

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 10 JANUARY 2019 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Paton (Chairman), Councillors Bainbridge (as substitute for Councillor Layden), Carrigan, Finlayson, Harid, McKerrell (as substitute for Councillor Mallinson J) and Sidgwick S.

ALSO

PRESENT: Shane Byrne, Department for Works and Pensions
Peter Moran, Cumbria Law Centre

OFFICERS: Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager
Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager
Policy and Communications Manager

HWSP.01/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Crawford, Layden and Mallinson J.

HWSP.02/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harid declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of agenda A.3 – Response to Welfare Reform. The interest related to his wife being in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payment.

HWSP.03/19 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED - It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public and Part B be dealt with in private.

HWSP.04/19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – It was noted that Council, on 8 January 2019, received and adopted the minutes of the meetings held on 4 October 2018 and 15 November 2018. The minutes were signed by the Chairman.

HWSP.05/19 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

HWSP.06/19 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Communications Manager presented report OS.35/18 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel.

The report detailed the most recent Notice of Executive Key Decisions, copies of which had been circulated to all Members, which had been published on 18 December 2018. There were no items within the Panel's remit contained in the Notice that had not already been considered by the Panel.

The report included a table of the progress on resolutions from previous meetings of the Panel and the current Work Programme. The Policy and Communications Manager drew the Panel's

attention to resolutions HWSP.36/18 (2) & (4) and reported that the Green Spaces Strategy had been delayed due to a service area restructure and the remit of the Play Area Review had been expanded and would be renamed the Active Spaces Strategy. As a result of the changes the Panel were asked if they would agree to moving the items to their February meeting.

The Policy and Communications Manager also informed the Panel that the Community Safety Partnership would come to the Panel as part of the Executive process and asked the Panel to agree to take the item at their next meeting.

A Member added that should there be any further delay to the three items that the relevant Portfolio Holder be asked to attend the Panel meeting to provide an update and explain the reasons for the delay.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report and Work Programme (OS.35/18) be noted.

2) That the following items be scheduled for the next meeting of the Panel:

Resolution HWSP.36/18 (2)
Resolution HWSP.36/18 (4)
Community Safety Partnership

HWSP.07/19 RESPONSE TO WELFARE REFORM

Having declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest Councillor Harid left the meeting for the consideration of the report.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager introduced Mr Byrne, Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) and Mr Moran, Cumbria Law Centre to the Panel.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager submitted an overview of the ongoing local partnership work developed in response to the Government's welfare reform agenda, Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015/16. (GD.02/9)

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager reminded the Panel of the background, purpose and membership of the Carlisle Welfare Reform Board. She detailed the Group objectives and agenda and highlighted the member feedback from the Department for Work and Pensions, Welfare Advice Service and Carlisle Law Centre which was set out in the report.

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager added that the Carlisle Welfare Reform Board enabled officers to better understand the consequences of any changes on individuals, householders and services.

Mr Byrne explained that the Carlisle Welfare Reform Board was an important partnership which gave Local Authorities and partners the ability to react to the messages that the DWP were providing and this was fundamental to DWP's communication strategy in Carlisle and was instrumental in helping customers. Universal Credit was a test and learn product which could be changed in response to issues unlike the legacy benefits and the Board allowed feedback to be provided to influence change.

Mr Byrne reported that every City in the UK was on full service for Universal Credit. He gave praise to the work of the Board, adding that it was important to the DWP to be involved as it enabled the DWP to see what the changes being introduced actually meant to the customer. He acknowledged that there was a lot of fear with regard to Universal Credit, the migration from

legacy benefits and the move to monthly payments. The role of the DWP was to assuage some of the fear and being part of the Board allowed the DWP to understand the issues and report back up the chain so that the issues could be corrected.

Mr Moran informed the Panel that the Law Centre dealt with a high number of people who needed information and guidance but did not necessarily need case work and advocacy. The Law Centre relied on referrals so that the right people dealt with cases. The challenge for the Law Centre was making sure that the limited amount of available funding was used to support those who really needed it and he felt that the Law Centre was managing this. He commented that he was aware that the Citizens Advice and the Benefits Advice Centre were also running at full capacity.

Mr Moran stated that the benefits system was not in a vacuum and the lives of individuals involved with the system were littered with agencies and many had a range of social and economic issues. Additional support for those with issues was being reduced and the move to sustainable tenancies had had a notable effect on people in terms of debt and housing issues. The Board allowed the Law Centre to see a broader picture which in turn helped them to make the best use out of the funding.

