

**Area Chairs Forum
Friday 13th July 2012
Committee Room 3, Civic Hall**

Attendance:

Councillors: P. Gruen (Chair), G. Hyde, G. Hussain, G. Wilkinson, A. Gabriel, K. Bruce, J Akhtar, J. Jarosz

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

Minutes: S. Warbis

Attending for specific items: Steve Carey, Lelir Yeung, Cllr Blake, Cllr Dowson

Item	Description	Action
1.0	Apologies	
1.1	Cllr A McKenna, Cllr J McKenna, Cllr Wadsworth, Jane Maxwell, Beth Logan	
2.0	Minutes and Matters Arising	
2.1	The minutes of the previous Area Chairs Forum meeting on 12 th March 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.	
2.2	<u>6.13 of previous minutes – Apprenticeships</u> North East outer will be looking at the apprentice option at their meeting in September and if proceeding will be looking to take on someone living in their area. South Inner, while supporting the idea of apprentices have reservations over whether wellbeing money is the most appropriate way to fund posts. South Inner will be revisiting in September but looking at options for the following financial year. Outer West are doubtful they have funding for this year but will be looking at the options for 2012/13. East Inner are looking to directly support a NEET in their area and see this as part of a wider programme for apprentices involving the ALMO. It was clarified that in the option being proposed to Area Committees the apprentice post would be managed by officers in the Area Teams but would gain experience through placements with other partners such as the police. It was re-emphasised that Area Committee involvement in supporting apprentices would show their commitment to the council wide ambitions for apprentices.	
3.0	Area Chairs Forum Terms of Reference	
3.1	Draft terms of reference were brought to the meeting and were adopted by the forum.	
4.0	Update on Presupposing for Welfare Reforms	
4.1	Steve Carey, Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer, attended and brought a report to provide an update on the implementation of the Government's Welfare Reforms and the approach being taken in Leeds to address the issues caused by the reforms.	
4.2	The focus has been on preparing for the reforms at a local level and looking at what we can do as an authority to help those most vulnerable to the impact of the reforms. There has been targeting of advice to people who we know will be affected through mail shots and followed up by visits.	
4.3	The view has been taken to inform people of what the likely impact will be now, although the implications will not take effect for another 8 months in some cases. General information has been displayed in One Stop Centres, GP	

	surgeries, Libraries etc.	
4.4	Voluntary Sector organisations have been briefed on the impact of the reforms and work has also been carried out amongst clusters and head-teachers forum and other organisations that will have contact with vulnerable groups.	
4.5	There will however be groups of people for who it is more difficult to predict the implications of the reforms, and other groups for who it is harder to get information to. There is therefore a need to involve the Area Support Teams and Area Committees to identify these groups and assist in getting advice and information to them.	
4.6	It is anticipated that the introduction of Universal Credit will lead to problems including access to online systems and support, and payments being made in arrears, including those to cover rent. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is looking at providing support in exceptions which may include rent support going straight to landlords in some cases, however in principal the DWP wants people to take responsibility for paying their own rent.	
4.7	Leeds is looking to develop a wrap around service for support tailored to individuals and move away from the rigid prescribed approach taken by the DWP. Executive Board has given approval for a council tax support scheme for certain groups but further consultation is required to establish what other support may be appropriate.	
4.8	The ALMOs in Leeds are also identifying which of their tenants will need support in the transition to Universal Credit payments, and work is also being carried out to assess the councils capacity for online access for Universal Credit claims.	
4.9	There are some concerns about how Jobcentre Plus will be accountable locally for it's provision of benefits support. At the moment there is no process in place.	
4.10	Concerns were raised by Area Chairs over the impact that would be seen in inner city areas and large council estates as rents become less affordable and pressures are put on people to move out of areas into smaller properties / houses of multiple accommodation. Also the issue of tenants being in arrears as benefit payment schedules change, and the move to monthly payments. It was agreed that Third Sector organisations would be vital in providing support and that the council should be promoting services such as credit unions and local support networks.	
4.11	It was pointed out that although the council will have the ability to provide some discretionary housing payments, this would need to be targeted, and it would be impossible to provide support to everybody that needed it. Members of the public would be looking to the council for help and it needs to be made clear that difficulties that occur are not the result of Local Authority policies, and communications on what options are available needs to be clear.	
4.12	LCC and the ALMOs are monitoring the increase in customer contacts regarding Welfare Reforms and the impact that this is having on resources and capacity.	
4.13	Concerns were raised as to how effective information distribution had been so far. There was a feeling that particularly private tenants were not taking in the messages of how they could be affected. It was recognised that mail shots would not always be read and it was pointed out that joint work with the Citizen's Advice Bureau was taking place to raise awareness with their customers, and that commissioning of support services for targeted groups was being looked at.	
4.14	The issue was raised of increased vulnerability of members of the community with mental health problems and particularly those being discharged from	

