

People Panel

Date: Thursday, 06 October 2022

Time: 10:00

Venue: Flensburg Room

Present: Councillor Mrs Christine Finlayson, Councillor Colin Glover, Councillor Mrs Ann McKerrell, Councillor Tim Pickstone, Councillor Christopher Wills
Councillor Neville Lishman (for Councillor David Shepherd), Councillor Peter Sunter (for Councillor Miss Jeanette Whalen)

Also Present: Councillor Ellis - Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor Christian - Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mrs Mallinson - Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder

Officers: Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Policy and Communications
Homeless Services Manager
Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Ms Blake, Cumbria County Council
Ms Gill, Cumbria Refugee Action Group
Mr Byrne, Department of Work and Pensions

PEP.37/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor David Shepherd and Councillor Miss Jeanette Whalen.

PEP.38/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were submitted.

PEP.39/22 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

PEP.40/22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

PEP.41/22 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

PEP.42/22 UPDATE ON WORK TO SUPPORT REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM CARLISLE REFUGEE ACTION GROUP AND CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL

The Head of Policy and Communications submitted updates from Carlisle Refugee Action Group and Cumbria County Council on their work in supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Carlisle and Cumbria.

The Chair welcomed Ms Gill from Carlisle Refugee Action Group (CRAG) and Ms Blake from Cumbria County Council to the meeting.

Ms Gill and Ms Blake gave a presentation covering: the history of refugee settlement and asylum seeker dispersal in Cumbria; the different schemes and support available to different groups of migrants including the 'Homes for Ukraine' initiative; and the variety and scope of the activities undertaken by CRAG. Slides were displayed on screen showing a number of projects and activities delivered by CRAG.

In considering the presentation, Member raised the following questions and comments:

- What action could councillors take to support the work of those supporting refugees and asylum seekers?

Ms Blake noted that the Council already undertook work in the area through its community cohesion work. Partnership work across the public and third sectors was essential in providing support to refugees and asylum seekers. It was important that the learning and experience gained in the support work that was already been undertaken was taken forward into the two new unitary councils.

Ms Gill responded that the organisation was hoping that Carlisle would become a 'City of Sanctuary' and she hoped the Panel would support the endeavour as more information became available in the coming months. It would also be useful if Members were able to support activities such as Interfaith Meals. Ms Gill undertook to share more information about the City of Sanctuary scheme with the Panel.

- Given the tremendous amount of effort made to settle refugees and asylum seekers, what rationale or triggers made some move from Carlisle?

Ms Blake set out the difference in legal status between refugees and asylum seekers. Asylum seeker support was provided from central government and its partners which included an assessment of the right to remain in the UK, Cumbria County Council was not involved in that work.

Refugees were given a choice of where to be located within the UK and may choose to move locations. Ms Blake noted that had been a smaller than expected outflow from the county from those refugees who had chosen to reside in Cumbria.

- A Member sought clarification as to whether asylum seekers, subject of the Dispersal Scheme were entitled to work or claim benefits.

Ms Blake advised that in such cases work was not permitted but that a small level of government funding was provided. Third sector support for such cases was very important.

Ms Gill added that in some cases where an asylum seeker had skills in particular areas of work that they may be permitted to work after a period of time in the UK, and some were able to enrol on education courses. The uncertainty relating to the possibility of being relocated was challenging.

- How was the work of the various partners co-ordinated?

Ms Gill explained that there was a weekly meeting of groups across the county working to support asylum seekers, as well as regular meetings for those involved in supporting settled refugees.

- Where there any 'Unaccompanied Children' refugees in the county, and how were they supported?

Ms Blake advised that there was a scheme for unaccompanied children which Cumbria County Council led on. At the start of the process there had been challenges relating to placements, but there were now a number of individuals in the county. The government's 'Homes For Ukraine' scheme had 1,000 unaccompanied children to house nationally, some of whom had been housed in the city, efforts were being made to connect those individuals to the wider community.

- Were local businesses invited to give sponsorship support, for example, providing laptops or informal apprenticeships?

Ms Gill replied that such schemes could be difficult to operate, there were some laptop schemes available and that it was useful to be able to provide technology to families, it was important that was done on a fair basis.

The Panel discussed a local scheme which provided bicycles to refugees and asylum seekers.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder stated that he had been made aware of reports of an increase in anti-social behaviour connected to a particular site in the city which housed asylum seekers, and wished to know whether there had been an increase of crime in the area.

Ms Blake responded that there had been concerns raised about behaviour as well as concerns about the targeting of asylum seekers, Cumbria Constabulary would have the relevant data on crime statistics.