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

- There were rumours that those waiting to receive Universal Credit were facing long periods of time with no money.

Mr Byrne responded that the DWP sought to solve issues as soon as they were made aware of them. Any delays in receipt of payment were usually because the process had gone wrong somewhere, the Partnership allowed some of those issues to be identified and addressed much quicker.

- Did the increasing external pressures on services cause the Board to work in a tighter unit?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager responded that the Partnership had to work as a tight unit due to reduced resources to services. The Homelessness Legislation had changed and had introduced the requirement that certain named public bodies had a duty to refer users of their services who they had reason to believe were homeless or threatened with becoming homeless within 56 days, to a local authority of the service users' choice. This had resulted in a more meaningful way to address issues at an earlier stage. The Board was also a good opportunity to raise cases anonymously and discuss where the process worked and where it did not and how it could be improved in the future.

Mr Byrne added that the Board allowed real networking and communication which carried on outside of meetings and positively impacted the day to day work of the services.

- A lot of the issues that Members became involved in were due to a lack of experience and knowledge of where to go for support. An obvious point of contact was the Housing Associations, were they involved in the Board?

Mr Byrne confirmed that the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) were a partner on the Board. In addition, the DWP met with RSLs quarterly and the DWP and RSLs had excellent communication, helped by all RSLs having access to the DWP's landlord portal and Trusted Partner programme. The DWP met with RSLs on a national, regional and local level to ensure a clear message was being conveyed right through organisations.

- Could education establishments help educate people on their rights or sign post them to the appropriate support?

Mr Moran informed the Panel that 90% of legal problems existed within the 10% of the lowest paid income in the UK, with those people averaging 5 legal problems a year. In the lowest income brackets the problems included debt, benefits and employment issues. The Law Centre had three main priorities:

Case management and representation

Public legal representation

Campaign for change

The Law Centre mainly dealt with case management and representation but there had been a move towards public legal education. The Law Centre was funded to take cases not education and he felt that broad legal education in schools would be very useful.

- Were officers confident that the Council's Portfolio Holders (PFHs) were open and available to approach in advance of issues arising?

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager confirmed that the PFHs were open and they worked well with officers. He explained that there was sometimes frustration when accurate information could not be given however the message for Universal Credit had gone well and there had been a relatively smooth transfer. There had been some impact on services, but the numbers had been low, and they were being managed. He had concerns that sometimes the PFH / Member mechanism may not work well for Members, but officers were happy to come to Scrutiny and were happy for Members to contact them to share information.

Mr Byrne explained that the DWP administered what the Treasury told them to and there had been no real increase in money in five years. Mr Byrne had met with the local MP to pass this message along and highlight the issues that some people were having with the amount of Universal Credit they received. An example of this was the £57 per week Universal Credit given to young people leaving care. Although they would receive help with their council tax and rent they would not have a structured support network and Mr Byrne felt this was not enough money.

He added that the goal of Welfare Reform had been to ensure that no one would be worse off in work than they were receiving benefits. It was designed to support people back into work, but the reality had been no real increase in money in five years, the matter needed to be discussed and required real lobbying.

- It would be useful for Members to have access to a guidance sheet of frequently asked questions or information on the route that should be followed by claimants who needed support or those facing homelessness.
- Why was 'implicit consent' so important for the Welfare Advice Service?

Mr Byrne responded that the GDPR regulations had driven implicit consent as a way of dealing with private landlords and disputes. Sometimes the legislation had been a barrier but it was important to the DWP in assuring customers that their information was being dealt with in a fair and honest way.

- In light of growing pressures and the reduction in resources had the Executive considered the provision of any additional support?

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services clarified that there had been no reduction in resources within the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Team and the team were fully staffed.

Mr Moran added that references to the reduction in support were regarding support services provided by Cumbria County Council, particularly issues with the lack of quality support from probation services. Some customers required intensive support and it was no longer available.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager commented that the reduction in other services directly impacted their service. A reduction in the number of people working in the community meant there was less chance of potential problems in households being identified at an early point. It would be useful if there was more education for those working out in the community to enable them to identify some of the warning signs so that help and support could be provided much earlier.

- Were staff in the Law Centre protected from threatening behaviour?

Mr Moran confirmed that the staff were protected as much as possible. All staff had received training on dealing with difficult individuals but it was felt important that the Law Centre remained as open as possible.

- A Member asked for clarification that those in receipt of disability payments would not be moving to Universal Credit straight away as there was potential for a reduction in their money.

