

**Area Chairs Forum
Friday 1st March 2013
Committee Room 1, Civic Hall**

Attendance:

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

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

Minutes: S. Warbis

Attending for specific items: D. Lyons, D. Roberts, H. Pinches, E. Richardson, P. Fairfax

Item	Description	Action
1.0	Apologies	
1.1	Cllr A McKenna	
2.0	Minutes and Matters Arising	
2.1	The minutes of the previous Area Chairs Forum meeting on 9 th January 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.	
2.2	<u>3.14 of previous minutes – Welfare Reform</u> It was noted that due to personal circumstances no officer was able to attend with the item on welfare reform at the West Inner Area Committee meeting on 20 th February. It was also noted that officers were working hard to prepare citizens, councillors and front line staff for the impact of welfare reforms but despite this there would be a real impact on the city in the coming months.	
2.3	<u>3.20 of previous minutes – Welfare Reform</u> There was some discussion over a consortium working with voluntary groups looking for funding from Area Committees relating to welfare reform activity. It was reaffirmed that each Area committee would have to decide individually the priorities for their funding and which applications should be successful.	
3.0	Approaches to Financial Inclusion	
3.1	David Roberts, Senior Policy and Information Officer, attended with Dianne Lyons, Chief Executive Leeds CAB and gave a presentation on the challenges of welfare reform and financial inclusion in Leeds.	
3.2	The presentation highlighted the issues of families without savings and those in debt, and raised the issues of benefit caps, under occupancy, households without bank accounts and changes to the DWP social fund. Also information was given on the support and advice being provided on debt advice by the CAB and other partners and support being provided through the Leeds Credit Union, including new accounts aimed at helping those most vulnerable.	
3.3	Information was also provided on Headrow Money Line which can offer higher risk loans, as an alternative to payday lenders, at significantly reduced interest rates.	
3.4	Area Chairs welcomed the information given and were pleased with the amount of advice and support that was being made available. However it was also recognised that there would still be a lot of Leeds residents in difficulty and that there may be unrest within some communities.	

- 3.5 It was pointed out that there would be certain situations where individuals would not be able to pay bills, including rent and council tax, and that the council needed to be clear on how it would deal with these situations.
- 3.6 It was mentioned that a report would be going to Executive Board in April outlining the authority's stance, and that it was important that support should be given to frontline staff who would be dealing with individuals with real problems.
- 3.7 The question was raised as to how smaller organisations that can offer support were being linked into approaches by CAB, Advice Centres and the Credit Union. It was pointed out that there were still a lot of people who were not aware of how they would be affected by changes to the welfare system. Dianne Lyons informed the meeting that a partnership exists that includes around 35 providers, both large and small, and that further funding is being sought through the lottery fund to develop back office systems and referral services that will link the partners closer together and provide a means for the most appropriate referrals for support.
- 3.8 It was also pointed out that there has been a shift in the advice being sought from debt advice to benefit advice and the CAB is looking at capacity issues and how it can be best organised itself to meet the increasing demands.
- 3.9 David Roberts was thanked for his presentation on financial inclusion and it was suggested that it might be relevant for this to be taken to Area Committee meetings in the future.

**David
Roberts**

4.0 Review of Area Working

- 4.1 Heather Pinches attended with a discussion paper regarding the development of the Area Lead Role for Area Committees.
- 4.2 It was pointed out that the paper did not cover the entirety of the new role and that more detail would need to be provided in "job descriptions" for the roles, including details of responsibilities and support for the role.
- 4.3 A comment was made around the potential role of co-optees as Area leads and that more detail needed to be given around training and development. It was also suggested that detail needed to be developed about the role relating to Neighbourhood Planning, as this seems to be a more prominent issue in localities.
- 4.4 The question was raised as to timescales for developing and implementing the Area Lead roles in Area Committees. It was agreed that the discussion paper presented should be taken to the next round of Area Committees in March. After feedback is received from Area Committees a paper will be taken to Executive Board with a view to Area Committees appointing to the roles in the June / July cycle of meetings. It was acknowledged that some Area Lead roles will be more fully developed at this time than others, and that there would be a need for some of the new Area Leads to be involved in shaping and developing their role over time.
- 4.5 Work had already started to strengthen the Area Committee Health Champion role, and it had been agreed with Cllr Mulherin that the health area could be used as a focus in developing the Area Lead Role and some principals could then be applied to other Area Lead Roles.

