

Scrutiny Report

Strengthening the Council's relationship with local Parish and Town Councils

Scrutiny Board (Safer and Stronger
Communities)

May 2013



Contents

	Page(s)
1. Introduction and Scope	3- 5
2. Conclusions and Recommendations	6 - 17
3. Desired Outcomes and Recommendation Summary	18 – 20
4. Appendix 1 – alignment of local councils to Area Committees	21
5. Evidence	22 – 23



Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. Local (community, neighbourhood, parish, village and town) councils are statutory bodies that are recognised nationally as the grass-roots level of local government.
2. The activities of local councils generally fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve the quality of life and community well-being.
3. However, the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 reinforces the role of local councils as it represents a clear statement of intent from central government of its plans to devolve power to local communities.
4. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of local councils. Within the 2011/12 NALC Annual Report, it states that over 15 million people, about a third of the population, live in communities served by local councils. Within the Leeds area, there are currently 32 established Parish and Town Councils.
5. Recognition of the added value gained in developing close working relationships between local councils and principal authorities led to the agreement of a Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter in October 2006. This Charter sets out how Leeds City Council and the local councils within its area aim to work together for the benefits of local people.
6. This 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.
7. 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.

Scope of the review

8. In agreeing to undertake this review, we recognised the associated links with another review being undertaken in relation to area working arrangements.
9. In June 2012, the Executive Board commissioned a review to examine the way the Council currently works through Area Committees, Area leadership and support, directorate/service area working arrangements and local partnerships.
10. Two of the key objectives for this review were:
 - To consider the effectiveness of community and partner engagement through the existing Area Committee and Forum based arrangements and make recommendations for improving citizen engagement across the whole of the city.
 - Consider the effectiveness of partnership working at the local level and the ability of local councillors



Introduction and Scope

and their communities to hold local services to account and influence decision makers to deliver improved local services.

11. Linked to these objectives, we acknowledged that Area Committees are already expected to promote working relationships with local councils in accordance with the Area Committee Procedure Rules within the Council's Constitution.
 12. The relationship between local councils and their respective Area Committees is also clearly referenced within the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter. 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.
 13. However, in acknowledging that relationships between Area Committees and local councils are not consistent across the city, we recognised the added value in focusing our review around strengthening such relationships in the future.
 14. We therefore set out 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.
15. In undertaking this review, we ensured that all of the local councils were given an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions openly with the Scrutiny Board. In doing so, invitations were sent to all the local councils to attend a working group meeting of the Scrutiny Board in December 2012. We also welcomed written submissions during the course of our review and took the opportunity to share and consult on our initial findings during the annual meeting of the city wide Parish and Town Council Forum in January. We are very grateful



Introduction and Scope

to the local council representatives for their contribution to this review.

16. We are also grateful to the Council officers, Area Leaders and Area Chairs that shared their experiences and thoughts on how we can work more collaboratively with our local councils.
17. We were also very pleased to welcome the contribution of the Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations (YLCA). Within our report, we acknowledge the support services provided by the YLCA and recognise the added value in the Council developing a close working relationship with the YLCA in the future.

Anticipated Service Impact

18. The recommendations arising from this review aim to promote more open and meaningful dialogue between local councils and Area Committees to enable them to work more collaboratively and positively in the future.
19. The desired outcomes linked to individual recommendations are summarised later in the report. However, we recognise that these desired outcomes can only be achieved by securing the commitment of all stakeholders.
20. As our recommendations also reflect the Council's move towards more locally responsive services, any potential financial implications linked to our recommendations should be met in

driving forward the locality working agenda.

21. We note that a comprehensive implementation plan is now being developed to drive forward progress following the Council's wider review of area working. We therefore hope that the findings and recommendations arising from this Scrutiny review will also help to inform this plan.

