

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 18 JULY 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Knapton (Chairman), Councillors Atkinson, Boaden, Mrs Fisher, Hodgson G, Morton, Mrs Parsons and Mrs Pattinson

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Bloxham, Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being attended the meeting as an observer.

COS.94/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

COS.95/02 AGENDA

The Chairman made reference to the fact that the Director of Tullie House was in attendance to present the Museum and Arts Service Forward Plan, but had other pressing business to attend to. He therefore suggested that that item of business be moved up the Agenda and considered as the first item.

RESOLVED – That the Museum and Arts Service Forward Plan be considered at Agenda item A.1.

COS.96/02 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings held on 20 May, 6, 7 and 17 June and 2 July 2002 were signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meetings.

COS.97/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF 'THE PARTY WHIP')

There were no declarations of interest affecting any item on the Agenda.

COS.98/02 FORWARD PLAN – MUSEUM AND ARTS SERVICE 2002-2005

The Director of Tullie House gave a presentation to Members on the forward planning process for Tullie House for the period 2002-2005. She indicated that although the content had not changed, the format of the Plan had.

All of the staff had been involved in the development of the Forward Plan through a series of training days and had contributed to the development of a mission statement for the

service which all could remember and identify with, namely:

‘To provide a quality Museum and Arts Service which is accessible to everyone’.

Four strategic objectives for the organisation had been identified which linked with and delivered the Council's quality of life and management objectives, the City Vision document and the Local Cultural Strategy. On a regional level the service mission linked with the Regional Cultural Consortium's strategy for the North West Region. Tullie House also linked in with the national context in the delivery of the new proposed structure for regional museums and galleries in England as a regional Hub Partner, and with new Arts Council structure of Regional Council boards.

During the period of the Plan, the funding mechanisms for the service would be reviewed and one of the options being considered was the externalisation of Tullie House to Trust status as a mechanism to produce savings without cutting services. A major opportunity for Tullie House was the development of the North West Hub Partnership, with participation in the Hub already having raised the profile of the Museum within the North West region.

The Director gave details of current visitor trends, commenting that the massive increase in footfall was due to the opening of the new Millennium Gallery. That increase was not, however, reflected in the income and that affected the customer profile. The reversal of that trend required to be addressed and priorities would therefore be targeted marketing campaigns to raise the profile of the product on offer and new product development.

The development of accessible storage also remained a priority and one which was being addressed in partnership with Cumbria County Council Libraries and Archives. A feasibility study required to be commissioned to identify suitable sites.

The Director then responded to Members' questions.

A Member commented that it would have been useful if copies of the Plan had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

A Member added that she was delighted with Tullie House's success which was important for the people of Carlisle as well as visitors to the City. The 'Love, Labour and Loss' exhibition was the most significant in the North of England and the Director and her staff should be congratulated.

Members also congratulated the Director on her new position with Durham County Council.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan for Tullie House be noted.

COS.99/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

RESOLVED – That it be noted that there were no matters which had been the subject of

call-in.

COS.100/02 MONITORING OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer presented report TC.130/02 highlighting the Forward Plan (1 July to 31 October 2002) issues which fell within the ambit of this Committee.

With regard to the Bereavement Services Best Value Review, a Member questioned whether the documentation would come back to this Committee following submission to the Executive, and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer affirmed the same.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the Forward Plan for 1 July to 31 October 2002 and which fell within the ambit of this Committee be noted.

COS.101/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2002/03, which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee.

He drew attention to the new Subject Reviews/Inquiries which had been included for this year, inviting Members to prioritise the same. He added that a background report on the first review would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Work Programme be noted.

(2) That the review of Theatre/Arts Centre should be undertaken as the first review in 2002/03.

COS.102/02 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEMBER TRAINING

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer referred further to requests received from the Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees that training be provided for Members, particularly covering topics such as overview and scrutiny skills, team building, performance management, the Council Budget and Best Value.

He added that once the views of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees were forthcoming the intention was that a coherent programme would be drawn up. There may also be merit in getting other local authorities involved.

Members were then invited to consider how their training needs may best be met.

In considering the matter, Members suggested the following:

- What is Overview and Scrutiny? (training previously provided by the North West Employers organisation)
- Role of the opposition of the Council as regards Overview and Scrutiny;
- Best Value training; and
- Performance Management (later in the year).