	hospitals. Steve Carey said that there had been sessions with the NHS but agreed that there could be a focus on providing information to those discharging patients and those providing outreach care.	
4.15	Area Chairs mentioned that local Elected Members are likely to get an influx of individual cases and that they needed to be armed with the information of what support is available and what the options are. Steve Carey mentioned that there is an intention to contact all elected members when the policy on discretionary rent support is finalised to make councillors aware of the policy and the routes for referral. There will also be briefings to the local MPs.	
4.16	There have been constructive sessions with Steve Carey and the Area Leaders to look at how Area Support Teams can provide intelligence on communication strategies, vulnerable groups, third sector partners and other local approaches to supporting people vulnerable to Welfare Reforms.	
4.17	It was agreed that a report is needed for Area Committees on the impact of Welfare Reforms and how Area Support Teams and Area Committees can play their part in helping local people. The report needs to be tailored to the individual circumstances of each Area.	SC/ALs
4.18	CLlr Gruen asked for a report to be considered for Cabinet on Welfare Reforms, detailing the options for support that are available and detailing a communication plan for reaching vulnerable people.	SC
5.0	Review of Area Working – Next Steps	
5.1	James Rogers gave a verbal update on initial progress of the Review of Area Working – Next Steps.	
5.2	The All Party Members groups had met twice, the second meeting having taken place yesterday, and have signed off the project plan outline and the communication plan.	
5.3	Engagement will commence with a number of sessions open to all Elected Members to explore their views of what is currently working and what isn't, what functions they feel are appropriate for Area Committees, how we can improve local engagement etc. Invitations will be sent in the next few days.	
5.4	In September there will be wider consultation with partners, community groups etc. There will also be an examination of finances to look at how budgets are allocated and potential for using section 106 money and capital receipts locally.	
5.5	A community engagement plan will be developed and it was suggested that, regardless of the review, more work should be undertaken to optimise the ongoing engagement of members of the Citizen's Panel within local areas.	ALs
5.6	Geography will be looked at to examine issues relating to boundaries for Area Committees, Parishes, Clusters, Neighbourhood Policing Teams etc. although this is not the emphasis of the review.	
5.7	The delegations and responsibilities of Area Committees will be looked at and it is vital that members views area at the heart of this. There will also be a consideration of local partnership arrangements.	
5.8	The review will look at different models from other parts of the country and will also look to build on and share good practice that is evident in the different areas of Leeds.	
6.0	Equality Improvement Priorities 2011-2015	
6.1	Lelir Yeung, Head of Equalities, attended to present a report on the Equality	

	Improvement Priorities 2011-2015.	
6.2	The Equality Improvement Priorities and revised Equality and Diversity Policy are going through Executive Board and Scrutiny Boards and there is a view to also take them to Area Committees. Lelir Yeung invited comments from Area Chairs on the priorities and how these could be taken into the Areas.	
6.3	Member Champions have been involved in ensuring that the right priorities have been set and part of their role is to update and inform members of their respective parties.	
6.4	It was explained that these are the high level equality priorities linked to the City Priority Plan and that it is necessary to get beneath issues to look at specific areas such as access to employment for specific communities.	
6.5	Reference was made to the underperformance at school of children in ethnic minority groups and the knock on effect that this can have for opportunities in adult life.	
6.6	It was acknowledged that there continue to be some significant issues for the city, which is why plans need to be in place to attempt to get at the root of problems.	
6.7	It was mentioned that the Members Champion group was a good forum to challenge services on what actions are being taken to address problems. Performance measurement has been carried out but there needs to be more appraisal of what has had the most impact and how this can be built on.	
6.8	Cllr Hussain mentioned that he had been involved when the equality unit was set up in the 1980s and had hoped that approaches agreed then would have been embedded within 5 years. It is right that there are city wide plans but it is also important to have area plans that target need at a local level. It is also important to bring in partners to develop plans and to measure what difference is made.	
6.9	It was mentioned that there was a need to have an equality focus locally, and that this was in all likelihood built into the devolved functions already. It was stated all cabinet members should be conversant with the plan and it should be influencing every portfolio.	
6.10	It was agreed that a piece of work needs to be carried out by Lelir Yeung and the Area Leaders to identify how the Equality Improvement Priorities are reflected in localities and how action can be identified and progressed at a local level with member support. It was agreed that Lelir Yeung would work with the Area Leaders to determine how the Equality Improvement Priorities can be made more relevant within local areas.	LY / ALs
7.0	Scrutiny Enquiry Report – Fuel Poverty	
7.1	Kathy Kudelnitzky, Chief Officer Localities and Partnerships, tabled a paper outlining a recommendation from the Scrutiny Board (Safer and Stronger Communities) relating to the establishment of Fuel Poverty Champions for each Area Committee. A draft response was tabled and views were asked from attendees for suggested amendments.	
7.2	It was raised that if Area Committees were to take on new functions there would be a need for Area Committees to operate differently in terms of sub groups and champions and that it was important for any roles to be effective. It was also noted that more roles and functions would add to the workload of Area Committee members.	
7.3	It was mentioned that there was a limited resource with an increasing remit. 10	

