

People Panel

Date: Thursday, 23 February 2023

Time: 10:00

Venue: Flensburg Room

Present: Councillor Mrs Christine Finlayson, Councillor Colin Glover, Councillor Mrs Ann McKerrell, Councillor Mrs Linda Mitchell, Councillor Tim Pickstone, Councillor David Shepherd, Councillor Miss Jeanette Whalen, Councillor Christopher Wills

Also Present:
Portfolio Holder

Councillor Mrs Mallinson - Communities, Health and Wellbeing

Portfolio Holder

Councillor Mrs Bowman - Economy, Enterprise and Housing

Councillor Higgs - Culture, Heritage and Leisure Portfolio Holder

Officers:

Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services

Corporate Director of Economic Development

Corporate Director of Finance and Resources

Head of Property Services

Head of Health and Wellbeing

Homeless Services Manager

Policy and Scrutiny Officer

Mr Rice, Mr McGarry and Mr Barnes - GLL

PEP.13/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

PEP.14/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were submitted.

PEP.15/23 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED - That items in Part A be dealt with in public and items in Part B be dealt with in private.

PEP.16/23 AGENDA

RESOLVED - That the Sustainable Warmth Programme Update be the first item of business considered.

PEP.17/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED - The minutes of the meeting held on the 12 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

PEP.18/23 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

The Chair noted that the meeting was the final for the Panel as the City Council would dissolve on 31 March 2023. He extended thanks to all who had attended, participated and contributed to the work of the Panel be they public sector partners, Portfolio Holders or Officers. He offered his personal thanks to the Members of the Panel for supporting in his role as Chair as well as to the Democratic Services and Policy and Scrutiny Officer who supported the work of the Panel. The Chair concluded by wishing all staff and Councillors of the new Cumberland Council very best wishes in the new authority.

PEP.19/23 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been subject of call in.

PEP.20/23 SUSTAINABLE WARMTH PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services submitted a report which updated members on the progress with the delivery of the Sustainable Warmth funding programme (GD.08/23. The Panel had considered the matter at its January 2023 meeting at which point Members were advised that a request for an extension on the deadline to deliver the scheme had been submitted to the then Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. That request had been agreed, subject to completion of a managed closure plan and the deadline for the completion of the scheme was put back to September 2023 from end of March 2023.

At the time of Panel's earlier consideration of the programme expenditure had been in the region of £90,000, it now stood at approximately £1M.

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

- The Chair asked if new applications were still being accepted and what would happen to approved applications where works were not complete in May 2023

The Head of Property Services responded that applications were still being received although efforts to publicise the scheme had ceased. Such applications would be fast tracked and those already approved and in the system would hopefully be delivered, any that were not would be passed over to any successor programmes that the Government may implement in the future. As such it was not clear at this stage in the project what the total expenditure / number of applications implemented would be.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder was disappointed that Officers did not have better news to report to the Panel. She thanked the Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services and his team for their work in turning the output of the programme around. She hoped the meeting with government later that day would be fruitful.

The Chair echoed the Portfolio Holder's comments noting the increase in project expenditure.

- Was it likely that the government would apply interest charges on monies the Council would re-pay to it?

The Head of Property confirmed that there was a clause in the contract that allowed

interest to be applied on returned monies, there was no suggestion at this stage that the clause would be triggered, but it was a matter the Council needed to be aware of.

On behalf of the Panel the Chair thanked the Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services and the Head of Property Services for their work in turning the project around and making it a success. He requested that Officers update the Panel of the outcome of their meeting with government later that day.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel scrutinised the review of the progress to date with delivery of the programme.

2) That the Head of Property Services inform the Panel of the outcome of the meeting with government on 23 February 2023.