Equality and Diversity

22. The Equality Improvement Priorities 2011 to 2015 have been developed to ensure that the council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to identify work and activities that help to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity to achieve its ambition to be the best City in the UK.
23. Equality and diversity issues have been considered throughout this review. The evidence submitted and the topics debated have not highlighted that a particular equality group are treated less fairly
24. Where a Scrutiny Board has made recommendations and these are agreed, the individual, organisation or group responsible for implementation or delivery should give due regard to equality and diversity and where appropriate an equality impact assessment will be carried out.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Mutual roles in providing strong local leadership

25. The Council's current locality working arrangements, introduced in 2011, brought about changes that were underpinned by a set of locality working design principles. Such principles relate to strong and effective governance arrangements that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of local communities. These also promote strong local leadership, with particular emphasis around engaging communities in a way that supports residents in developing local priorities, holding services to account, enabling them to do more for themselves and developing a sense of pride and belonging in their local neighbourhood.
26. Linked to such arrangements, the role of Area Committees can be summarised as – influencing / shaping council service delivery at a local level including both a focus on functions formally delegated to them and influencing other service outcomes of significance to individual localities.
27. As local councils are regarded as the grass-roots level of local government, they also aim to provide a voice for local communities and help people feel more involved in the decisions that affect them.
28. Within our introduction, we acknowledge that this mutual role of providing strong local leadership is already recognised and reflected within the Council's Area Committee Procedure Rules and the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter.

29. However, despite this formal recognition, it is evident from our own review that current relationships between local councils and Area Committees vary considerably across the city. Whilst some local councillors and Area Chairs/Leaders reported positive experiences of working collaboratively, we noted that a number of local councils had not established any formal relationship with their respective Area Committee.
30. Despite such mixed responses, there was a consensus that more effort is needed from all stakeholders to help strengthen links between local councils and their respective Area Committees.

Raising the profile of Area Committees

31. We learned that local councillors would generally contact their local Leeds City Councillor to raise any issues or make funding requests rather than make formal representations to their Area Committee.
32. Whilst we would not want to discourage positive dialogue between local councillors and individual Leeds City Councillors, we believe that matters of wider community importance and impact warrant broader discussion with Area Committees.
33. We are aware that a number of Leeds City Councillors are also members of local councils or are formally invited to attend meetings of their local council. This has therefore helped in terms of establishing a closer relationship with their respective Area Committees.



Conclusions and Recommendations

34. However, during our review, some local council representatives had reported a lack of awareness and understanding about the role of Area Committees. This was therefore highlighted as a key priority for the Council to address in terms of raising the profile of Area Committees, particularly in relation to publicising the work undertaken in achieving better outcomes for local communities.
35. Interestingly, we note that the findings of the Council's wider area review also highlighted a lack of understanding across the Council about the explicit role of Area Committees and their relationship with other parts of the democratic structure. It therefore concluded that the profile of Area Committees needs to be raised so that they can provide the strong local leadership role as set out within the locality working design principles.
36. We acknowledge that the findings arising from the wider area review have already led to a number of recommendations being agreed by the Executive Board which aim to strengthen the role of Area Committees. However, in terms of raising the profile of Area Committees amongst local councils in particular, we believe that this can only be achieved by promoting more open and meaningful dialogue. We therefore address this matter in more detail later in the report.
37. The National Association of Local Councils firmly believes that the way local councils are perceived, appreciated and viewed is linked to their reputation. It therefore supports local councils to achieve the highest levels of reputation in the eyes of the public, other public service representatives and providers, and the media.
38. During our review, we welcomed the contribution of the Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations (YLCA). This is an independent membership organisation which includes over 500 local councils (parish, community, town councils and parish meetings) throughout North, South and West Yorkshire. The Associations are a federation of three 'county associations' which have agreed to work jointly and to deliver their services on a joint basis.
39. Affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils, the YLCA also works to support councils by giving members legal and technical advice, information and training relevant to their work and generally to support their work and governance. Its core work includes:
- Delivering specialist information and training to members;
 - Offering casework advice on legal, procedural and technical matters;
 - Drawing members together to address issues of mutual interest;
 - Liaising with principal authorities, government departments and other local/regional/national agencies on matters affecting parish and town councils;
 - Delivering specific work or projects
40. The Localism Act 2011 reflects the move towards the decentralisation of

Raising the profile and capacity levels of local councils



Conclusions and Recommendations

powers down to the lowest practical level of local government. In view of this, we also recognise the need to support local councils in raising their profile and building up capacity to take on their enhanced role.