The Chair considered that it may be useful to look at the relevant statistics with a view to liaising with the Police and Crime Commissioner to identify solutions.

In summing up the presentation and discussion, the Chair considered that the item had been very useful in awareness raising for Members. The Panel's Work Programme had been kept deliberately light in the latter stages of the municipal year to enable the Panel feed information to Cumberland Council.

Members discussed what resolution the Panel wished to make in relation to developing 'City of Sanctuary' status.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Panel thanked Ms Blake and Ms Gill for their presentation.

2) That the Panel thanked Carlisle Refugee Action Group and all other groups, organisations and Officers involved in the support of refugees and asylum seekers.

3) That the Panel supported the principle of the ambition for Carlisle to become a 'City of Sanctuary'

The meeting adjourned at 11:10am and reconvened at 11:17am.

PEP.43/22 CARLISLE WELFARE REFORM BOARD

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An overview and update of the work of the Carlisle Welfare Reform Board was received the Panel (GD.58/22). The Chair welcomed the Mr Byrne, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to the meeting.

Mr Byrne gave a verbal presentation covering: the background to the Welfare Reform Board; the partners involved in the Welfare Reform Board; the changes to benefits and the implementation of Universal Credit (UC); how the Welfare Reform Board fed into government policy and practice; and, the types of support the DWP provided to benefits claimants.

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

- A Member congratulated Mr Byrne on the work of the Welfare Reform Board (WRB) and the DWP, she considered the focus on getting people into work helped to make society fairer.

Mr Byrne thanked the Member, he noted that job centre staff worked in a difficult environment. Some individuals had a sense of fear or resistance about attending the Job Centre, however, the role of the staff was to look at each individual's circumstances with view to providing the appropriate support to make being in work financially beneficial.

- Did drug culture and black market finance, for example loan sharks, interfere with efforts to get individuals into work?

Mr Byrne responded that such issues did affect and prevent people from being in work, the DWP worked with partners such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Unity drug and alcohol services to help address such matters for individuals. Such support was dependent on individuals notifying the Job Centre that they had such issues which some were reluctant to do.

The Chair noted the impact of debt on individual's mental health.

- Was the number of people classed as 'economically inactive' static or had it risen following the Covid 19 pandemic and was there a profile for individuals in that category?

Mr Byrne advised that the Local Enterprise Partnership was seeking to develop a profile and that the Cumbria Intelligence Observatory was assessing why those individuals were no longer economically active. The pandemic had increased the numbers, with poor physical or mental health often being a cause of people ceasing to be economically active as was childcare concerns, however, further research was needed to understand the full extent of the

issue.

- Was there a database of volunteering opportunities?

Mr Byrne confirmed that there was. He advised that there were currently 160 work experience opportunities in the district a significant portion of which were in the third sector which was a large employer in the district. Work experience was particularly valuable for young people as it provided both experience and a reference for those who participate. Mr Byrne described a number of individual cases where following participation in work experience placements, employment had been secured.

Mr Byrne indicated he would welcome a recommendation to promote Job Centre Services and encouragement to other employers to take advantage of its recruitment support tools.

The Chair responded that it may be useful to also take the matter up with the Local Enterprise Partnership.

- Would the Welfare Reform Board look to integrate with the new Cumberland Council?

Mr Byrne responded that the DWP would welcome a wider remit. Given the variety of issue across the different areas of Cumberland it was be useful to retain focus on individual areas. The DWP had recently developed a place based strategy for Carlisle.

The Chair asked who would be responsible for deciding whether the WRB were to continue?

Mr Byrne advised that the Council would decide whether the Board would continue.

The Chair thanked Mr Byrne for his presentation.

RESOLVED - That the Panel ask Officers to consider the future model for the Welfare Reform Board in light of Local Government Reorganisation.

PEP.44/22 REVENUE BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT - APRIL TO JUNE 2022

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources provided an overview of the Council's General Fund revenue budgetary position (RD.31/22) for the period April to June 2022 which had been considered by the Executive on 30 August 2022 (Minute Excerpt EX.112/22 referred).

Members' attention was drawn to page 38 of the document pack which contained a table setting out the variances in the Revenue Budget as at the end of June 2022. The Corporate Director gave an overview of the Council's loan interest, Minimum Revue Provision and external grants.

Regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), an Implementation Reserve had been set up to contribute to the funding of the work, the LGR Programme Director had latterly vacated the post thereby creating an underspend. Quarter 2 data would be provided to the Committee later in the year.