PEP.21/23 LEISURE CONTRACT UPDATE

The Head of Health and Wellbeing submitted a report which updated the Panel on the Council's Leisure Contract with GLL, the Sands Centre Redevelopment and how leisure services might develop following the transition to Cumberland Council.
(CS.06/23)

Mr Rice delivered a presentation covering the following: Sands Centre re-opening, next steps and challenges; 'the cube' GLL's six principle approach; leisure usage data; tackling health inequalities; membership numbers; community development team; outreach holiday programmes; and the school delivery programme.

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

- A Member commented that youth work often ended up focussed on children (i.e. under 12s), he was keen to find out what was in place to address the issue.

Mr Barnes acknowledged the Member's comments noting that the majority of GLL's youth work taking place in its centres took place with 5 – 12 year olds. The expansion of it to include a wider age range was currently in his scope of work subject to necessary research being carried out.

Mr McGarry noted the current work undertaken with the teenage age group which included a 'junior gym' that had approximately 200 participants and in response to which a series of junior classes would be developed for after school activities that would include both virtual and instructor led classes to help increase accessibility. Sessions were also available for young people at the Trinity School site on weekdays and the offer there was expected to develop over time.

- Some residents found it difficult to access the facility as there was no public transport directly to the site, had discussions taken place with local providers?

The Head of Health and Wellbeing advised that discussions had taken place with Stagecoach, but that it had declined as the cost of overhauling the timetable was prohibitive.

- Usage of the cycle track at Harraby was in decline, what plans were in place to address that?

The Head of Health and Wellbeing explained that the cycle track was managed by GLL on behalf of Carlisle Sports. The Council, with partners, were currently working with stakeholders to identify a way forward for the track. He noted that the facility was still used by clubs, but that common usage had declined.

- Was the Sands Centre able to accept government childcare vouchers to support households being able to attend activities?

Mr Barnes advised that the Sands Centre did not accept the childcare vouchers directly, however some parents did request an invoice for the payments made for their child's attendance which it was understood were required to claim monies back via the voucher scheme. GLL would look into whether it could implement the voucher scheme.

The Sands Centre did operate the government funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) in the longer school holidays. It was noted that there were issues with people booking under that scheme who did not then attend the session rather than notifying the Sands Centre which meant that place for the activity and food could not be used elsewhere.

- How was the issue of energy costs being managed?

Mr Rice advised that currently government subsidy was available but would end in spring. The issue of energy costs was one affecting the whole of the leisure industry, particularly where swimming facilities were available. He anticipated technological solutions would come forward to reduce operating costs. Although the rise in energy costs had created adverse conditions within the industry as a whole, the facilities at the Sands Centre, particularly the swimming pools were very energy efficient.

- A number of Members commented that concerns had been raised by residents about the Sands Centre no longer accepting cash payments, particularly in relation to the purchase of refreshments at the site.

Mr Rice responded that consideration was being given to the development and implementation a mechanism to address the cashless payments issue.

The Chair noted that previously those visiting the Sands Centre to purchase tickets for events had been able to park for free for the short time whilst carrying out the transaction, that facility as no longer available.

The Head of Health and Wellbeing undertook to discuss the matter with the Council's car parking services, were any system to be implemented it was important that it was devised in such a way that it may not be breached.

The Chair understood that Carlisle United Football Club had indicated that it required a training facility to use on weekdays.

Officers understood that the Newman School site and the Sheepmount may have capacity for such activity, they undertook to explore the matter.

The Culture, Heritage and Leisure Portfolio Holder commented that it had been his privilege, as Portfolio Holder, to receive presentations from GLL. It was delightful to see the redeveloped Sands Centre in operation and he commended all those involved in the work to bring that to fruition. He agreed that the issues of cashless

only payments and increasing use of the cycle track needed to be addressed.

The Culture, Heritage and Leisure Portfolio Holder thanked the Panel for its observation and wished the Sands Centre all the best for the future.

RESOLVED – 1) That in relation to the loss of subsidy in relation to utility costs, the Panel request that the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) take the issue up with the local MP.

2) That Officers consider the issue of cashless only payments at the Sands Centre.