41. We note in particular that the new General Power of Competence, set out within the Localism Act 2011, is intended to better enable local councils to take on their enhanced role and do things they have previously been unable to do under their existing powers, such as being able to set up a company or co-operative society to trade and engage in commercial activity.
42. However, in exercising this General Power of Competence, we learned that this will only be extended to 'eligible parish councils'. To become eligible, local councils must demonstrate that it has an electoral mandate and that its clerk has the relevant training and qualification.
43. An electoral mandate means that at least two thirds of the members of the local council must hold office as a result of being declared elected. This means they should have stood for election, whether at an ordinary or by election, even if unopposed, rather than co-opted or appointed.
44. To be deemed qualified a clerk must hold the Certificate in Local Government Administration; the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy; the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Council Administration; or the first level of the foundation degree in Community Engagement and Governance awarded by the University of Gloucestershire. In addition, the clerk must also have completed training in the exercise of the General Power of Competence as part of one of these qualifications or as a separate exercise.
45. During our review, particular reference was made to the national Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme. We learned that this Scheme was launched in 2003 following the Government's *Rural White Paper (2000)* and aimed to provide benchmark minimum standards for parish and town councils. However, the Scheme was changed in June 2008 to better reflect the increased professionalism of councils.
46. In particular, we noted that two of the mandatory tests for obtaining Quality Status also involve having an electoral mandate and a qualified clerk.
47. It was evident during our review that the perception of local councils was often linked to these two key factors. However, in acknowledging that only 4 of the local councils within the Leeds area have obtained Quality Status, we explored the reasons for this low uptake.
48. The Chief Officer of the YLCA reported that the anticipated financial rewards first associated with achieving Quality Status had not materialised from central government. However, such accreditation was still considered beneficial to a local council in terms of demonstrating to its local community that minimum standards have been met and also reassuring the principal authority of its capabilities to deliver services on their behalf or in partnership.



Conclusions and Recommendations

49. Despite such prestige, we noted that the level of commitment required to achieve Quality Status in terms of time and resources was deemed too much for some local councils without any real financial incentive.
50. Linked to the electoral mandate requirement, some local councillors also reported having difficulty in the past finding new candidates as the role can already appear intimidating and time consuming. This is compounded by the fact that it is also voluntary. It was therefore felt that despite such additional powers now being devolved to local councils, this may not necessarily help to attract candidates easily.
51. We do recognise the key benefits of gaining formal accreditation to demonstrate a local council's capability of representing local communities effectively. However, we also acknowledge the issues raised by local councils in terms of their capacity levels in meeting the requirements of the current national Quality Status Scheme. We therefore considered whether a more localised benchmark scheme could be developed in partnership with local councils. This would set out locally agreed minimum standards that would help raise the profile of local councils across the city and also help to create a strong foundation upon which to develop a more positive partnership approach with the Council.
52. In acknowledging that the national Quality Status Scheme tended to only attract large to medium sized local councils, the YLCA also supported the principle of having a scheme that is more accessible and attractive to all local councils.
53. However, it was highlighted that the national Quality Status Scheme is currently under review. The National Association of Local Councils held a series of workshops during 2011 aimed at informing the future development of the Scheme. As a result, it advised the Quality Parishes Scheme working group (which is formed of national stakeholders from the local council sector, the Local Government Association and central government) to review the Scheme with a view to re-launching an updated standards scheme in 2013.
54. We learned that the National Association of Local Councils was also undertaking a wide ranging consultation, taking views from across the town and parish sector, as well as engaging with principal authorities on their views of the scheme as it stands and of how it might develop in the future.
55. In view of this, we accept that it would be appropriate to await the outcome of this national review and details of the updated national scheme. Once available, the Council should work closely with the YLCA to compare the merits of the updated national scheme against the potential benefits of a localised benchmark scheme.
56. In the meantime, it remains vital that the capacity levels of local councils are continually developed to instil greater confidence within communities and amongst partners. Linked to this, we acknowledge the level of support and training opportunities already available



Conclusions and Recommendations

to those local councils that are members of the YLCA. Whilst we were pleased to note that the majority of the local councils within Leeds are already members of the YLCA, we would urge all local councils to be part of the associations.

