

**COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015 AT 10.00 AM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Allison (as substitute for Councillor Gee), Ellis, Mrs Prest, Mrs Stevenson and Mrs Vasey.

**ALSO**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Martlew – Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder

**OFFICERS:** Deputy Chief Executive  
Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager  
Policy and Performance Officer  
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

**COSP.09/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Gee and Harid.

Apologies were also submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Bradley and Mrs Riddle.

**COSP.10/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in respect of the business to be transacted.

**COSP.11/15 PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public.

**COSP.12/15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record of those meetings.

**COSP.13/15 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS**

There were no matters which had been the subject of call in.

**COSP.14/15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chairman advised that, in order to facilitate Officer and Member time, the Overview Report and Work Programme would, at this meeting and in future, be taken as the final item of the agenda.

**COSP.15/15 UPDATE ON PLAY AREA REVIEW**

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager presented report LE.05/15 which updated the Panel on the progress of the Play Area Review. The report summarised the work carried out to date and looked ahead at the improvements planned for the coming year.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that there had been a period of positive development work as a result of the first stage of the review. The removal

of obsolete equipment and the closing of some play areas was a difficult time and received an adverse reaction.

For the past 6-9 months a lot of intervention and development work had been undertaken investing in children's play in Carlisle in order to reach the Council's objective of quality play equipment and better standards and with the resources available to focus on quality.

The work tied in with the Council's overarching objectives in their role as a Healthy City and providing the opportunities for children to develop physical strength, to be challenged and to judge risk.

The largest single investment during the year was at Dale End Field in Harraby where the play area was completely replaced after being declared obsolete in the Review. The supplier of the equipment was chosen after extensive consultation with the community including parents and children. Carlisle South Community Group, the Council's main point of contact with the community, organised a number of consultation sessions. Funding came from a Section 106 contribution by Barratt Homes and a landfill Tax Grant from Cumbria Waste Management.

At Yewdale Community Centre a new multi-play unit was installed in summer 2014 incorporating components to challenge children's abilities in climbing, balance and stamina.

At Melbourne Park the Review identified a need for investment in new equipment as a priority and consequently the Council had consulted widely with the community. Their clear instruction was to focus on provision for younger children and that would form the basis of the tender specification. The project will be funded entirely from Section 106 contributions which had already been paid over by the developers concerned.

The Play Area Review afforded the opportunity to stand back and assess the key sites for investment and improvement. The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager indicated a number of play areas identified in the Review as strategically important but in need of upgrading. There had been investment during the year to make sure that all children had ready access to decent play equipment.

As well as healthy play the Council also provided residents with opportunities to keep fit with specialist 'outdoor gym' equipment. The fitness trail in Bitts Park Riverside was installed in wood many years ago and had become unsafe due to natural wear and tear. In summer 2014 it was replaced with new equipment which incorporated instructions for safe use and the benefit of that specific exercise.

The purpose of the Review was to help Officers to make sure that the Council's resources were used most efficiently. At the end of the year a new independent inspector was commissioned to look at every play facility in the Council's portfolio as well as a number managed by Parish Councils. The resulting report enabled Officers to plan the forthcoming year's maintenance work and the Director of Local Environment outlined the planned programme of work for 2015-16.

The future of children's play in Carlisle had been secured by the Council's approach and the Council was now able to look ahead at the play areas whose equipment had further deteriorated in the two years since the survey was conducted and was now in need of replacement. The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that investment would be required in Eden Parkside and Lund Crescent and a significant

investment in play was due at Hammonds Pond via the Section 106 Agreement relating to the Story Homes development at Blackwell Road.

In rural areas most play areas were provided and maintained by Parish Councils. The Council's strategy was to support the Parishes by offering a reduced rate for the independent annual inspections that were required by insurers. Officers were also working with Dalston, Brampton and Arthuret Parish Councils to maximise the value of existing play areas in their Parishes.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that such a programmed approach would help the Council to maximise the play value of its sites while keeping them safe for children to enjoy. Following the Review the City Council currently retained responsibility for 49 children's play areas, three BMX tracks, four multi-use games areas (MUGAs) and the Skate park.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that a wheelchair swing would be installed in Bitts Park. That would avoid the need to lift older children from their wheelchairs onto a swing and enable them to join in the play with other children. In line with health and safety a fence would be installed around the swing to prevent children running into it while in use. It was anticipated that the Council would receive up £20,000 from the Cumbria Waste Management Landfill Tax towards the cost of the swing.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that consultation had taken place with local children to determine what play equipment they would like and what needed to be replaced.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager presented photographs of a number of play areas showing the original play equipment and either the new equipment or, where the play area had been removed, the site after it had been grassed over.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Do the new play areas have cellular covering that allows the grass to grow through?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that a number of surfaces were used depending upon the location of the play area. The cellular type of surface was low maintenance and once the grass had grown through would only require limited maintenance. Other surfaces, if set alight, would be expensive to replace.

