

# Report to Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Agenda  
Item:  
**A.2**

Meeting Date: 9 April 2015  
Portfolio: Economy, Enterprise and Housing  
Key Decision: No  
Within Policy and Budget Framework: Yes  
Public / Private: Public

Title: RIVERSIDE CUMBRIA  
Report of: The Director of Economic Development  
Report Number: ED 18/15

**Purpose / Summary:** Content for this report has been prepared by Riverside Cumbria and provides Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel with an update in respect of a number of issues raised by Members of the Panel, following the previous report on 31 July 2014.

**Recommendations:** Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel are invited to ask questions and comment on the contents of the report prepared by Riverside Cumbria.

## Tracking

Executive:	
Overview and Scrutiny:	
Council:	

## **1. BACKGROUND**

**1.1** Following Riverside's attendance at Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel in July 2014, Members of the Panel had requested updates from Riverside on the following subject areas:-

- Longtown maintenance update - including outcomes of the BRE report (the Executive Summary of the BRE report is included as *Appendix 1*)
- Riverside's capital programme within Carlisle District
- Welfare Reform
- The customer satisfaction report (provided as *Appendix 2*).

Additionally, Riverside were asked whether a representative from the Tenant Scrutiny Board could attend the Panel. It has been confirmed that Ian Haywood, Chair of Riverside's Tenant Scrutiny Panel will be able to attend.

The text in sections 1.2 to 1.6 has been provided by Riverside Cumbria

### **1.2 Longtown maintenance update (including outcome of the BRE report)**

Riverside are currently undertaking the following works at Longtown:-

- Installing „I Boost' diverters to the electric boiler systems. These divert the electricity generated by the PV (photovoltaic) panels to the heating system.
- Servicing & remedial works are being carried out to all systems. Remedial work includes installing thermostatic radiator valves, upgrading pipe lagging and setting systems up to tenants' requirements.
- Installing external wall insulation to Moor Road (flats) & Raefield (all flats & 3 houses) total 36 properties. This work also includes installing new PVC windows, communal front and rear doors.
- Brick built bin stores are being constructed to Moor Road flat blocks in order to remove the bins being stored at the front communal area of the property.
- Environmental improvements are being carried out to the rear of Moor Road flat blocks which will included the installation of fencing.

Last year Riverside Director Dean Butterworth held a meeting with Longtown tenants to go through the outcome of the BRE report and explain the subsequent improvements which would be carried out.

The BRE Report is 75 pages long, so only the Executive Summary has been included in this report as *Appendix 1*. However, the full BRE Report, together with a supporting *PowerPoint* presentation, on Longtown Heating systems can be accessed via the following link:-

[http://riverside.org.uk/north\\_west/cumbria/events/event\\_list/bre\\_investigation\\_into\\_longtown.aspx](http://riverside.org.uk/north_west/cumbria/events/event_list/bre_investigation_into_longtown.aspx)

The conclusions of BRE's presentation are:-

- Riverside have provided tenants with a modern whole house central heating system providing higher comfort & convenience.
- No mains gas in Longtown means that more expensive electricity has to be used instead of gas.
- Air source heat pumps (ASHPs) use electricity very efficiently (provide 2x to 3x the energy) but not suitable for all houses.
- Electric boilers are usually cheaper to run on E10 tariff.
- Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels provide tenants with some free electricity but the amount may be increased by fitting Power Diverters.
- Further investment in insulation and help in setting controls and choosing best tariffs will reduce tenants' energy costs.

Subsequent to the BRE report each of the tenants referred to in this report have had a visit from an independent consultant from Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAFS) offering free advice regarding their heating system and heating tariffs.

In addition to the independent advice, Riverside has now appointed an Affordable Warmth Officer whose role is to assist tenants in achieving the most efficient use of their heating systems. Many of the Longtown tenants have already benefitted from the advice provided.

### **1.3 Riverside Cumbria Capital Programme – New Development**

#### **Overview of 2014-15 schemes handed over in Carlisle**

- 11 properties in Borland Avenue
- 11 properties (including 1 refurbishment) at St Elizabeth's Close, Harraby (formerly Arnside Court)
- 21 properties in Thomlinson Avenue, Raffles

- 37 properties in Dalton Avenue, Raffles
- We have also purchased 8 Section 106 units from Persimmon at Teasdale Place, Denton Holme
- Total properties delivered within Carlisle City Council within the year 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 is 88.