- 4.6 A diagram was distributed that showed the existing area and local partnership arrangements. It was explained that this had been used in a workshop the day before to start looking at models for future local partnership arrangements.
- 4.7 The workshop had highlighted that there is sometimes a disconnection between city wide and local partnerships, and that links between on the ground staff and local partnership groups also need strengthening. There is also inconsistency across the three areas relating to employment and skills arrangements.
- 4.8 There was a feeling from the workshop that there was a need for some consistency across the three areas at the top level themed partnerships but that there should be less prescription below the Area Committee level, with local arrangements to suit local needs being the most appropriate way forward.
- 4.9 It had also been suggested that Area Committee sub groups needed to be closely related to delegations, and also that the Area Lead Role would be key to making partnership links and influence over service areas most effective.
- 4.10 It was suggested that the difficulty in being able to represent employment and skills activity on the diagram may not be because things aren't happening, but may be because communication of what is in place may need improving.
- 4.11 There was seen to be a need for further discussion about the links and relationship between Area Committees and school clusters.
- 4.12 It was stressed that the link between the ground and the strategic level needed to be developed and explained, and that methods for influencing up and down should be clear.
- 4.13 It was mentioned that Area Champions had not always been successful in the past as the roles were not defined and support was not in place. It was suggested that the Area Lead Roles needed to be sold to elected members who may have had disappointing experiences in the past. It was also suggested that there needed to be clarity about how the roles would operate and there needed to be confidence that the implementation of the Area Lead Roles would result in a change to the effectiveness of the Area Committees.
- 4.14 It was stressed that the Area Lead Roles were seen as being extremely important, but that they would rely on the services to support them, and enable them to exert influence. Links to the executive members would also be vital in making this a success and there would need to be close monitoring of how things were progressing and where there were issues to resolve.
- 4.15 It was pointed out that the partnership diagram was the wrong way round and that the community should be at the top, with Area Committees in the middle, and strategic partnerships at the bottom.
- 4.16 It was also pointed out that the third sector was missing from the diagram. It was stressed that the diagram did not attempt to capture all partnership arrangements and that the vital informal networks / levels of influence were not represented.

5.0 Transform Leeds Programme

- 5.1 Pat Fairfax, Policy and Performance Manager, attended with Erin Richardson, Transform Leeds Programme Manager with Voluntary Action Leeds, to provide

background to the Transform Leeds Programme and to discuss the opportunities for Area Committee involvement in its future development.

- 5.2 There is a need to strengthen the links between the third sector and the council at a locality level and one way could be through a regular discussion with Area Committees about local issues and priorities and to provide an update on local activity. An audit of third sector organisations highlighted that they value elected members as a source of information at a local level.
- 5.3 Transform Leeds is an 18 month programme of work, led by the third sector, that aims to radically improve support and development services for frontline third sector organisations in Leeds. Its main outcomes are to provide sustainable support for third sector organisations, to develop local leadership and effective partnership working, and to have more efficient services with less dependence on state funding.
- 5.4 A key part of the programme is the Transform Commission, which is chaired by Councillor Yeadon, and which brings together experts and interested parties from the third sector, the council, universities and other partners. The commission would benefit from having a locality view fed in.
- 5.5 The question was asked as to whether Area Chairs felt it would be useful for third sector partners to attend Area Committees, whether regular updates would be welcomed and if Area Committees would value sharing their priorities with third sector partners.
- 5.6 It was pointed out that following the recent State of the City event, and through experience of the Stronger and Safer Partnership and the Third Sector Partnership, there is a concern that connections are not being made effectively and that these could be strengthened.
- 5.7 It was also mentioned that with the prospect of the forthcoming Youth Service delegation, strong links between the Area committees and on the ground organisations would be vital. There were some concerns raised over whether city wide third sector organisations could truly represent local groups. This is always going to be an issue, however Third Sector Leeds are now linking in to more local groups and Area Committees could assist in improving this.
- 5.8 It was mentioned that groups such as the Leeds Faith Forum are looking to forge links with the third sector and could benefit from engaging with Transform Leeds. In the past third sector groups have competed for funding but now there is an increased need for groups to be working together. There was a view that Area Committees would benefit from local updates and could also benefit from advice on how to build local consortia.
- 5.9 It was agreed that Pat Fairfax, Cllr Yeadon and Cllr Hussain would be invited to the next regular meeting with Cllr Gruen, James Rogers and the Area Leaders to discuss how to best make progress with the Transform Leeds discussions.