57. As the principal authority, we recognise that Leeds City Council also has a key role to play in terms of supporting local councils to achieve their full potential. Within the Charter, reference is already made to the practical support offered to local councils. However, in moving forward there are clear mutual benefits in developing a closer working relationship with the YLCA in terms of promoting existing support services, but also maximising available resources to provide any additional local support and advice that will enable local councils to undertake their roles with confidence.

Recommendation 1
That the Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) works with the Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations to consider the outcome of the national Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme review and compare the merits of the updated national scheme against the potential benefits of a localised benchmark scheme.

Recommendation 2
That the Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) works with the Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations to develop a strategy aimed at promoting existing support services for local councils and also maximising resources to provide any additional support and advice that will enable local councils in Leeds to undertake their roles with confidence.

More open and meaningful dialogue between local councils and Area Committees

58. During our review, we noted that whilst some local councillors had sought assistance from officers within the Area Support Teams, they would not necessarily have made the associated links back to their Area Committees.
59. Area Chairs also reported that some local councillors would prefer to make direct contact with the Area Support Teams rather than approach the Area Committee Chair. However, it was felt that the general lack of awareness and understanding about the role of Area Committees was probably a key factor.
60. During our review, it was evident that local councillors would welcome the opportunity to have more of an informed role with their respective Area Committee in terms of sharing local intelligence and influencing local decision-making.



Conclusions and Recommendations

61. Linked to this, we debated the potential benefits of local councillors being co-opted onto Area Committees as non-voting members. However, this raised a number of practicality issues, particularly for Area Committees that are aligned to a number of local councils (see appendix 1). It was also made clear that such an appointment would need to be meaningful and not just a means of collating information, particularly as local councillors are volunteers and therefore need to prioritise where they can add the greatest value.
62. We noted that as part of the wider area review, members of Area Committees felt that their meetings were not always as effective as they could be in terms of enabling debate on the local issues and challenges that are important to them.
63. There was also some frustration about what, and how, reports were put before Area Committees. Issues were raised about their lack of focus on local issues and challenges and with too many reports just “to note”. It was also felt that Area Committee agendas are often too full and too paper heavy.
64. We note that Area Chairs and Area Leaders are developing ways to address this from identified best practice that is tailored to each committee. However, during our review we also discussed the issue of Area Committee reports and recognised a need for these to include a separate section indicating any potential local impacts or challenges.
65. We also acknowledged another potential option already put forward, which included a forward work programme for each Area Committee to be agreed along with the Committees’ annual business plan. This forward work programme would identify a major ‘theme’ or ‘topic’ for each Area Committee meeting. Universal and targeted publicity would then be undertaken to promote the themed debates to the public and stakeholder groups.
66. Whilst supporting these proposals in terms of helping to raise the profile of Area Committees, we feel that Area Committee meetings may not necessarily be the best forum for undertaking open and meaningful dialogue with local councils.
67. During our review, we were particularly interested to learn more about the co-ordinated approach adopted by the Wetherby and Harewood Parish and Town Council Forum.
68. We understand that this Forum model evolved from the Community Involvement Team structure in providing the opportunity for local councillors and Leeds City Councillors from the Wetherby and Harewood Wards to receive presentations; discuss issues of common interest; share information and good practice and raise any issues of concern.
69. The Forum meets quarterly; is open to all local councillors, is held in a variety of venues across each Ward and is chaired between the six Harewood and Wetherby Leeds City Councillors. The Forum is also supported by an officer from the East North East Area Support Team and therefore has strong links to the North East Outer Area Committee. It was evident during our review that



Conclusions and Recommendations

this Forum model has been well received by the local councils, the Area Committee and the Area Support Team.

70. Our review has led us to conclude that there needs to be clear pathways and protocols in place to enable open and meaningful dialogue between local councils and their respective Area Committee on matters that impact on their local communities. Whilst we recognise that Area Leaders and Area Support Teams have a key role to play in brokering, advising and guiding such relationships, there needs to be a clear commitment from all stakeholders to work more closely together.
71. Whilst we are not advocating a 'one size fits all' approach, we do acknowledge that the Forum approach adopted in the East North East Area should be identified as a good practice model to promote.