RESOLVED – That the suggestions as outlined above be programmed into the training event for Overview and Scrutiny Members.

COS.103/02 PRESENTATION OF THE LOCAL HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY – FINAL REPORT

The Principal Environmental Health Officer submitted report EN.70/02 detailing the findings of the Private Sector Housing Survey carried out in 2001/02. He introduced Mr Eric Watt, Director and Principal Consultant with The Housing Consultancy Limited who had undertaken the survey on the Council's behalf.

Mr Watt then gave a presentation to Members. He indicated that House Condition Surveys were undertaken as a means of identifying housing stock condition and had long been recognised as an essential part of housing strategy development. The Government undertook a national five yearly house condition survey and imposed a statutory duty on Councils to review conditions annually.

The City Council had met its statutory obligations to review housing conditions in the District at a time of legislative change and a fully competitive bidding process under the Housing Investment Programme.

Mr Watt explained the survey methodology utilised by The Housing Consultancy, which followed DTLR (now ODPM) guidelines. The survey included the production of a random sample of 1200 property addresses with the District having been sub-divided into four study areas. Within each study area private sector stock was identified separately to facilitate subsequent analysis of gathered data. Analysis was carried out using the BRELASS software package which had been developed specifically to implement Government recommendations on the conduct of local house condition surveys.

Mr Watt outlined the survey results which fell under the headings of main findings, subsidiary findings and key findings, and which identified the extent of existing problems in the housing stock and indicated the level of resource needed to make an impact thereon. He particularly drew Members' attention to the repair costs for the private sector housing stock by area table detailed at page 4 of the survey report. He stressed that the figures were not an over estimate, the most important figure for the City Council being that of 'make fit only' immediately which stood at £6,849,040. The Council should look at making a submission to the Government Office for funding by way of assistance.

Empty Properties also remained an issue and one which the Council required to take action to address. The Principal Environmental Health Officer commented that the Regulatory Reform Order, which had come into effect that day, afforded Councils the opportunity to move towards loans and equity release and he would report further on that matter to a future meeting of the Committee.

Mr Watt and the Principal Environmental Health Officer then responded to Members' questions.

The Chairman thanked Mr Watt for his interesting and informative presentation.

RESOLVED – That the report and presentation be received, it being noted that the document would be used to influence the Council's future Housing Strategy and Housing Investment Programme.

COS.104/02 BEST VALUE REVIEW, HOUSING DEBT

RECOVERY – ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

The Manager – Housing Management presented report H.42/02 concerning the Best Value Review of Housing Debt Recovery.

He updated Members on progress achieved since February 2002 on the implementation of measures to allow continuous improvement of the service to prevent, manage and recover rent arrears from City Council tenants, particularly drawing attention to the amended Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

With regard to the reduction of current rent arrears, he commented that arrears were now in decline, currently standing at £594,000.

In considering the matter, a Member asked whether progress had been made with regard to the adoption of partnership working and liaison with the CAB. The Manager indicated that he had arranged a meeting with the Manager of the CAB for Friday last which, unfortunately, had to be cancelled but which would be rearranged.

A Member queried whether any progress had been made with regard to the problems being experienced with The Business Objects Management Information System. The Manager indicated that Orchard had been unable to rectify the fault and therefore a consultant needed to be directly involved. The Chairman asked whether the Portfolio Holder, who was in attendance at the meeting, would be prepared to intervene and the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would do what he could.

With regard to improved rent payment facilities, a Member expressed concern at the proposed use of credit cards which he felt may exacerbate problems associated with debt. The Portfolio Holder commented that, whilst he sympathised with that point of view, the Council had a right to avail itself of all possible avenues to allow all tenants to make payments including rent.

A Member questioned the use of Estates Officers in preference to Legal Officers in presenting cases at Court. The Manager indicated that there were TUPE issues which remained to be resolved and therefore that arrangement had not yet commenced.

RESOLVED – That progress thus far be noted, together with the expectation that outstanding issues would be completed by the originally envisaged target date of December 2002.

COS.105/02 SMART CARD SCHEMES – FINAL REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer presented the final report on Smart Card Schemes and reminded Members of the background to the matter.