**Sara
Warbis**

6.0 Wellbeing Budgets

- 6.1 The wellbeing budget position as at period 10 was circulated and discussed.
- 6.2 Great efforts had been made by all 10 Area Committees to ensure that orders were raised and payments made. It was noted that there are still issues with flagging funding for staff positions and projects that have been agreed beyond the current financial year, with budgets showing as being uncommitted on the

**Area
Leaders /
Kathy**

system, when they have clearly been assigned. It was agreed that Area Leaders **Kudelnitzky** would pursue this with finance staff.

- 6.3 It was pointed out that the figures presented did not include commitments made during the February cycle of Area Committee meetings and that the position will have improved since then.
- 6.4 It was raised that a large amount of wellbeing money was being spent to tackle environmental issues and that there was an argument that more of the citywide funding should be used to address areas where this was particularly a problem, such as areas with high student resident numbers. It was pointed out that the distribution of resources for the environmental delegation already took this into account.
- 6.5 It was highlighted that the West Inner Area Committee, that contains only two wards, needs to use a higher proportion of it's wellbeing allocation to fund additional posts in it's area. It was argued that there should be a weighting used in their case when allocating wellbeing budgets.
- 6.6 It was pointed out that all Area Committees could make arguments about increased wellbeing funding for their areas. It was also pointed out that the wellbeing budgets had remained the same for at least the last two years despite financial pressures for the authority. It was accepted that there could be an argument for more targeting of environmental resources based on environmental standards, acknowledging that some areas would need more resource to reach an acceptable level, but it was also noted that areas can change in terms of their demographic, such as the student population moving more towards the city centre.
- 6.7 It was noted that there needed to be a greater degree of social responsibility in some areas, and that there could not be an expectation that the authority would repeatedly focus attention on streets that would rapidly deteriorate after remedial work was carried out. It was suggested that in certain areas more emphasis on enforcement and education was needed. It was also suggested that money raised through environmental enforcement action should remain in the area to help mitigate future problems, and also as an incentive for enforcement staff. Cllr Gruen agreed that he would investigate this suggestion.
- 6.8 There were further discussions relating to the movement of staffing resources to cover sickness in other areas, and also over the distribution of litter picking staff. It was pointed out that Area Leaders, Area Chairs and environmental sub groups all had a role in raising these issues with service managers.
- 6.9 It was raised that there should be more options for Area Committees who had committed all of their annual budgets to get support from Area Committees who had in year reserves for projects to be carried out in the next financial year.
- 6.10 It was raised that the issues relating to the distribution of resources would also arise when future delegations are being developed, and that there needed to be pressure on services to match delegations with real resources.
- 6.11 It was noted that there shouldn't be pressure to use up budgets if it resulted in unwise spending. It was also noted that there would be increased pressure for the council to allocate funding where the need was greatest in the future.

Cllr Gruen

7.0 Any Other Business

Appendix 1

- 7.1 It was suggested that the focus of the next Area Chairs Forum meeting should be around Health Issues and particularly how to promote issues around health equality. It was agreed that invitations to the meeting should be given to Cllr Mulherin, Cllr Illingworth and Ian Cameron, Director of Public Health.

**Sarn
Warbis**

8.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 Friday 3rd May 2013, 10:00 – 12:00, Committee Room 4 - Civic Hall