	Area Committees, 3 Area Leaders, one Chief Officer. There needed to be shared practice amongst the Area Committees and an efficient model needed to be developed, allowing for the differing needs of each area.	
7.4	It was also mentioned that there needed to be a level of political coordination with better links between the work of Executive Board and Area Committees.	
7.5	Area Leaders referred to the timeliness of the Review of Area Working. Pressures will be put on the Area Support Teams and the Area Committees and there will be a need for services to respond and the organisation to mature to meet the demands.	
7.6	In light of the ongoing review it was agreed that a response for the Scrutiny Board Fuel Poverty report recommendations should be drafted to state that Area Committee Fuel Poverty Champions will be considered in the Review of Area Working along with the wider issue of members roles and links to services and partnerships.	SW
8.0	Youth Service Review Update	
8.1	A discussion took place amongst attendees at the forum meeting prior to the arrival of Cllr Blake who was attending to provide an update on the Youth Service Review.	
8.2	Area Committees have previously expressed that they feel that they can have a beneficial impact on Youth Services in their areas and are keen to be involved in the review of the service and to have more of an influence in the future.	
8.3	Cllr Gabriel mentioned that she had been interviewed by the appointed consultant and her view was that the service would need to become a more targeted and specialised service. It was important to utilise voluntary and community based groups to deliver activities in their area. Area Committees could have a role in influencing this.	
8.4	Cllr Hyde had also been interviewed by the consultant. He felt that there was potential for commissioning to be carried out at three levels: local, intermediate and city wide and that Area Committees could be heavily involved in this. Parameters could be set centrally but Area Committees have insight into the local priorities and should have the ability to influence or commission provision from the youth service and also private and community organisations.	
8.5	Rory Barke had also been interviewed by the consultant and felt that there was scope for the expertise within Youth Services to be used to develop and support local providers.	
8.6	Cllr Blake joined the meeting with Cllr Dowson to provide an update on the Youth Services Review.	
8.7	There is a lot of history to the agenda involving different experiences in different parts of the city. There has been a lack of satisfaction from members over aspects of provision, but specifically around a lack of awareness of intended provision and a lack of information regarding the impact of the service.	
8.8	Many Local Authorities have withdrawn from providing Youth Service provision but this is not the view taken in Leeds. LCC needs to be able to influence approaches for the youth of the city or there is a danger that children will be poorly served in the future.	
8.9	There have been cross party talks about Youth Services issues. There have previously been changes to the formula for allocating resources and this needs to be looked at again in light of the changing population in Leeds.	

8.10	There is a will to devolve resources down to a local level, to clusters and beyond, and there is a will to empower Area Committees and move some commissioning down to a local level. To meet the differing needs in differing areas.	
8.11	A consultant has been brought in with an objective eye and he will be interviewing all of the Area Chairs individually. He will also be collecting local views through interviews in the patches to get a view on past experiences, future aspirations, and how local people can be involved in developing the service.	
8.12	A report will be pulled together which will be subject to further consultation with members and eventually for Executive Board approval. It will be important to acknowledge that all areas are different, with differing dynamics of youths, differing degrees of community infrastructure and differing opinions of how provision should be run, and these views need to be reflected in the report.	
8.13	It was agreed that Ken Morton should be invited to the next Area Chairs Forum meeting to provide an update on the Review of Youth Services and provide feedback on the consultation carried out by the consultant.	SW
9.0	Any Other Business	
9.1	<u>Items for Future Area Chairs Forum Meetings</u> Area Chairs were invited to suggest items for future forum meetings. Items suggested were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Area Working • Update and Overview of Clusters • Third Sector Review • Sharing Good Practice Between Area Committees • Welfare Reform further update 	
9.2	Cllr Gabriel gave her apologies for the next meeting.	
10.0	Date of Next Meeting	
10.1	Tuesday 11 th September 2012, 13:00 – 15:00, West Room - Civic Hall	