- *What were the maintenance costs of play areas?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that each play area was inspected weekly. Any faults were repaired as soon as possible and dangerous items removed. The maintenance cost was £2,000 per year. As an example the Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that if a set of swings was vandalised and needed to be replaced the cost would be in the region of £2,500 to £5,000 and multi-play equipment similar to that at Yewdale would cost £7,500.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder stated that she was glad that the review had been undertaken and things had moved on from the first, difficult phase. The report was very positive and highlighted the need for working with other financial pools to enable the Council

to do what they wanted to do. Section 106 Agreements had been implemented and money used from Cumbria Waste Management.

The Portfolio Holder had attended the opening of the Dale End Road play area and the children were delighted with it. That epitomised what had been said, that children needed quality play areas and the work would be ongoing.

With regard to the wheelchair swing the Portfolio Holder advised that it had been decided to locate the swing in Bitts Park as it was a central location and added that it was hoped that, at some point in the future, more wheelchair swings could be installed around the district.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated the Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager and Officers for their hard work in maintaining the play areas to such a high standard.

- *The Council was facilitating projects using Section 106 Agreement monies and grants such as Landfill Tax rather than investing in projects. Would it be possible to facilitate more projects in rural areas or to support Parish Councils?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that most of the play areas in rural locations were maintained by Parish Councils. However the Council helped and supported the Parish Councils by offering advice on where to seek funding and the criteria needed to obtain funding. The Council also offered a play area inspection service at a cost of £45 which was substantially less than the Parish Council could obtain elsewhere.

In response to a query from a Member the Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that the cost of maintenance was included in the Council's revenue budget.

- *Would it be possible to install netball/football nets on the play areas that had been grassed over?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that the areas would require a weekly inspection which would result in costs similar to a small play area. Therefore, regrettably, he was unable to agree in most cases.

The Portfolio Holder believed that as long as the children knew they were play areas they should be encouraged to use them.

- *Children do use them and the lack of play equipment encourages more creative play.*
- *Longtown Parish Council had been promised help with their play areas but that had not yet been forthcoming.*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that he was aware that help had been promised to Longtown, Brampton and Dalston Parish Councils and that would be followed up. The money was available and the Officer was awaiting a delegated decision to release the money. Parish Councils were keen to work with the City Council and to use Section 106 monies for play provision and to replace old equipment.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager believed that it was important for Parish Councils to engage with the planning process and when a development was proposed the Parish Council need to be involved at an early stage.

- *The Council's Development Framework was looking at preventing a proliferation of small developments and queried how the Council could comply with the planning agreements. There was the possibility that there could be a lot of small play areas which could cease to be the Council's responsibility after ten years.*

The Portfolio Holder advised that the nature of play areas was changing and in future small play areas would not provide the stimulus needed. The Council would then need to look at larger, more comprehensive play areas that would serve a wider area. The nature of play was evolving. The Council would resist creating small play areas in a number of areas which would be expensive to maintain.

Small play areas were difficult to maintain and in the past few years larger developers had agreed to maintain the areas under a management company agreement in perpetuity which would take the responsibility away from the Council.

- *A Member was concerned that Section 106 monies would be put into a central pot and used only for central areas.*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that the rule for Section 106 monies for public open space was that it had to be linked to the development. The Council's calculations were based on a contribution to support play and amenity open space.

However the rules were changing with the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the details of which were not yet clear. The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that Officers were trying to encourage developers to look at the longer term and if they were planning to develop an area in stages to contribute to a larger play area rather than create a smaller play area at each stage of the development.

- *With regard to Section 106 Agreements was discussion taking place with developers to make contributions to destination sites?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that that was covered by the Local Plan but there was scope for negotiation. As an example the Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that there was currently agreement for two developments at Houghton with the possibility of another in the future. There was therefore scope to negotiate better play provision across the whole development.

- *There seemed to be positive work coming out of community engagement.*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager advised that Officers were trying to do the best they could. Developers had a sustainability test that they could apply. That resulted in a long "shopping" list for Councils which included open space which was competing with the need for transport, etc. If the development was unsustainable the developer could challenge the Section 106 Agreement. Some people saw green space as a luxury and if it came up against a need for an additional classroom green space would lose out. Officers were trying to involve other people in discussions.

- *How was the use of play areas monitored?*

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager explained that when inspectors went out they could often see the area being used. Inspectors also determined how often areas

were used by noting whether there were weeds growing among bark covering which would indicate the area was not being used

RESOLVED: 1. That report LE.05/15 be noted and that staff be congratulated on their hard work.

2. That a further update report be submitted to the Panel in twelve months.

### **COSP.16/15 – THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014/15**

The Policy and Performance Officer presented Report PC.03/15 which updated the Panel on the Council's service standards that help measure performance. The report also included updates on key actions contained within the Carlisle Plan.

Details of each service standard were included in a table appended to the report. The table illustrated the cumulative year to date figure, a month-by-month breakdown of performance and, where possible, an actual service standard baseline that had been established either locally or nationally. The updates against actions in the Carlisle Plan followed on from the service standard information which was attached to the report. A note of the performance of the Customer Contact Centre was also included as an appendix to the report.

