not totally parished and in some areas there will be a reliance on driven individuals to take a lead, but in some areas these individuals may not be there. Elected Members have a key role in stimulating and encouraging local activity. | |
| 3.14 | It was mentioned that the Inner East area has a community leadership team that links local groups together and that the Area Committee has a key role in tying things together in an area through Neighbourhood and Area Action Plans. There is also a role in ensuring that communities take the lead and are not manipulated by developers or other groups with conflicting interests. | |
| 3.15 | Morley has an active Town Council and has parishes but these do not cover all areas. The Area Committee has a vital role in providing structure where no parishes exist and in building community capacity where there are no other options in place. | |
| 3.16 | It was important that members and officers consider the opportunities to change the way they operate and how council business is carried out. Debates | |

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| | need to happen in the appropriate places to bring about real change. It was stated that elected members need to be aware of plans as they are being developed and implemented. | |
| 3.17 | It was mentioned that a power point presentation has been produced which details the work going on within the council to anticipate the localism act and it was agreed that this would be circulated to Area Chairs. | JR |
| 3.18 | It was suggested that Area Chairs should liaise with the Area Leaders to be kept up to date with developing structures in their areas. | |
| 4.0 | Citizen's Panel – Feedback from Area Committee Meetings and Next Steps | |
| 4.1 | Chris Dickinson, Area Management Officer, and Matt Lund, Corporate Consultation Manager attended to discuss feedback from Area Chairs regarding the discussions around the Citizen's Panel at the previous round of Area Committees, and provided a paper detailing feedback already received. | |
| 4.2 | There was a discussion around representation on the Citizen's Panel and reference was made to the report and appendices detailing the current recruitment profile and where significant gaps were emerging as the panel was being recruited to. | |
| 4.3 | The question was raised as to why people under the age of 18 were not included on the panel. It was explained that the views of 16-18 year olds were gathered through other focused work, including Breeze, and that their views would not be ignored. | |
| 4.4 | The question was asked as to when we were likely to have a full membership on the Citizen's panel. Currently 35% of the panel has been filled through a variety of methods with a focused mailing initiative about to start which is hoping to recruit up to 6,000 members. The profile of the panel membership is being tracked at an Area Committee level and officers are able to react where there is a projected under representation of specific groups of people. | |
| 4.5 | It was pointed out that the three Area Committees with the lowest percentage of their membership level at present were all inner areas with Inner East having the lowest percentage. It was acknowledged that consultation can be more problematic in the inner areas and that attempts were being made to avoid drawing panel members from residents who were already actively involved in engagement. | |
| 4.6 | It was suggested that the Citizen's Panel could be used to influence the priorities for targeting wellbeing spending. There were mixed views over the suitability of this with some Area Chairs seeing the value of an annual report to inform priority setting and others not convinced that the panel would be capable of delivering this for some time. It was generally agreed that the Citizen's Panel could be used to influence the business plan. | |
| 4.7 | A short consultation on events relating to the Olympic Games is taking place with the current Citizen's Panel members numbering approximately 2,000 people. It was pointed out that any results should have a health warning as the panel is not representative of the Leeds population at the moment. The resident's survey will also feed into opinions and results should be available in the next couple of months. The next consultation is likely to take place in the spring. | |
| 4.8 | The question was raised as to how under representation in terms of faith and ethnicity was being addressed. It was pointed out that much of the recruitment to date has been carried out through the media and that direct contact through local representative groups would become a greater part of the recruitment | |

