

Meeting Date: 13 September 2022

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **People Panel Chair's Report – Councillor Colin Glover**

The July meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel focused on the growing impact of the cost-of-living crisis and received evidence from organisations who are at the forefront of providing support. In addition to the financial impact, it is clear that the mental health impact is causing significant concern. The Panel agreed to establish a task and finish group to carry out more detailed investigation into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations for consideration by the Council's Executive and Cumberland Council. The group is in the process of being established.

Food Security

We received a comprehensive update from the Chair of Carlisle Foodbank. Since it was set up twelve years ago, the need for support has continued to grow and current demand has almost doubled since January 2022. The pressures have been compounded by reductions in donated food and the Foodbank has needed to utilise limited financial resources to purchase food to meet the current level of demand. There is concern that this isn't sustainable in the longer term.

The impact of the covid pandemic and lockdown led to new foodbank and affordable food outlets being established and the establishment of a Food Security Network to try to better coordinate the response and bring organisations together, rather than competing for the limited resources. Council Officers will provide further support to the Food Security Network to ensure appropriate referral systems and make best use of resources.

Citizens Advice Carlisle & Eden

Citizens Advice services are under increasing pressure, particularly with regard to increased demand for debt advice and significant increases in energy costs which it is anticipated will rise further in October and again early in 2023 to unmanageable levels. The CAB Carlisle & Eden CEO outlined that existing debt advice aims to maximise income, assist with budgeting and agree creditor payment arrangements utilising any

remaining funds in the family budget. However, increasingly even clients' basic expenditure exceeds income and there is nothing left to deal with debts. There are also increasing numbers of younger people seeking assistance and families with household income of up to £30,000 are experiencing financial difficulty and seeking CAB help. There has been an increase in the numbers of people presenting with mental health difficulties and the CAB is working with MIND and other partners to provide a holistic approach.

The Council has provided financial support to CAB for many years, and it is hoped that Cumberland Council will continue this valuable support. It was noted that the grant has not received an uplift for a number of years and given the unprecedented increase in demand for assistance at the current time, the Panel agreed to ask the Council's Executive to consider providing CAB Carlisle & Eden with additional financial support to meet the urgent needs of local people.

Cumbria County Council Cost of Living Programme

The Cumbria County Council Strategic Policy & Scrutiny Advisor provided members with a helpful update on work being done by Cumbria County Council to support residents facing cost of living issues. There is evidence of increased poverty with the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit for over a year, rising significantly from 2,800 in May 2020 to 9,211 in February 2022. The increase in food prices and utility bills is disproportionately impacting on lower income households as food and energy costs make up a higher proportion of their total household expenditure. Similarly lower income households in rural areas are being particularly hit by the costs of vehicle fuel and oil for home heating. Cumbria County Council provides signposting to cost of living support and this can be found at <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/costofliving/default.asp>

Thriving Communities

The panel received an excellent presentation on the success of the first phase of the Thriving Communities programme. Thriving Communities Carlisle aims to deliver Healthy City outcomes with an emphasis on people impacted by loneliness and isolation. The programme has developed a network of social prescribing partnerships and activities and it has made a positive difference to the lives of participants. The programme has delivered excellent outcomes for people and the Panel welcomed the provision of funding to extend the work through 2022/23. It is hoped that the evidence and positive outcomes of Thriving Communities can be used to inform and extend the work under the Cumberland Council.

Overview Report

Discussions have taken place with the Chair of the Place Panel with regard to transferring some operational elements of housing to the People Panel for scrutiny purposes. This could include homelessness, housing advice and support and empty properties, standards and improvements, to be agreed in due course by both the People and Place Scrutiny Panels.