Two reports on the subject had previously been submitted to the Committee (TC.5/02 and TC.66/02 attached as Appendices to the final report). Following the second of those reports, the Committee had concluded that the City Council should not seek to pursue a major smart card project in the immediate future. The fundamental reasons for caution were as detailed in that report.

It was, however, important that the Council remained in a position to learn from other local authorities and their smart card pilot schemes. By so doing, the Council would ensure that it was ready to introduce a scheme at the most appropriate point in the future.

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer therefore suggested that the Executive should be asked to keep a 'watching brief' on the potential for more extensive use of smart cards in Carlisle. In addition, he proposed that an annual update be submitted to this Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Executive be asked to keep a 'watching brief' on the potential for more extensive use of smart cards in Carlisle. In particular, the various pilot schemes which were being undertaken by local authorities should be monitored carefully and their implications for Carlisle assessed.

(2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer be requested to update this Committee on the matter on an annual basis.

COS.106/02 SUPPORTING PEOPLE REGIME

The Head of Housing Provision presented report H.43/02 concerning the requirement upon the authority to adopt a strategic multi-agency partnership approach to support and sustain independent living for vulnerable people within the District.

With the Supporting People Regime due to commence in April 2003 it was necessary to provide an interim (1 year) Shadow Strategy. The shadow strategy document revolved around a series of statements and priorities which reflected 'the vision' of partners in seeking to achieve the prime objective referred to above.

The Head of Housing Provision outlined what was a very detailed document (attached as an Appendix to his report) and invited Members' comments, in particular, with regard to the vision statement, priorities and key urgent priorities.

As part of the introduction of the Supporting People legislative framework, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) had requested that a statement be made regarding a 'Charging Regime' to deliver the funding to provide equitable services within Cumbria.

Since that aspect of the legislative process for supporting people had now been published, Officers had taken the opportunity to present the proposals for consideration by Members in conjunction with the Supporting People Strategy. A summary of the proposals was also attached for Members' information and comment.

A Member drew attention to the differing needs prevalent in various areas of the County and questioned how the structure took account of the same. The Head of Housing Provision advised that the Core Strategy Development Group had been established in 1999 as the lead group to oversee both the strategic and operational work of implementing Supporting People in Cumbria. In addition, three Locality Groups had been set up – East (Carlisle and Eden), West (Allerdale and Copeland) and South (Barrow and South Lakeland) their role being to look at local issues and priorities which would be fed back through the document.

A Member questioned whether work was currently being undertaken on the key urgent priorities (very sheltered housing schemes and floating support schemes) and the Head of Housing Provision indicated that his report merely concerned the principle of the regime and whether Members were in agreement.

A Member made reference to the difficulties encountered in the LSVT process with regard to financial issues and peoples' understanding of the same. He stressed the need to avoid misunderstandings occurring as regards the Supporting People Charging Policy and requested that that should be conveyed to Cumbria County Council as the Administering Authority.

RESOLVED – That the Executive be requested to take on board the comments of this Committee with regard to the Supporting People Shadow Strategy and the Government's proposals for charging for Supporting People services, as outlined above.

COS.107/02 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORTED HOUSING – HOMELESSNESS AND SPECIAL NEEDS

The Head of Housing Provision presented report H.46/02 concerning the delivery of supported housing for those individuals and families presented as homeless within the Carlisle District. He outlined the background to the matter, in particular the need to enhance the authority's Special Needs and Accommodation Strategy through the adoption of an Independent Living Model (ILM) pilot initiative.

The Head of Housing Provision explained the purpose of his report, which was to set out an alternative approach for the provision of supported accommodation. Members' approval to that approach was sought, together with delegated responsibility for the Director of Housing in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being to implement the service.

Details of the potential ILM, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, were provided along with information on services currently available for vulnerable and potentially homeless people, the objectives of the Supporting People Regime, consultation arrangements and implications for the City Council.

Members' attention was particularly drawn to a 'window of opportunity' which existed up until 31 March 2003, to fund a wide range of support services utilising the additional funding stream of Supporting People. That would entail establishing services utilising Transitional Housing Benefit (THB) which would 'size' the Supporting People Grant that comes on stream in April 2003.

Members were invited to comment upon the issues raised in the proposed approach.