3) That the Panel welcome discussion with Carlisle United Football Club regarding available facilities for weekday training activity.

4) That the Panel endorse the thanks and comments of the Portfolio Holder for the fantastic achievement of redeveloping the Sands Centre by both Officers and GLL staff.

PEP.22/23 VICTORIAN BATHS UPDATE

The Head of Health and Wellbeing submitted an update on the Victorian Baths, which covered; the conservation requirements for the heritage asset; the investment appraisal; Building management procedures including Building condition surveys; the handover to the Station Gateway project; and the Friends Group's proposals.
(CS.07/23)

In response to a question from a Member regarding the interaction between the Station Gateway Project and the Baths, the Corporate Director gave an overview of the proposal for the Project, which Cumbria County Council was the lead authority for. As part of the Project, £1M of Borderlands funding had been allocated to secure the Victorian Baths and provide heating.

The Panel discussed the progression of the Friend's Group proposals and concerns expressed by the Group regarding difficulties in getting required information from the Council to enable the development of plans and also difficulties in having meetings with Officers.

Officers responded gave an overview of interactions between the Council and the Friends, explaining that they understood that all requests from the Group had been met.

The Chair requested that the Corporate Director of Economic Development discuss with The Friends the Community Ownership Fund. The Corporate Director agreed to do so.

The Chair thanked Officers for the update and looked forward to seeing further developments in the future.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel received report CS.07/23.

2) That the Corporate Director of Economic Development discuss the Community Ownership Fund with the Friends Group.

PEP.23/23 CUMBRIA CHOICE – UPDATE ON THE HOUSING REGISTER

The Homeless Services Manager submitted report GD.09/23 which provided an update on Cumbria Choice and the impact of the new allocation policy. (GD.09/23)

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

- What circumstances defined urgent need?

The Homeless Services Manager responded that those experiencing homelessness, property disrepair or property overcrowding were deemed to be in urgent need. The Chair further asked if residing in a property that was not fit for human habitation deemed an individual to be in urgent need?

The Homeless Services Manager confirmed that such a property would fall into the category of disrepair and those resident in it would be considered to have urgent need.

- What scale of private sector rental properties were not effectively maintained?

The Homeless Services Manager did not have data on the matter. He advised that private sector landlords were able to access funding for works through Homelife etc and that insufficient property maintenance was more likely to be experienced by owner occupiers. In cases where landlords were not conducting appropriate property maintenance, the Council's Environmental Health Service was able to carry out enforcement action.

- Was there any indication that of private landlords selling properties in response to the cost of living crisis?

The Homeless Services Manager responded that there was anecdotal evidence to suggest there had been an increase in sales of properties used in the private rented sector.

- Was data collected and held on the employment status of those using the service?

The Homeless Services Manager undertook to provide a written response on the matter.

The Member further asked if data was collected and held on the numbers of people who transitioned from social rental properties into homeownership.

The Homeless Services Manager advised that housing associations may hold such data, but that the Council did not.

- How successful was the policy in terms of processing applications and bids?

The Homeless Services Manager responded that the website was better than previous versions which made the process of applying and bidding easier. For those unable to access online services paper application forms were still available on request and housing associations were able to offer help to complete the forms.

- Were there differences in social housing availability across the new Cumberland Council area?

Due it is larger population, there was a greater demand for social housing in Carlisle. For example, a social housing property may attract 30 – 40 applications, a similar property in West Cumbria may attract 10 – 20 applications. The Officer undertook to circulate to the Panel figures for social housing properties in West Cumbria.

- Was the increase in the proportion of properties allocated to those with an identified statutory housing need a result of the cost of living crisis?

There had been an increase in people presenting to the service with homelessness due to property affordability, exact figures on the matter would not be available until next year.

The Panel discussed the how the local connection criteria operated and was administered.

- What was the general length of time from an application being submitted to the allocation of a property?