Mr Byrne reported that those in receipt of Severe Disability Premiums would not naturally migrate to Universal Credit. 19 groups of clients had been identified as potentially requiring additional protection on Universal Credit, he added that all of the transactional parts of Universal Credit could be disposed of if the amount of Universal Credit was higher.

Mr Byrne also highlighted a change to the contract between the DWP and the Council's Customer Contact Centre. The DWP nationally had awarded the support contract to the Citizens Advice. This had not been a reflection of the work which Carlisle City Council had provided which had been excellent but it was a reflection of the support provided by other local authorities in the Country.

RESOLVED – 1) That Mr Byrne, Department for Works and Pensions and Mr Moran, Cumbria Law Centre be thanked for their attendance at the Panel;

2) That the Response to Welfare Reform report (GD.02/19) be received and the progress of the partnership be noted.

The meeting adjourned for a short break at 11.08am and reconvened at 11.11am.

Councillor Harid returned to the meeting.

HWSP.08/19 CARLISLE INTERAGENCY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-20

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager provided an update on key data and outcomes in relation to the Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015-20 priority areas (GD.03/19).

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager detailed the background and legislation for the Interagency Homelessness Strategy and outlined the four key priority areas for the strategy:

- 1) Appropriate flexible accommodation and support pathways
- 2) Multiple Exclusion Homelessness and rough Sleeping
- 3) Positive outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness
- 4) Prevent and relieve homelessness

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager highlighted the feedback set out in the report from stakeholders including My Space Housing, Cumbria Law Centre, Human Kind and Inspira.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager detailed the summary of year 1 – 3 key data along with a summary of key outcomes as attached to the report.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services drew the Panel's attention to the fact that no one had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation due to the excellent and diligent work of the team. In addition, the high level of performance detailed within in the report showed that the team were helping and supporting people which was the key priority of the Council. He thanked the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager and her team for their work.

The Panel echoed the comments of the Corporate Director in thanking the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager and her team.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager informed the Panel that the Council had made a commitment that, where possible, bed and breakfast accommodation would not be used as temporary accommodation. Government guidance stated that if bed and breakfast accommodation was used it should be for a maximum of six weeks and unfortunately some authorities were placing people in bed and breakfast accommodation for much longer periods of time. The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager felt that other temporary accommodation available from the Council was more appropriate as they offered support and advice to help individuals move to permanent accommodation.

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

- A Member asked for clarity regarding the difference between the rough sleeper figure of 0, and the No Second Night Out figure of 147.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager explained that the No Second Night Out had been the name of the pilot which had been introduced to reduce the number of rough sleepers in London. The scheme was used to help and support those that may become homeless if there was no intervention.

- The report was very informative and showed the excellent work that was being undertaken by the Council, yet the perception of the Council on social media and the Internet was very negative. Could the Council address this?

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services responded that it was very difficult for officers to respond to such comments. The work that was being carried out was excellent and the best thing that officers could do was continue to keep Members informed as they were the Council's representatives in the local community.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager added that the Partnership was a vital part of making sure that the right message was being communicated. Partners understood the work that was being carried out and were confident in letting people know when appropriate or necessary.

The Policy and Communications Manager reassured the Panel that should any factually incorrect items be released in the newspapers then the Council's Press Officer would ask for a correction. Unfortunately, the comments and social media pages had no moderation and people were free to express their opinion.

- Had the introduction of the referrals legislation changed the focus of the work to prevention work?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager explained that the team had always focused on prevention and it was good practice to do so. The new duty was aimed at reducing homelessness and the team had to alter the way that they worked to be prepared for the changes. There had been some challenges which had resulted in some services being managed in a different way, but the new legislation put some responsibility back on the individual or household to help engage them and prevent further issues.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services added that the duty to refer was important as the new Data Protection regulations stopped partners from sharing some information, the new duty meant the partners had to talk to each. He informed the Panel that in parallel to the work the team was undertaking the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Service had taken the lead on rehoming 49 Syrian refugees in Carlisle to date, which was a higher number than other authorities had taken in the rest of Cumbria.

- The report did not give any data on homelessness issues for ex-service people.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager confirmed that ex-service people were a priority and she agreed to circulate data to the Panel.

RESOLVED – 1) That the key data and outcomes in years one to three in relation to the priority areas within the Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015-20 and feedback on the partnership from stakeholders be noted. (GD.03/19).

2) That the Panel congratulated the Homeless Prevention and Accommodation Team on their dedication, compassion and commitment in helping the people of Carlisle who find themselves in extremely difficult circumstances.

3) That the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager provide further information on the support provided for ex-service people.

(The meeting ended at 12noon)