### **Overview of 2015-16 schemes planned so far in Carlisle**

- Riverside have secured planning permission for 18 units at the site adjacent to the Border Terrier public house in Morton
- We have planning permission for 13 units at Longtown at Lochinvar Close
- The above will have a start on site no later than July 2015 and will be handed over prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016
- We also have 7 further Section 106 units to take at Teasdale Place that will be completed by August 2015
- Riverside Cumbria is continuing to work up a pipeline of further schemes; although it is too early to discuss any specific sites at this point. These represent reasonable sized sites that would start on site 2015-16 with a view to hand over 2016-17.

### **1.4 Riverside Cumbria Capital Programme – Existing Stock**

For the **2014/15 Programme** Riverside have undertaken the following works:-

- It should be noted that the capital programme for 2014/15 is primarily re-roofing works - 439 roof renewals have been completed: the majority of which are within the Raffles, Wigton Road and Belah neighbourhoods.
- Replacement of 90 external double-glazed security doors.
- Kitchen and bathroom replacements: approximately 50 combined
- Continuation of the „bathroom on stilts’ refurbishment programme - now in its third year with a further 24 properties completed. (Bathroom-on-stilts are first floor bathroom extensions supported by steel stanchions built circa 1980s works include upgrading the thermal efficiency of the wall structure, new flat roof, repairs to steel structure and removal of asbestos containing materials).
- Additional budget from Group of £1million, of which £670,000 has been spent on Public Realm projects – 16 schemes have benefitted from upgrading unadopted roads, and improving footpaths and parking areas to the wider community in our customer neighbourhoods.

- £105,000 spent upon our Green Spaces – 29 schemes across various neighbourhoods with a „spend to save’ theme; thereby reducing our long term maintenance costs by upgrading and installing protection measures to our planted schemes.
- £150,000 spent upon providing external boundary fencing and hedging to our bungalow communal areas to tackle the issues highlighted by our customers: i.e. increased sense of security and wellbeing to our elderly customers; reducing neighbourhood nuisance.
- Upgrading existing shared paths to 70 properties on Raffles to provide each property their own access which has promoted ownership to tenants; leading to a reduction in fly-tipping and dumping of abandoned furniture, especially to front gardens with shared paths.

For the up-coming **2015/16 Programme**:-

- The majority of the budget is allocated to a continuation of the re-roofing programme, which is programmed to replace 300 roofs at Belah, Petteril Bank, Upperby, and Raffles.
- Continuation of the bathroom on stilts refurbishment programme with 34 homes programmed at Currock, Petteril Bank, and Upperby.
- External upgrade schemes to Greengarth, Upperby and Moor Crescent, Longtown; including insulation, remedial wall repairs, render, installing new windows and re-roofing.
- Garden fencing works to Currock and Raffles neighbourhoods.

## **Aids & Adaptations**

Riverside Cumbria continues to fund all Major Adaptations costing under £7,000, for its customers. For those costing over this amount a DFG (Disabled Facilities Grant) application is made to Carlisle City Council. Riverside make a contribution of up to £7,000 towards the cost of the grant funded cases. In 2014/15 the number of adaptations completed to date is 81 with a further 6 due for completion by 31st March 2015.

- Of the key adaptations undertaken, by the end of March 2015, we will have installed 35 wet rooms/level access showers and 38nr over bath showers.
- We have relocated 2 families living in unsuitable accommodation, saving £4,200 and we have 3 relocations due to complete by mid-April with a potential saving of a further £11,900.

## **1.5 Welfare Reform**

The main issue of concern lies with the introduction of Universal Credit. Currently this is only affecting new claimants. Riverside Cumbria has 18 cases with total arrears of £14920.90. This averages out at £828.94 per customer. This compares with an average figure for all other customers who are in arrears of £369.60.

The process of application for Universal Credit relies heavily on the claimant providing information and managing this process carefully. A process also exists to initiate managed payments which are paid to the landlord however payments take up to six weeks to come through and these may be sporadic and credits are not necessarily for the full period required.

Riverside Group had identified specific members of staff to act as „Champions’, to support customers and colleagues dealing with Universal Credit claims. Further assessment is ongoing to evaluate the impact on tenants and the Riverside long term business plan. For the Cumbria division we anticipate an increase in the numbers of arrears cases as the number of new claimants escalates. At this stage it is difficult to assess how many new claims will be made over the forthcoming months.

## 1.6 Tenant Scrutiny and Customer Satisfaction

Riverside undertakes an annual customer satisfaction survey. The results of the next survey are due in May 2015. Figures for the last two years have remained fairly static and the last survey was somewhat scaled down from previous years.