With regard to the suggested replacement of the London Road Hostel with a smaller short stay 'Resettlement Centre', a Member expressed concern that, if the Centre were smaller, people may be turned away and questioned what guarantee was in place that the Centre would be utilised to a greater extent. Another Member stressed that such a decision must not be taken hastily simply because of funding opportunities, that London Road was a last option for many people and that he would not wish to see people having to revert to Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

The Head of Housing Provision indicated that Members were being asked to approve the proposed approach in principle and, if that were forthcoming, additional work would be undertaken, including a risk assessment. That would cover demand, a financial assessment, LSVT implications and Health and Safety issues and once undertaken would be submitted to this Committee for initial consideration.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Executive be advised that the alternative approach to the delivery of homelessness services, as detailed in report H.46/02, was in principle acceptable to this Committee.

(2) That the Director of Housing be requested to submit a detailed report on the way forward, including cost implications for the City Council, to a future meeting of this Committee.

COS.108/02 HOUSING STRATEGY SUBMISSION TO THE
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR 2003-2006
– DRAFT

The Head of Housing Provision presented report H.45/02 setting out the draft submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for the Housing Strategy 2003-2006.

The Head of Housing Provision outlined the background to the matter, commenting that, for the second year in succession, in 2001/02 the City Council had been awarded an 'above average' assessment which resulted in an enhanced level of borrowing approvals.

He indicated that the housing and capital allocation processes had both undergone a process of fairly radical change in previous years, which had resulted in a process of constant revision of the Council's documentation.

Details of the key issues arising for the 2002/03 submission were set out in the report, which in turn needed to be seen in the context of new arrangements for housing investment for 2003/04. A draft of the proposed document was attached for Members' approval and, subject to comments, would go out for a period of consultation prior to submission to the ODPM by 31 July 2002.

In terms of the HRA Business Plan, a three year Plan had been approved by Committee in October 2000 (H.106/00 refers) and a firm of external specialist housing business plan consultants (Pennington Consulting and Support of Manchester) had been commissioned to provide a review and audit process for the 2003/04 update.

The Head of Housing Provision then outlined the consultation arrangements, in particular, The Regional Housing Statement which was the key contextual document for North West housing authorities, and was attached as a consultation draft in Appendix 2.

A Member queried the current position with regard to the post of Fuel Poverty Officer. The Head of Housing Provision advised that the Principal Environmental Health Officer was dealing with the matter and he would ask the Officer to respond to the Member on that point.

RESOLVED – That the Executive be advised that the draft Housing Strategy Submission to the Office of Deputy Prime Minister for 2003-2006 was acceptable to this Committee.

COS.109/02 HOUSING STRATEGY BEST VALUE REVIEW –
SCOPING PAPER

The Head of Housing Provision presented report H.44/02 concerning the Best Value Review of the Housing Strategy, which was a planned review within the Council's thematic approach to Best Value established in 2001.

The overall scope of the Review had been approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 January 2002. A Best Value Review Team had been established to oversee the Review and was concentrating on the following areas:

- Strategic role;
- Supporting people;
- Homelessness service delivery;
- Ownership and management of homelessness accommodation; and
- Private sector renewal and energy efficiency

A series of bullet points outlining the current issues with regard to the above services were attached at Appendices 1 – 5 of the report upon which Members' comments were invited.

Members questioned the makeup of the Best Value Review Team. They stressed the importance of Member input, referring to difficulties that had arisen with the current Regeneration Best Value Review from which lessons required to be learnt. Members were of the view that Best Value should be a fundamental part of their workload.

The Head of Housing Provision advised that it was an internal Officers' Group, chaired by himself, but he was happy to take on board Members' wishes in that regard.

As regards the Regeneration Best Value Review, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer commented that the key issue was that it had not tapped into Members' knowledge. He suggested that it may be useful to have a Member on the Review Team who would become an 'expert' on the subject and thus be equipped to assist the Committee's in its deliberations in the future.

It was agreed that the Chairman should attend the next meeting of the Review Team to assess the situation and thereafter report back to this Committee. The Head of Housing Provision further suggested that the Chairman and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer should discuss the matter with the Best Value Officer, which course of action was agreed.

RESOLVED – That the course of action outlined above be agreed.

[The meeting ended at 4.37 pm]