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

- What impact would the Local Government Pay award have on the revenue budget?

The Corporate Director responded that a 2% increase had been budgeted for, were the award to be greater than that consideration would need to be given to how it would be funded as well as the impact on Cumberland Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

- Referring to pages 40 and 52 of the document pack, the Chair noted the underspends in relation to Local Government Reorganisation, he asked whether the balance was required to support the ongoing process?

The Corporate Director reiterated that the LGR Programme Director was no longer in post, that matter had been dealt with by Cumbria County Council. The outturn position showed £400,000 reserve for LGR to enable the Council to meet any costs levied on it, that reserve was currently available, however, future decisions in respect of LGR may require that reserve to be utilised.

Referring to the Panel's Cost of Living Task and Finish Group, the Chair considered it may recommend actions to take. He noted the level of variances in the Revenue Budget were approximately £1M. and was minded to recommend that the Panel ask Officers and the Executive look at setting aside a substantial sum to meet initiatives made by recommendation of the Task and Finish Group, any funds not required would be used to create a reserve. A Member indicated that they would second the proposal.

The Corporate Director set out the relevant processes for such a request: for a spend of more than £35,000 a report to Executive would be required; a spend of more than £70,000 would require a report to Council.

The Chair asked if, in the event, of the Task and Finish Group recommending a spend in excess of £100,000 whether the Shadow Authority would need to be advised?

The Corporate Director considered that the Shadow Authority should be advised if such a level of spend were to be determined, she undertook to check whether the matter was covered by the Section 24 Direction.

The Chair of the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group stated that the Group had yet to itemise any potential initiatives, however, a potential area being considered was additional support for energy costs for those in the rural areas.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder noted that the report submitted to the Panel pertained to the first quarter of the financial year, given the existing inflationary pressures he cautioned against planning spending that may impact the budget in future quarters.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be thanked for her report (RD.31/22)

2) That the Panel request Officers and the Executive look into creating a reserve to be called on to address cost of living issues as advised by the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group.

PEP.45/22 CAPITAL BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT APRIL TO JUNE 2022

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources provided an overview of the budgetary position of the Council's capital programme for the period April to June 2022 (RD.32/22) which was considered by the Executive on 30 August 2022 (Minute Excerpt EX.114/22 referred).

Paragraph 3.1 of report set out the budget monitoring position as at June 2022. The Corporate Director gave an overview of the position in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants and the Sustainable Warmth grants schemes.

The Chair noted that there had been no spend in respect of the Sustainable Warmth grants, he

asked if it was likely to be spent? Furthermore, he noted that the deadline for bidding for the next round of funding was 27 January 2023, he questioned whether the Council would be likely to access additional funding if the current monies were not spent?

The Corporate Director undertook to provide a written response on the matter. The project was externally funded by the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), it was understood that re-profiling exercise was being undertaken. It was expected that if monies were not spent it would require to be returned to BEIS.

Regarding the next tranche of funding, the Corporate Director was aware that Officers were considering whether to submit a bid.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources be thanked for her report (RD.32/22)

2) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources circulate a written response to the Panel detailing whether, in the event of the Sustainable Warmth grant funding not being spent, that a bid for the next round of finding may be submitted.

PEP.46/22 EMERGENCY PLANNING – WINTER READINESS AND LGR PREPARATION

The Head of Policy and Communications provided an update on Emergency Planning, winter readiness and the related work in the LGR Programme. (PC.25/22).

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

- The Carlisle Community Resilience Forum had stepped down, what process was in place for community response?

The Head of Policy and Communications responded that the Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service had funded a Community Resilience Worker who had worked with a range of groups to develop proposals to consolidate and strengthen community resilience in Carlisle. The post was now look at how to sustain groups to be able to respond in the case of a crisis event. It was understood that a report on the matter was being developed which may be shared with the Panel upon its completion.

- The Environment Agency had some time ago signalled its intention to create a community engagement group, the Agency was due to deliver a presentation to the Place Panel on 13 October, were the Panel able to consider the matter?

The Head of Policy and Communications noted that the Environment Agency did wish to address the matter in its presentation to the Place Panel on 13 October 2022.

RESOLVED - That report PC.25/22 be received.

RESOLVED - That report PC.25/22 be received.

PEP.47/22 CARLISLE LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN (LCWIP) – ONE YEAR ON.

The Deputy Chief Executive presented an update on progress with the development and implementation of the Carlisle Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) (CS.30/22).

