

Report to: Council

Agenda
Item

Meeting Date: 13 November 2012

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Communities & Housing Portfolio Holder's Report –
Councillor Jessica Riddle**

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Community Centres

Following the report of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group looking at Community Centres, officers are looking at ways to further engage with the community centres. Centres have been advised that legal advice and support is available to them through the Community Matters network. In addition officers will be available to attend regular meetings with the centre managers and will work with the centres to attract young people onto management committees.

Carlisle Community Neighbours

External funding has been secured by the Wellbeing Team to recruit a Community Neighbours Co-ordinator. The Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating the provision of a Community Neighbours Scheme for vulnerable older people throughout Carlisle. The scheme would use volunteers to provide support to older people in a number of ways. Nothing complicated, just a quick hello to check they are ok, or if they were visiting the shops, is there anything their neighbour needed. In addition the post holder will make appropriate links with the Community Centres, health and social care teams as well as the third sector and other agencies to develop appropriate activities for older people in line with the Mrs Carlisle agenda.

HOUSING

Enforcement

A joint operation between the City Council, police, fire services and the Border Agency resulted in the successful prosecution of a landlord (Mr Alam) for offences relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation. Mr Alam pleaded guilty and received a hefty fine of £8,100.

Home Improvement Agency

Carlisle's Home Improvement Agency has been offered the Sanctuary scheme contract by Cumbria Constabulary. The scheme, which at present is not available in the north of the County, works to ensure that victims of domestic violence can remain in their own homes, retaining links with schools and communities and preventing homelessness. The Home Improvement Agency will receive referrals for the scheme. The new service is expected to be up-and-running by the end of November.

Carlisle's Home Improvement Agency has also been awarded £32,000 by the NHS joint Commissioning Board to fund a housing options caseworker for 12 months. The funding is part of the development of an integrated pilot to help older people remain independent at home for as long as possible. The new service is expected to launch later this year or early next year.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Customer Contact Centre

The amount of customers presenting for queries on Housing & Council Tax Benefits in the Customer Contact Centre is already rising steadily in advance of welfare reform implementation. Our records indicate a large increase in the number of customers from abroad. Many customers are also worried about the forthcoming changes in legislation and how it will affect them. An action plan is ongoing to mitigate the increase and change in the customer base accessing Contact Centre services. This will include training, supporting the frontline staff team and effective interagency working.

REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES

A major piece of customer consultation across all the authorities in the Revenues & Benefit Shared Service has reached a conclusion, the response rate has been high and reports will feed into the new Localised Support for Council Tax scheme, which proposes no substantive change for recipients in the first year (2013/4). Details of the draft scheme are available on the Council's website via this link www.carlisle.gov.uk/lsc

COMPACT

Work continues to implement the Compact action plan and integrate good practice across the Council. This includes raising awareness of the Compact with councillors, officers and community engagement partners, in partnership with Cumbria Voluntary Services. Information will be provided at targeted events and training is under development for the Council's learning and development programme. There are plans to update the next version of the Procurement Strategy with a section on the Compact and agreements with Voluntary and Community organisations.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Operation Roman Candle is a two week multi-agency event designed to reduce anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and deliberate fires throughout the autumn period.

Officers from Carlisle City Council, Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire and Rescue will work together to tackle the seasonal increase in incidents.

The operation is due to commence on Friday 26th October, starting with an event in Botchergate to address safety in the night time economy and promoting public safety. Alongside this event a number of additional measures will be introduced to address public concerns.

Problem Solving Groups

The Carlisle East and City West PSG's (Problem Solving Group) continues to work well and provide early interventions to ensure a quick response to community issues.

PSG Performance Monitoring	City West (March 2011 -)	Carlisle East (March 2012 -)
Total number of actions dealt with	120	35

Annual Community Safety Conference

On Saturday 6th October 2012 the Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch Association in conjunction with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership held a joint conference to showcase some of the projects that are delivered in our area that demonstrate how partnership working can improve community safety.

The programme included presentations from Mary Robinson, Chair of the CDRP, Dr John Perkins, Chair of Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch, Superintendant Sean Robinson, Mark Clement, Safer Communities Manager and Carolyn Otley, Cumbria Third Sector Network Co-ordinator and reflected the excellent work that continues to be delivered in our communities regardless of what problems we are faced with on a daily basis, both locally and nationally.