The time taken to deal with applications varied, due to the differing circumstances and needs of applicants. Three months was a fairly standard process time, those requiring larger properties would potentially take longer to be allocated.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel considered the content of report GD.09/23

2) That the Homeless Services Manager circulate to the Panel:

- i) Data on the employment status of those using Cumbria Choice;
- ii) Data on social housing figures in West Cumbria.

PEP.24/23 STANDING ORDERS

RESOLVED - That Council Procedural Rule 9, in relation to the duration of meetings be suspended in order that the meeting could continue over the 3 hour time limit.

PEP.25/23 REVENUE BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources submitted a report which provided an overview of the Council's overall budgetary position for the period April to December 2022. (RD.58/22)

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

- Would the Bereavement Services infrastructure funding assist in meeting rising energy costs?

The Head of Health and Wellbeing advised that the infrastructure monies was to replace the existing assets, consideration was being given to the use of electric cremators which would have a lower energy demand than existing which were gas powered. The matter would be determined by Cumberland Council.

In response to a question from a Member regarding Market Hall income, the Corporate Director explained that the references to the facility contained in the report

related to Towns Deal Funding rather than a loss of income. A Business Case to draw down the funding was to be developed.

- The Chair sought clarification on the process of creating an earmarked reserve for Talkin Tarn.

The Corporate Director responded that the matter was to be determined by Council on 28 February 2023. The Council had many existing earmarked reserves, which ring fenced funds to be spent on the particular items they were created for; those would all be transferred to Cumberland Council.

A Member asked if Cumberland Council was able to un-earmark such reserves?

The Corporate Director confirmed that it could adding that the Section 151 Officer would review the ear marked reserves on an annual basis and make recommendations to Council on the continuation / termination of reserves.

- Was the Council able to broaden out the help it offered under the upcoming fuel help scheme?

The Corporate Director explained that in terms of the newer schemes, central government has set up a portal to manage the applications process, the Council's role was simply to provide a check on that process and disburse the monies.

Responding to a follow up question from a Member in relation to a scheme of energy cost support for those without mains gas, the Corporate Director understood that the scheme may be delivered via fuel companies.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources for her report.

RESOLVED- That the Panel scrutinised the overall budgetary position for the period April to December.

PEP.26/23 CAPITAL BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources submitted a report which provided an overview of the Council's capital programme for the period April to December 2022. (RD.59/22)

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

- In relation to the repayment of monies in respect of the Sustainable Warmth Grants, the government was able to levy interest on that sum, had there been any indication whether that would be applied in this case?

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources responded that as yet there had been no indication on the matter. She noted that when an earlier tranche of funding was returned interest had not been applied to that sum.

- The Chair sought clarification that the monies for the Crematorium Infrastructure had been carried into the 2023/24 budget.

The Corporate Director confirmed that was the case, the matter had been fed across

to the Shadow Authority for inclusion in the Cumberland Council Budget and was incorporated into the Shadow Authority's Executive Budget Proposals on 16 February 2022.

- Were the funds secured in relation to the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal secured and, were it deemed necessary were those funds able to be re-profiled?

The Corporate Director explained that any re-profiling would need to be approved by government through the appropriate change control mechanism.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director for her report, moreover, he commended her careful stewardship of the authority's finances in her role.

RESOLVED - That the Panel scrutinised the overall budgetary position for the period April to December 2022.

PEP.27/23 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT AND OVERVIEW REPORT

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.06/23 which provided an overview of matters related to the Scrutiny Panel's work. The report also included a draft of this year's Scrutiny Annual Report for comment. (OS.06/23)

In response to a question from the Chair, the Policy and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that she would co-ordinate the delivery of information from the Panel to the relevant Officers and Members at Cumberland Council.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Panel noted the items within Panel remit on the most recent Notice of Key Executive Decisions

2) Considered the appended Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23.

3) That the Policy and Scrutiny Officer co-ordinate the delivery of information from the Panel to the relevant Officers and Members at Cumberland Council

The Meeting ended at: 13:14