

## **SCRUTINY BOARD (SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES)**

### **STRENGTHENING THE COUNCIL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS**

#### **DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Local (community, neighbourhood, parish, village and town) councils are statutory bodies that are recognised nationally as the grass-roots level of local government. Their role is to provide a voice for communities, helping people to feel more involved in the decisions that affect them. The importance of this role is reinforced with the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, which represents a clear statement of intent from central government of its plans to devolve power to local communities.
- 1.2 The National Association of Local Councils reports that over 15 million people live in communities served by local councils (around 35% of the population). Within the Leeds area, there are 31 local Parish and Town Councils currently established.
- 1.3 Mutual recognition of the added value gained in developing a closer working relationship had led to the agreement of a Parish and Town Council Charter in October 2006. This Charter sets out how Leeds City Council and the local councils aim to work together for the benefits of local people.
- 1.4 The Charter is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances and arrangements of local government. A review of the Charter is therefore carried out on an annual basis with the local councils to keep pace with developments.
- 1.5 However, in June 2012, the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services made a request for Scrutiny to conduct a separate review of the Council's relationship with local Parish and Town Councils and explore how this can be strengthened.
- 1.6 In agreeing to undertake this review, the Scrutiny Board also recognises the associated links with the Council's current review of area working. Within the terms of reference for this wider review, one of the key objectives is to 'consider the effectiveness of partnership working at the local level and the ability of local councillors and their communities to hold local services to account and influence decision makers to deliver improved local services'.
- 1.7 Within the current Parish and Town Council Charter, particular reference is made to the relationship between local councils and their

respective Area Committees. It states that 'Area Committees will seek to maintain and promote partnership working and funding arrangements with their local councils as appropriate for the sustainable social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their local communities'. As part of this, the Charter also makes reference to local councils being consulted, as appropriate, on the annual Area Delivery Plan of their respective Area Committee. However, the Scrutiny Board acknowledges that the relationship between Area Committees and local councils is inconsistent across the city.

- 1.8 In view of this, the Scrutiny Board recognises the added value gained in focusing its review on strengthening the relationship between Area Committees and local councils and sharing its findings and recommendations as part of the Council's wider review of area working.

## **2.0 Scope of the inquiry**

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

- Current and forthcoming powers and responsibilities given to local councils.
- Statutory and voluntary standards applied to local councils (including reference to the current Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme)
- The location of existing local councils in relation to the current Area Committee structure.
- Relevant consultation feedback from Leeds City Council Elected Members as part of the wider review of area working.
- Findings from the September 2012 Parish and Town Councillor questionnaire aimed at examining their current relationship with Area Committees.
- Examples of existing good practice between local councils and their Area Committees.
- The views of Area Committee Chairs on their vision for future working with local councils.
- The views of local Parish and Town Councils on their vision for future working with Area Committees.
- The potential role of Area Managers and Area Teams in strengthening the relationship between Area Committees and local councils.

## **3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Member**

- 3.1 In line with Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 12.1 where a Scrutiny Board undertakes an Inquiry the Scrutiny Board shall consult with any relevant Director and Executive Member on the terms of reference.

#### **4.0 Timetable for the inquiry**

- 4.1 The Inquiry will take place over a number of sessions. These sessions will involve smaller working group meetings, which will provide flexibility for the Board to gather and consider evidence that will aid the discussions during the public Board meetings.
- 4.2 The length of the Inquiry is subject to change. However it is anticipated that a final report will be produced in April 2013.

#### **5.0 Submission of evidence**

##### **5.1 Session one – November 2012**

To receive an overview of the current and forthcoming powers and responsibilities given to local councils.

To consider the statutory and voluntary standards applied to local councils (including reference to the current Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme).

To map the location of existing local councils in relation to the current Area Committee structure.

To consider relevant feedback from the consultation undertaken with Leeds City Council Elected Members as part of the wider review of area working.

To consider the findings from the September 2012 Parish and Town Councillor questionnaire aimed at examining their current relationship with Area Committees.

##### **5.2 Session two – December 2012**

To invite and consider the views of local Parish and Town Councils on their vision for future working with Area Committees.

##### **5.3 Session three – December 2012**

To invite and consider the views of Area Committee Chairs on their vision for future working with local councils.

To consider the potential role of Area Managers and Area Teams in strengthening the relationship between Area Committees and local councils.

#### 5.4 **Session four – January 2013**

To consider the findings arising from the earlier sessions and explore potential areas for improvement.

#### 5.5 **Session five – January 2013**

To attend the annual Parish and Town Council seminar and consult on the initial findings arising from the Scrutiny review (including potential areas for improvement).

#### 5.6 **Session five – February 2013**

To consider the draft recommendations arising from the review.

#### 5.7 **Session six – April 2013**

To agree the Board's final report.

### 6.0 **Witnesses**

6.1 The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services
- Executive Officer (Performance Management)
- Head of Civic and Member Support
- Area Committee Chairs
- Area Managers
- Representatives from local Parish and Town Councils
- Representative from Yorkshire Local Councils Association

### 7.0 **Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

7.1 The Equality Improvement Priorities 2011 to 2015 have been developed to ensure our legal duties are met under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to achieve its ambition to be the best City in the UK and ensure that as a city work takes place to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity.

7.2 Equality and diversity will be a consideration throughout the Scrutiny Inquiry and due regard will be given to equality through the use of evidence, written and verbal, outcomes from consultation and engagement activities.

7.3 The Scrutiny Board may engage and involve interested groups and individuals (both internal and external to the council) to inform recommendations.

- 7.4 Where an impact has been identified this will be reflected in the final inquiry report, post inquiry. Where a Scrutiny Board recommendation is agreed the individual, organisation or group responsible for implementation or delivery should give due regard to equality and diversity, conducting impact assessments where it is deemed appropriate.

## **8.0 Post inquiry report monitoring arrangements**

- 8.1 Following the completion of the Scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.
- 8.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

## **9.0 Measures of success**

- 9.1 It is important to consider how the Scrutiny Board will deem if their inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.