Recommendation 3
That local councils and Area Committees give a commitment to work closely together to develop clear pathways and protocols that will enable open and meaningful dialogue on matters that have specific impact on their communities.

That Area Leaders take the lead on developing these clear pathways and protocols and report progress back to Scrutiny by December 2013.

Recommendation 4
That the Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) promotes the following as good practice amongst Area Committees:

- **The development of a forward work programme and identification of a major 'theme' or 'topic' for each area committee meeting**
- **That Area Committee reports include a separate section indicating any potential local impacts or challenges**

Working together in achieving more locally responsive and accountable services

72. In the current economic climate, difficult decisions will be required on where to focus spending in the future. Strong local decision making will help ensure that the Council is able to make the most efficient use of resources in line with what the public in their area needs and wants.
73. New area based delegations in regard to a range of street cleansing and environmental enforcement services were introduced in 2011. This delegation and the negotiation of Service Level Agreements (SLA) with each Area Committee has been universally regarded as a success, including local councillors. It has led to



Conclusions and Recommendations

significant improvements in terms of responsiveness of services; their ability to influence priorities; and improved cleanliness in local communities.

74. The area review identified a number of other areas to develop locally responsive services, whether they are true delegations or alternative forms of local influence on delivery. The priorities for action in the first phase on implementation include youth services; neighbourhood planning; employment and skills; local parks and open space; and local highways maintenance.

75. In acknowledging that more services are likely to be delegated to Area Committees, we believe that local councils need to be recognised as a key source of local intelligence and can assist Area Committees to help prioritise and shape services to local people.

Recommendation 5
That Area Leaders ensure that input is sought from local councils as part of any future area based delegation scheme and particularly around the negotiation of Service Level Agreements.

76. Linked to such delegations, the model of having a senior officer whose role is to ensure that a service has a locality focus has also proved very successful and is therefore recognised as a good practice model. Local council representatives were particularly keen to ensure this approach included planning and highways maintenance services.

77. However, we note that there is a specific section within the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter that makes reference to operational relationships between Leeds City Council departments and local councils. It states that 'Leeds City Council departments will work with local councils in establishing arrangements describing the operational relationships which exist between them, including the provision of service standards and contact details within key service areas'.

78. We would consider planning to be a key service area for local councils. As such, we understand that there are already examples where operational arrangements exist, which include:-

- the Charter for dealing with planning matters which includes the whole of Planning and Sustainable Development i.e. Enforcement, Local Planning, Strategic and Neighbourhood Planning. We understand that this has led to an improvement in these relationships and is considered and reviewed every year at the Annual Forum with Parish and Town Councils. During the last Forum meeting on 31st January 2013, further amendments to the Charter were suggested by Parish Councils and are currently being worked on.
- the Neighbourhood Planning process has involved significant interaction and working with Parish and Town Councils and is ongoing; the operational arrangements are being captured in the Charter for the coming year including engagement in the Site Allocations process; and



Conclusions and Recommendations

- representatives of the Parish and Town Councils are invited to a Major Developers Forum where there is an opportunity to discuss service planning, delivery and changes to planning processes on a pro-active basis.

79. Whilst we acknowledge that good relationships are being developed with local councils around the new neighbourhood planning agenda and also across the wider planning service, we believe that links between local councils and planning services could be further strengthened and welcome opportunities to do so.

80. In relation to highways services, there is a Charter which works in a similar way to the planning one described above and is subject to annual review. We are also aware that there is a supplementary document to the Charter which sets out operational links between Parish and Town Councils and Highways and Transportation.

81. Whilst this document provides contact details associated with key functions provided on the highway, it states that Highways and Transportation will also undertake to provide local councils with details of named officers and contact numbers for regularly used services. This information will be specific for each local council to enable enquiries to be directed to the person who is authorised to provide the service. Although these operational relationships have been established with local councils, the review has highlighted that these relationships also need to be strengthened particularly in relation to the mechanism for clarifying follow up actions.

Recommendation 6

That, in accordance with the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter and supplementary document, the Director of City Development leads on strengthening and ensuring there is a consistent approach to the operational relationships with all local councils in relation to Planning Services and Highways and Transportation.