With regard to the Service Standard which measured the average number of days to process new benefits claims the Policy and Performance Officer explained that there had been an improvement in the service and the figures for January 2015 indicated that the trend was continuing.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Had there been a drop in the number of benefit claims?*

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that he was not aware of a drop in claims but there had been an improvement in the service. Remedial actions to resolve some of the problems appeared to be taking effect thus far.

- *What impact would the introduction of Universal Credit have on the service?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council did not yet know the milestones in respect of Universal Credit but was aware that there would be challenges for the Customer Contact Centre. Once the milestones were known the Council could start predictive work to reduce the impact.

- *Would any staff be transferred as a result of the winding down of the shared service?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised there would be no staff transferred in that respect. The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that there were concerns nationally about the impact of Universal Credit but at present there was no clear information from the DWP.

- *Would it be useful to contact the local MPs about the matter?*

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that it had not got to that stage yet and it would be useful for the Council's Shared Services Partnership Manager and the DWP to meet to

discuss the issues. The Council's role will be to support people with legitimate claims and manage the changeover as well as possible.

The Policy and Performance Officer reminded Members that the shared service was being wound down.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the positives of the new service were not immediately obvious and that it was likely that there would be problems. However it was important that the performance of the service continued to improve.

When the shared service was finally sorted the Council could look at what went well during that time.

- *Universal Credit was a very complex area. Was there any intention to have further discussion on the matter?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council's Shared Services Partnership Manager had attended Panel meetings some time ago in respect of the IT system that would be required for Universal Credit.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the shared services arrangements were due for discussion at the next Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting and had been discussed by the Executive on 2 February 2015.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be looking at the process and the management of the winding down of the shared service. The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel would deal with the outcomes and outputs of the service.

- *Could the matter be included in the Work Programme to allow Members to find out more about the issues and to discuss the implications for staff?*

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded Members that the Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder was also a member of the Welfare Reform Board which also looked at the impact of the forthcoming changes. Representatives from the County Council and Riverside were also represented on that Board.

The Policy and Performance Officer suggested that the Council's Shared Services Partnership Manager could attend the meeting when the end of year performance report was considered. By that time the Council would be a couple of months into the new system and the changes to the shared service will have passed.

- *With regard to the Carlisle Plan was the Arts Centre on target in terms of timescale and budget?*

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that it was.

- *In the original projection it suggested that staff from Carlisle Leisure Limited would help at the Arts Centre.*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that would not now be the case. However some of the people who would be helping and working at the Arts Centre would have been trained by Carlisle Leisure Limited. Staffing would be looked at again in the future.

- *The contract in respect of the catering included staff undertaking roles in ticketing as well as catering. Was that still the case?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that was still the case but the contractual terms had not yet been finalised and were still in draft form.

- *With regard to the Harraby Campus the report mentioned additional funding supplied by the County Council. Was the project over budget and was the County Council covering the shortfall?*

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the removal of asbestos and flood prevention works had put additional pressure on the budget. The County Council had discussed the matter with their Cabinet and it would be necessary to look at the site again to re-evaluate the finance. The contribution from the City Council would remain the same.

RESOLVED: 1. That report PC.03/15 be noted.

2. That the Council's Shared Services Partnership Manager be invited to attend the meeting in June 2015 when the final end of year performance report was considered.

## **COSP.17/15 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.02/15 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and included the latest version of the work programme and Key Decisions of the Executive which related to the Panel.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported:

- that the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, published on 30 January 2015, included the following item which fell within the remit of this Panel.

KD.003/15 – Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership Annual Plan 2015/16 – Executive consideration of the Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership's (CSP) Annual Plan for 2015/16 had been deferred following the postponement of a meeting between the CSP Leadership and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Officer which was scheduled to take place on 10 February 2015. The Plan will be returned to Executive as soon as possible after the meeting had been reconvened and the final draft confirmed and submitted to Council in April 2015.

- *The Panel urged the Portfolio Holder to ensure that the Panel were involved in the Plan.*

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Portfolio Holder could take the Panel's concerns that they had not had sight of the report back to the Partnership Board.

- The following item within the remit of the Panel had been considered by the Executive on 2 February 2015:



- EX.12/15 – Inter-Agency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Officer had contacted the Panel by e-mail asking if there were particular issues they wished to see discussed in the Annual Report. A facilitation session was scheduled for Monday 2 March 2015 and comments would feed into the Annual Report. Therefore the Annual Report which would be submitted to the Panel's final meeting of the civic year on Thursday 9 April 2015 may be retrospective with the second part of the report being submitted at the Panel's first meeting of the next Civic year.

The Chairman explained that the Annual Report included information from each of the Scrutiny Chairs and invited Members of the Panel to e-mail any topics which they wished to be included.

- The Work Programme had been attached to the report for comment/amendment.

RESOLVED – That the Overview Report (OS.02/15) incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

[The meeting ended at 11.25]