Riverside Group has provided some national benchmarking for the Annual Report to tenants 2014:-

Question	Our result	Best	Average	Worst
Overall satisfaction with landlord	83%	96%	84%	69%
Satisfaction in taking tenant views into account	60%	90%	69%	56%
Repairs and maintenance	77%	93%	80%	64%
Neighbourhood as a place to live	83%	92%	84%	71%
VFM of service charges	61%	85%	69%	56%
VFM of rent	73%	91%	79%	66%

The Riverside Cumbria Tenant Scrutiny Group undertook a survey of tenants within the Cumbria division in 2014. The group prepared a report which highlights the purpose and outcomes of this survey. The Scrutiny group provided information which was more qualitative in nature; this was the first major project for the group, the results of which were presented to Riverside Board members and Managers.

Riverside's Tenant Scrutiny Report on Customer Satisfaction 2013/14 is included as *Appendix 2*.

**2. PROPOSALS**

**2.1 N/A**

**3. CONSULTATION**

**3.1 N/A**

**4. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

**4.1 N/A**

**5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES**

**5.1** The joint working between Carlisle City Council and Riverside Cumbria contributes to the Carlisle Plan priorities of developing effective partnerships and addressing Carlisle's housing needs.

**Contact Officer: Jeremy Hewitson**

**Ext: 7519**

**Appendices Yes**  
**attached to report:**

**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:**

- **None**

**CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS/RISKS:**

**Chief Executive's -**

**Community Engagement –**

**Economic Development –**

**Governance –**

**Local Environment –**

**Resources -**



## ***Appendix 1: BRE Investigation into Longtown Heating Systems***

### ***Executive Summary***

Riverside has approximately 175 properties in Longtown comprising a mix of houses, bungalows and flats. New heating systems were installed about 18 months ago to replace solid fuel systems of storage heaters. Since the area does not have a mains gas the new systems were either electric air source heat pumps (ASHPs) or electric flow boilers. The properties also had solar photovoltaic (PV) panels installed.

Some tenants have complained about high heating costs. This has led to high profile media and MP involvement. The media has in some cases confused the high heating costs with the solar PV.

Riverside commissioned BRE to provide an independent report to address a number of questions regarding the installations, including whether the new heating systems are fit for purpose, are the running costs (electricity bills) reasonable or not, and whether the PV installations are linked to the problems with the heating systems.

Two BRE experts undertook a site visit and inspection of five representative properties on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014. This report presents the results of these surveys and BRE's opinion on the appropriateness of the heating systems and whether the solar PV systems are in any way linked to the heating problems.

In BRE's opinion the choice of electricity as fuel is reasonable considering that the area does not have main gas but does mean that the use of electric boilers will be relatively expensive to run. ASHPs should consume around half the electricity of the electric boilers and have similar running costs to mains gas-fired boilers but for practical reasons it was not possible to install them in all properties. The main alternatives are stored fuel systems based on LPG or heating oil. These are also expensive fuels whose price can also fluctuate significantly. There are also practical as well as security and maintenance reasons why they are less suitable and therefore not recommended as alternatives.

The cost of running the electric boiler heating systems may be reduced by around 20% by the tenants switching to an Economy 10 tariff. There is also evidence that initial high running costs was in at least one case caused by inappropriate thermostat temperature and timer settings. BRE recommends that Riverside provides guidance and assistance on switching tariffs and appropriate temperature and programmer time settings. In some cases tamperproof thermostats should be considered.

Additional running cost savings may also be made by further energy efficiency improvements and some are already planned by Riverside. However, in these older properties individual

measures such as wall insulation and new windows generally only provide relatively modest savings.

BRE can confirm that the PV installations are not linked to any problems with the heating systems and should slightly reduce the tenants' electricity bills.

BRE found that the solar PV systems in the five properties inspected were configured and correctly wired to supply some electricity to the properties during the hours of daylight, with any power produced over and above the demand being „spilled' onto the electricity grid. One system was non-functional on the day of BRE's inspection. This fact was reported to Riverside who have confirmed to BRE that this fault has now been repaired.

A limitation in the existing PV systems is that they can only provide relatively small reductions in the tenants' electrical heating bills. The simple reason for this is that the main heating demand is in the winter months, when the output of the PV is lowest due to low light levels and shorter days. The PV output is highest on sunny days when the heat requirement tends to be lowest.

BRE recommends that the benefit to the tenants from the solar PV systems may be improved by fitting an output power diverter unit, which can divert any excess electricity generated by the solar system to the immersion heater. Only when the hot water is up to the set temperature would the excess power be exported to the grid. Under current rules such an arrangement would not affect the level of feed-in tariff paid.