Working in partnership to maximise available resources

82. There will be significant changes to local funding streams in the near future, with Section 106 funding being scaled back and other sources of funding coming on line. In particular, the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations state that the Council can choose to levy a charge on the owners or developers of land when it is developed so that they contribute to the costs of providing the necessary supporting infrastructure for the area.

83. Linked to this, the Council has a duty to pass on a 'meaningful proportion' of the funds raised through the levy to a Parish or Town Council for the area where the development that gave rise to the payment takes place. Where there is no Parish or Town Council, the City Council has to spend it in the local area in consultation with the community.



Conclusions and Recommendations

84. In January 2013, the government announced its proposal for this meaningful proportion. Neighbourhoods that have an adopted neighbourhood plan will receive 25% of the CIL revenue from that area. Areas without a neighbourhood plan will receive 15% of the revenue and this will be capped at £100 per existing dwelling in that area. This therefore has clear implications as an incentive for communities to adopt neighbourhood plans and for the Council to provide the necessary support.

85. The importance of effective neighbourhood planning was also raised during our review as it aims to provide an opportunity for local communities to be better engaged in the future of their communities. Whilst the Council has a duty to support communities who come forward with requests to set-up neighbourhood forums and designate areas where they would like to see a neighbourhood plan, we acknowledge that Leeds has been very proactive in taking this agenda forward. During our review, we were very pleased to note the positive feedback from local councils on their joint working approach with the Council around neighbourhood planning.

86. We acknowledge that Area Committees also have an important role, particularly through their wellbeing fund, in developing innovative, community/third sector led bottom up approaches to solving entrenched problems. Whilst Area committees are to retain their autonomy in identifying appropriate projects for spending wellbeing funds, the area review emphasised the importance of using such funds to lever in additional funding wherever possible

through match funding or pooling budgets.

87. We therefore recognise the mutual benefit of local councils and Area Committees working in partnership to explore opportunities for maximising available resources to best meet the needs of their local communities.

88. Linked to this, we also recognise the important role of local councils in encouraging people to take an active role within their community and to promote more volunteering initiatives. In doing so, we would also expect Leeds City Council to actively support approaches made by local councils for any advice and assistance directly associated with such initiatives.

Recommendation 7

That Area Leaders proactively work with local councils and Area Committees to identify opportunities for maximising available resources to best meet the needs of their local communities.

Recommendation 8

(i) That local councils are proactive in promoting volunteering initiatives and encouraging people to take an active role within their community.

(ii) That the Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) and Chief Officer Localities and Partnerships lead on actively supporting approaches made by local councils for any advice and assistance directly associated with local voluntary initiatives.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Promoting the benefits of partnership working with local councils

89. In acknowledging the clear benefits in working more collaboratively and positively together, it is vital that such partnership working between local councils and Area Committees continues to be actively promoted across the city.
90. Whilst the recommendations arising from our review reflect actions needed to begin strengthening links between local councils and their respective Area Committees, we recognise the need to ensure that such relationships continue to develop in the future. We are aware that an annual review of the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter is already undertaken as part of the annual meeting of a city wide Parish and Town Council Forum. However, we believe that this annual meeting should also be utilised to enable local councils to openly share their experiences of working with their Area Committees, thereby providing an opportunity to share good practice as well as identifying potential areas for improvement.
91. To complement this, Area Committees should also commit to actively monitoring their relationship with local councils to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

Recommendation 9

That the three Area Leaders actively promote partnership working with local councils as part of the integrated locality working agenda in the three wedges of East North East, West North West and South East.

Recommendation 10

That the Chair of the city wide Parish and Town Council Forum ensures that the Forum's annual meeting is used to provide an opportunity for local councils to openly share their experiences of working with their Area Committees, share good practice and identify potential areas for improvement.

Recommendation 11

That Area Leaders work closely with Area Chairs to ensure that Area Committees continue to monitor their relationships with local councils in order to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

92. In view of the on-going development of the local council sector nationally, we also recognise the important role of principal authorities in encouraging and supporting the development of new local councils.
93. Whilst the scope of our review focused specifically on strengthening relationships with existing local councils in Leeds, we acknowledge that the Council's role in encouraging and



Conclusions and Recommendations

supporting the development of more local councils across the city could be a potential area for future scrutiny. In the meantime, we recommend that the Chief Executive of the Council nominates a Chief Officer to work closely with the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations in driving forward this agenda.