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| | process moving forward. | |
| 4.9 | It was also mentioned that the use of advocates in the third sector to represent people with learning difficulties or language barriers was being looked into to ensure that these groups were effectively represented. The question was raised as to how the views of smaller groups of the population, such as those with learning difficulties, would not become lost. It was explained that statistical work can be carried out to weight responses and that the percentage of the population in each Area Committee is taken into account and is addressed in the target numbers for panel members in each area. | |
| 4.10 | It was agreed that the Citizen's panel would be a welcome addition to the toolbox for engagement. There has been significant progress in recruitment and that the Area Leaders could help to address shortfalls in certain groups within their areas. A range of organisations are carrying out engagement in the areas. A pilot is being developed for a patient's panel for example and there are risks that this could be a counter process if it is not linked up. It was pointed out that the Citizen's Panel is a partnership exercise, for example the ALMOs are included, so that issues such as tenure and employment status are known which would mean that engagement with specific sub groups such as council tenants would be possible. | |
| 5.0 | Area Management Restructure Update | |
| 5.1 | A paper was provided by the Area Leaders showing the current picture of staff locations in the Area Teams and vacancies following the restructuring process. | |
| 5.2 | The process of exploring the talent pool had taken place and discussions were taking place with Human resources to release remaining vacancies to the city wide council staff. | |
| 5.3 | Area chairs noted the progress made. | |
| 6.0 | Environmental Delegation – Current Progress and Future Options | |
| 6.1 | Helen Freeman attended to provide an update on the Environmental Services delegation and to explore views on the future options for the delegation. | |
| 6.2 | The delegation came into operation in September and a report on progress was taken to all Area Committees in the December cycle of meetings. Meetings have also taken place with Area Committee Environmental Champions. There have been no major criticisms of the delegation, although some snagging has been necessary, and there is an appetite within the Area Committees to discuss what comes next. A report was provided which gave a summary of the feedback from the Area Committees. | |
| 6.3 | Services such as ginnel and gully cleansing, graffiti removal, needle picking and public convenience cleaning have been referenced as potential services to include in the delegation. These services have been moved from city wide teams to locality teams with effect from 3 rd January 2012 and are therefore in a position to be included in the next delegation. Further member input is required to agree the way forward. | |
| 6.4 | A report is going to the Executive Board in February which will give a client side perspective of how the delegation has performed so far, incorporating views from services and councillors. | |
| 6.5 | It was pointed out that the delegation was a change in the way services are delivered but largely the public are not aware of the changes. It was suggested that the need for a communication strategy should be included in the report that was going to executive board. | |

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| 6.6 | Helen Freeman mentioned that as well as the need to inform the public of how the service has changed, locality teams were focusing on developing civic pride in an area and increasing peer pressure within communities to look after their areas. | |
| 6.7 | It was suggested that there needs to be a balance between education and enforcement and that the balance needs to be appropriate for particular areas. Targeted enforcement may be necessary for certain areas such as around parades of shops and it needs to be demonstrated that action will be taken where it is needed. | |
| 6.8 | Area Chairs were asked to provide feedback from their Area Committees on how the delegation had been received and how they felt the new arrangements were working. There was a common view that the delegation was going well with the following additional comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The committees have an ability to influence the delegation but would like further input into the type of machinery used and where it is deployed o Doubts had been expressed over the efficacy of having spare days in scheduled work but these were seen to be working well in picking up issues as they arise o Early signs were good but there needed to be efforts to maintain the current performance o There were still concerns over the amount of down time and the most effective use of appropriate depots o The reaction to de-leafing and other seasonal problems had been good | |
| 6.9 | Praise was given to the efforts of the three Locality Managers in Environmental Services and in particular their creativity in addressing local issues. | |
| 6.10 | The Area Leaders commented that they were also pleased with the progress of the delegation and that comments from Area Chairs and other ward members will be incorporated into the report that is going to the Executive Board. | |
| 6.11 | It was agreed that the draft report to Executive Board on the Environmental Delegation would be circulated to Area Chairs for comment and amendments. | SM |
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| 7.0 | Any Other Business | |
| 7.1 | <u>Area Committee Budgets</u> Cllr Gruen mentioned that the budget setting process is ongoing and that during the process they will be looking at the current levels of spending for each Area Committee. The question was raised as to whether there would be capital funding for 2012/13 but it was stated that it was too early in the process to give a definite answer to this. | |
| 7.2 | <u>Luncheon Clubs</u> A query was made on the progress made relating to luncheon club funding arrangements with the new financial year approaching. Shadowing of the budget arrangements by Area Team staff had taken place and, as agreed at the previous Area Chairs Forum, work will take place during the year to explore the feasibility of changing arrangements for the 2013/14 funding applications. | |
| 8.0 | Date of Next Meeting | |
| 8.1 | Friday 24 th February 2012, 10am, Committee Room 4, Civic Hall. | |