## ***Appendix 2: Riverside Scrutiny Report on Customer Satisfaction 2013/14 (September 17<sup>th</sup> 2014)***

### **Summary**

The Scrutiny Panel after discussion chose to scrutinise customer satisfaction. The Panel is composed of tenants who are representative of most of the neighbourhoods in and around Carlisle

The Panel chose to scrutinise customer satisfaction following the publication of the STARS survey for 2012 which showed a drop of 2% (from 85%) for 2011 in the level of customer satisfaction within the Riverside Cumbria Division.

### **Overall Aims and Objectives**

The scrutiny effected by the Panel aimed to ascertain the cause/es and any significant factors which might have materially affected customer satisfaction rates and produce a report and recommendations to the Divisional Board and the business in order to improve those levels of satisfaction.

### **Introduction**

The Panel, now comprising thirteen tenant members and representative of eight of our neighbourhoods has met monthly on fifteen occasions during 2013/14.

Evidence for scrutiny was provided by examination of documentation and systems in use within the business, through interviews and discussions with staff and most importantly through Panel members conducting a doorstep survey of tenants on sixteen of our neighbourhoods in and around Carlisle. The spreadsheet linked to this report details the results of that survey.

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## **Materials and methods**

### **Interviews of Staff and Selected Tenants**

A sub group of Panel members was formed and discussed with staff the likely causes of a reduction in customer satisfaction. A selected number of tenants who had experienced problems were interviewed. This process permitted the group to discuss, review and evaluate their findings reporting back to the full Panel.

### **Shadowing staff**

A number of Panel members shadowed staff directly involved with tenants; these included front line reception, repairs, allocations and payment of rents. Opportunities were taken to observe front office staff engaging with several customer issues including allocations, repairs and rent queries.

### **Desktop Review**

A sub group of Panel members was provided with unlimited access to all paper documents and forms currently in use within the division relating to complaints. The Panel were advised that complaints were tracked and controlled using the Division's computer system. Complaints in general related to quality of repairs to properties and rechargeable repairs levied against tenants on vacating a property. These permitted the group to discuss, review and evaluate the content and again report back to the full Panel.

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### **Survey of Tenants**

Panel members undertook a doorstep survey of tenants around sixteen of the Division's neighbourhoods in and around Carlisle including some rural areas between March and July 2014.

Questions asked related to tenants' satisfaction with the service received from Riverside (including comments where appropriate), tenant's awareness of their designated housing officer, length of tenancy, whether or not they read the Tenant's Newsletter, preferred method of communication and an assessment of age grouping.

The spreadsheet linked to this report outlines the range of responses given by tenants. Panel members designed the questionnaire which asked the same questions of all tenants interviewed in order to assess their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

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### **Main body/findings**

The Division being concerned over the apparently significant drop in customer satisfaction rates influenced our decision and the processes used to scrutinise this issue.

The Panel met between May 2013 and July 2014 with two joint meetings with the Divisional Board in August 2013 and May 2014.

A small group of Panel members held a „brainstorming session’ with staff representatives from the Stock and Contract teams during November 2013. The session was focussed on their views relating to likely causes of customer dissatisfaction and any influencing factors.

Team members responded to two questions posed by Panel members – “Why do you think customer satisfaction levels have dropped?” and “Should the specification for re-letting properties be reviewed?”

Responses expressed by the Teams focussed on cost, budgetary constraints, higher tenant expectations, fewer building inspectors and time constraint pressures; level of current voids and new heating and/or power technology. The last two points were specific to the Division’s properties at Longtown.

The interviews with staff and selected tenants were conducted in the Boardroom, Carlisle. A number of issues from these interviews were highlighted including renovation of estate properties, installation, maintenance and repair of heating boilers, quality of new fitted kitchens and inconsistent response from staff contacted by tenants with problems. Some tenants are upset that promises made in relation to stock improvements during the transfer of housing stock from the local authority to Riverside Cumbria have not been kept.

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Panel members felt that this issue was purely tenant’s perception, with no evidence to support it; however lack of communication relating to this, by the Division, appears to be the main problem.

Adaptations to properties cause confusion with tenants who are uncertain as to which agency is actually responsible resulting in the blame inevitably being levelled at Riverside.

The use of customer satisfaction cards was inconsistent but has historically been productive in assisting the business to accurately monitor customer satisfaction on an ongoing basis. Additionally it was noted that where work was accessible (i.e. outside the building) workmen were not making the customer aware that work had been done, resulting in complaints of non-attendance.