The LCWIP set out prioritised plans for the provision of enhanced cycling and walking routes in Carlisle. The Plan was prepared by the County Council with support from City Council Officers,

Key Stakeholder groups, and has been the subject of extensive public consultation. The approved plan would be an essential requirement when the Council bids for government funding for cycling and walking improvements.

The final draft of the LCWIP was approved by the County Council, Carlisle Local Committee on the 9th March 2022. A report, CS.14/22, was subsequently presented to the City Council Executive on the 21st March 2022 seeking endorsement of the report. The plan was endorsed, and the County Council are subsequently taking steps to action the plan. The appendices to this report provided details of the LCWIP.

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

- A Member expressed their support for the Plan. He felt it needed more added to the Plan, he asked what level of budget was available and how behavioural change would be supported, for example preventing cyclists riding bicycles on footpaths?

The Deputy Chief Executive welcomed the Member's comments and noted that the pandemic had increased levels of walking. Raising the profile of the LCWIP was important and he was minded to consider how behavioural change may be encouraged.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder added that the report contained maps setting out the Plan, he was aware Officers from the county council had walked all the shown routes and had confirmed all were achievable. The government had recently published new cycle route standards which would likely increase the cost of delivering the plan, there were various pots of money that would need to be lobbied for to fund the delivery. Installing appropriate infrastructure as well as encouraging behaviour change were both important and the Council would seek to encourage it. He hoped that in the future the routes in the plan would link up with public transport provision.

The Chair proposed a further update report be submitted to the Panel in the new year.

The Deputy Chief Executive undertook to provide a further report and suggested that it focus on the hierarchy of routes.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder noted that the Hadrian's Wall Partnership at a meeting today was considering imposing a 20mph speed limit in all villages on the Wall, and suggested that the matter also be considered in the future report.

The Chair welcomed the suggestion.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Panel welcome the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

2) That the Deputy Chief Executive submit a further update report to a future meeting of the Panel.

PEP.48/22 OVERVIEW REPORT

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.22/22 which gave an overview of matters relating to the People Panel. An update on the pending resolutions of the Panel was given.

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer had circulated as an addendum to the report notes of the meeting of the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group which had met on 5 October, it proposed a number of recommendations for the Panel to consider, set out as follows:

Funding information

1. That funding information is promoted more widely internally to within the city council and is given higher prominence in external communications (website and social media). Officers should also seek opportunities to engage with colleagues at sovereign councils that will become part of Cumberland in sharing funding information.

Signposting, information and support

2. That the City Council should add value to existing provision by offering short-term support to the following:
 - Offering designated officer support to groups that require information, signposting or publicity for opportunities they provide.
 - Supporting third-sector partners, such as community centres and parish halls, to open as 'Public Living Rooms'.
 - Funding a Warm Space Directory, designed and promoted to be accessible to target audiences.
 - Supporting CALC to co-ordinate and promote existing opportunities, and to share good practice across rural Parish Councils.

It is recommended that the Chair of the People Scrutiny Panel will write to CALC. The letter should make CALC Members aware that designated officer support is available to provide advice and signposting.

3. That promotional material be developed that can be disseminated through partner forums, rural networks and community noticeboards to highlight the information, support and signposting that the city council offers.

The Chair of the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group noted there were three timescales for responding to the cost of living issue: short, medium and long term, and that the circulated addendum set out a number of potential recommendations for the Panel to consider. He gave an overview of the issues the Group was considering.

The Chair of the People Panel considered that the proposed recommendations sought to build on the existing work of Officer activity.

The proposed recommendations were discussed and it was:

RESOLVED - 1) That funding information be promoted more widely internally to within the city council and that it be given higher prominence in external communications (website and social media). Officers should also seek opportunities to engage with colleagues at sovereign councils that will become part of Cumberland in sharing funding information.

2) That the City Council should add value to existing provision by offering short-term support to the following:

i) Offering designated officer support to groups that require information, signposting or publicity for opportunities they provide.

ii) Supporting third-sector partners, such as community centres and parish halls, to open as 'Public Living Rooms'.

iii) Consider the development of a Warm Space Directory, designed and promoted to be accessible to target audiences.

iv) Supporting CALC to co-ordinate and promote existing opportunities, and to share good practice across rural Parish Councils.

3) That the Portfolio Holder be asked to CALC to make its members aware that designated officer support is available to provide advice and signposting.

4) That promotional material be developed that can be disseminated through partner forums, rural networks and community noticeboards to highlight the information, support and signposting that the city council offers.

The Meeting ended at: 13:05