Recommendation 12
That the Chief Executive of the Council nominates a Chief Officer to work closely with the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations in encouraging and supporting the development of new local councils across the city.



Desired Outcomes and Recommendation Summary

Desired Outcome – That there is a quality standards benchmark scheme that is attractive and accessible to all local councils in Leeds.

Recommendation 1 – That the Council’s Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) works with the Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations to consider the outcome of the national Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme review and compare the merits of the updated national scheme against the potential benefits of a localised benchmark scheme.

Desired Outcome – That the capacity levels of local councils are continually developed to instil greater confidence within communities and amongst partners.

Recommendation 2 – That the Council’s Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) works with the Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations to develop a strategy aimed at promoting existing support services for local councils and also maximising resources to provide any additional support and advice that will enable local councils in Leeds to undertake their roles with confidence.

Desired Outcome – There are clear pathways and protocols in place to enable open and meaningful dialogue between local councils and their respective Area Committee on matters that impact on their local communities.

Recommendation 3 – That local councils and Area Committees give a commitment to work closely together to develop clear pathways and protocols that will enable open and meaningful dialogue on matters that have specific impact on their communities.

That Area Leaders take the lead on developing these clear pathways and protocols and report progress back to Scrutiny by December 2013.

Desired Outcome – Area Committee meetings are utilised effectively to address matters of local relevance.

Recommendation 4 – That the Council’s Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) promotes the following as good practice amongst Area Committees:

- The development of a forward work programme and identification of a major ‘theme’ or ‘topic’ for each area committee meeting
- That Area Committee reports include a separate section indicating any potential local impacts or challenges



Desired Outcomes and Recommendation Summary

Desired Outcome – That local councils and Area Committees work in partnership to maximise local intelligence and achieve more locally responsive and accountable services.

Recommendation 5 – That Area Leaders ensure that input is sought from local councils as part of any future area based delegation scheme and particularly around the negotiation of Service Level Agreements.

Desired Outcome – That there are effective operational relationships with all local councils in relation to Planning Services and Highways and Transportation.

Recommendation 6 – That, in accordance with the Leeds Parish and Town Council Charter and supplementary document, the Director of City Development leads on strengthening and ensuring there is a consistent approach to the operational relationships with all local councils in relation to Planning Services and Highways and Transportation.

Desired Outcome – That local councils and Area Committees work in partnership to explore opportunities for maximising available resources to best meet the needs of their local communities.

Recommendation 7 – That Area Leaders proactively work with local councils and Area Committees to identify opportunities for maximising available resources to best meet the needs of their local communities.

Desired Outcome – That residents are actively encouraged and supported in undertaking volunteering initiatives that will benefit their local communities.

Recommendation 8

- (i) That local councils are proactive in promoting volunteering initiatives and encouraging people to take an active role within their community.
- (ii) That the Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) and Chief Officer Localities and Partnerships lead on actively supporting approaches made by local councils for any advice and assistance directly associated with local voluntary initiatives.



Desired Outcomes and Recommendation Summary

Desired Outcome – That partnership working between local councils and Area Committees continues to be actively promoted across the city.

Recommendation 9 – That the three Area Leaders actively promote partnership working with local councils as part of the integrated locality working agenda in the three wedges of East North East, West North West and South East.

Desired Outcome – That the relationship between local councils and Area Committees is continually monitored and developed.

Recommendation 10 - That the Chair of the city wide Parish and Town Council Forum ensures that the Forum's annual meeting is used to provide an opportunity for local councils to openly share their experiences of working with their Area Committees, share good practice and identify potential areas for improvement.

Desired Outcome – That the relationship between local councils and Area Committees is continually monitored and developed.

Recommendation 11 – That Area Leaders work closely with Area Chairs to ensure that Area Committees continue to monitor their relationships with local councils in order to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement.

Desired Outcome – That the Council is proactive in supporting the development of new local councils within the Leeds area.