There were apparent problems with the use of the „pod’ system, using prefabricated components, as utilised at Stonegarth and there is a notable problem relating to the installation and use of solar panels, specifically at Longtown. This last issue is the subject of a separate piece of work within the Division.

These pieces of scrutiny highlighted the lack of up to date accurate tenant contact details held within the division.

Shadowing of in house repair staff highlighted issues related to the size of areas covered by some individuals, lack of effective contact between repair staff and the stock management team. On the whole Panel members were impressed with positive attitude apparent among the actual repair teams.

The desktop review included examination and review of documentation in use during the period of scrutiny and discussion with staff involved with the control, monitoring and resolution of customer complaints within the Division. It was noted that the new Customer

Relations Management system was imminent (and has now been installed) and that at the time of interview only one person was responsible for all aspects of complaints.

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Scrutiny of documentation, included tenant starter packs, new tenant agreement booklets, assured tenant agreement booklets, nationally published reports, customer complaint files, service pledges, communication standards and information leaflets presently in use plus the use of customer satisfaction cards.

Findings from the desktop review were discussed fully by the sub group and the full Panel and recommendations formulated.

The doorstep survey of tenants carried out by Panel members revealed a wide ranging number of responses to questions relating to their views on the service received from Riverside Cumbria and additional questions useful to the panel and the business.

Riverside homes in almost all of the local areas were covered with the aim of meeting or exceeding the „magic number’ of 400 responses; in the end the Panel collected 762 responses.

The results show that 563 tenants are satisfied overall. Of the remainder, 116 tenants said that their problems were unresolved at the time of the survey.

Of the 762 tenants interviewed, 601 said they read the Tenant’s Newsletter.

The spreadsheet linked to this report provides the business with the opportunity to extract and utilise data relevant to each department. Panel members expressed their personal opinion that the doorstep survey exercise had been one of the most important and significant aspects of this piece of scrutiny, providing „hands on’ education and familiarisation with customer service issues and tenant’s views.

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### **Conclusion**

Scrutiny based on all of the information obtained resulted in a number of areas where the Panel felt confident in making recommendations. At the request of the Divisional Board, four primary submissions were presented in May 2014 on the grounds that they were „quick hits’ which the business could utilise and assimilate quickly and effectively.

Communication in its’ many forms was felt by the Panel to be the single most contributory factor to tenant dissatisfaction, since every area of scrutiny highlighted communication, either between departments or between staff and tenants was often less than ideal.

It was felt that the experience of connecting with customers directly showed that this was the most invaluable and useful tool in this and future scrutiny work.

### **Recommendations**

Four primary submissions were presented to the Divisional Board in May 2014 relating to the re-introduction of customer satisfaction response cards, the re-heading of the customer complaints and comments and compliments forms, the rewording of the transfer notice inspection form and the setting up of a process to capture and continually update customer details at all points of contact. Details of the evidence and Panel judgements relating to these submissions have already been circulated and presented.

**The Scrutiny Panel additionally recommends –**

1. The spreadsheet data linked to this report be utilised by the business at the earliest opportunity.
2. Communications between departments and between departments and customers be reviewed and improved at the earliest opportunity.
3. Doorstep surveys as the most effective means of connecting with and capturing customer's views.
4. Tighter control of complaints and repairs should be continued on an ongoing basis.

## References

# Scrutiny Tool Document

## Carlisle Tenant report 2012

## Assured Tenancy Agreement April 2010

## Starter Tenancy Agreement April 2010

Sign Up Pack (getting started in your home) February 2013

## Transfer Notice Inspection Form

## STAR Surveys 2012 and 2013

## Findings from the Focus groups on the performance and communication with Riverside

Carlisle – Laura Chadwick and Maria Mendez - January 2013

Customer feedback on contact with Riverside Carlisle (authors as above) November 2013

Our Service Pledge leaflet April 2009

Making a Comment or Complaint leaflet April 2013

## Divisional Customer Complaint files – current

Riverside Communication Standards document – current

Comments and Compliments form December 2009

## Acknowledgements

Sean Crossley, Riverside Cumbria

Judith Falder, Riverside Cumbria

Sue Taylor-Gage, Riverside Cumbria

## Repair teams, Riverside Cumbria

Stock and Contract Team representatives, Riverside Cumbria

## Appendices/Links

Spreadsheet data from doorstep survey of tenants  
Tenant's Survey form 2014  
Copies of Minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel

# COMMUNICATION

**Is the message that is understood**

**We cannot, not communicate**