Recommendation 12 – That the Chief Executive of the Council nominates a Chief Officer to work closely with the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations in encouraging and supporting the development of new local councils across the city.



Appendix 1

Area Committee	Ward	Parish and Town Councils
North East Outer	Alwoodley	*Alwoodley PC
	Harewood	*Harewood PC East Keswick PC Collingham with Linton PC Bardsey cum Rigton PC Scarcroft PC Shadwell PC Thorner PC Barwick in Elmet and Scholes PC Aberford & District PC
	Wetherby	Wetherby TC Walton PC Thorp Arch PC Boston Spa PC Clifford PC Bramham cum Oglethorpe PC
East Outer	Garforth & Swillington	Swillington PC Great and Little Preston PC
	Kippax & Methley	Kippax PC Allerton Bywater PC Ledston PC Ledsham PC Micklefield PC
South Outer	Morley North	Gildersome PC Drighlington PC
	Morley South	Morley TC
North West Outer	Adel & Wharfedale	* Bramhope & Carlton PC Pool in Wharfedale PC Arthington PC
	Guiseley & Rawdon	Rawdon PC (est. Nov 2012)
	Horsforth	Horsforth PC
	Otley & Yeadon	* Bramhope & Carlton PC Otley TC



Evidence

Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Charter between Leeds City Council and the Parish and Town Councils within the administrative area of Leeds City Council. Revised January 2012.
- Briefing report for session 1 working group meeting. 26th November 2012.
- Map of local Parish and Town Councils
- Yorkshire Local Councils Association Advice Note on Local Council Powers. June 2011.
- A guide to becoming a Quality Council. Second Edition 2008. National Association of Local Councils.
- The National Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils. The Portfolio Guide. Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). 2012
- Review of Area Working – Summary of responses to Parish and Town Council Questionnaire.
- Written submissions to the Scrutiny Board from local councils.
- Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Access and Performance) to Executive Board on the review of area working findings and recommendations. 12th December 2012.



Evidence

Witnesses Heard

Ian Cornick, Head of Civic & Member Support, Leeds City Council (LCC)
Heather Pinches, Executive Officer (Performance Management), LCC
Rory Barke, Area Leader, East & North East Leeds, LCC
Shaid Mahmood, Area Leader, South East Leeds, LCC
Jane Maxwell, Area Leader, West & North West Leeds, LCC
Councillor Gerald Wilkinson, Chair of North East Outer Area Committee
Councillor Andrea McKenna, Chair of East Outer Area Committee
Sheena Spence, Chief Officer, Yorkshire Local Councils Associations
Chris Pilkington, Deputy Chief Officer of the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations

Local Parish and Town Council representatives *

Glyn Robins – Collingham with Linton PC
Councillor Derek Armitage - Collingham with Linton PC
Councillor Michael Czwarno – Micklefield PC
Colin Pool – Thorp Arch PC and Walton PC
Councillor Harry Chapman – Wetherby TC
Councillor Ian Wallace - Great and Little Preston PC
Councillor Stella Walsh - Barwick in Elmet & Scholes PC
Councillor Claire Hassell - Barwick in Elmet & Scholes PC
Karen Oakley – Morley TC
Councillor Jacqui Smith – Swillington PC
Councillor Dave Kent - Alwoodley PC
Councillor Norman Taylor – Shadwell PC
Councillor Jude Arbuckle – Horsforth TC

* The Chair of the Scrutiny Board also attended the annual meeting of the city wide Parish and Town Council Forum on 31st January 2013 to consult further with local Parish and Town Councillors on the Board's initial findings.

Dates of Scrutiny

Scrutiny Board Meeting – 22nd October 2013 – agree terms of reference
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 1 - 26th November 2012
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 2 – 12th December 2012
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 3 – 10th January 2013
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 4 – 28th January 2013
Parish and Town Council Forum Annual Meeting – 31st January 2013
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 5 – 21st March 2013

Scrutiny Board (Safer and Stronger Communities)
Strengthening the Council's relationship with local Parish and Town Councils
16th May 2013
Report author: Angela Brogden



www.scrutiny.unit@leeds.gov.uk