

PORTFOLIO:

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Report of
Portfolio Holder:

COUNCILLOR R BLOXHAM

HOUSING & HEALTH ITEMS

1. Decisions Taken by the Portfolio-Holder

I can report that in the period in question I have not taken any delegated decisions in respect of the Council's Health and Well-Being Portfolio.

2. Issues Arising from LSVT

After what was by any standard a close result in the ballot of tenants on the proposal to transfer, after discussion the Executive at its meeting on 12 August decided to back the expressed majority view of tenants and proceed with the transfer.

The size of the turnout (at just under 68%) was most encouraging and I am pleased with the outcome as I feel that it is in the best interests of our tenants. Despite continued conjecture by Government, on possible changes to the treatment of Councils' housing finances at some point in the future, I can still see no evidence of a viable alternative to LSVT that guarantees the levels of increased investment that the tenants of Carlisle will now see.

A period of even more intense work is now required to fill in all the necessary details on the transfer proposal between CHA, and ourselves before a formal proposal is put to special Council on 24 October 2002 to apply to the ODPM for consent to transfer.

3. Raffles Redevelopment

Following the very successful first round of public consultations on the draft plans in May 2002, the four partners in this project have been working hard to refine and improve on these.

A further round of consultations on the second stage plans commenced at the end of August and I understand that the level of interest on the estate has continued to be high.

The overall process remains on timetable so the Council should as expected be in a position to receive final proposals to consider around November 2002.

The further we take this exciting process, the more my confidence grows that we could at last have a long-term sustainable future for this important area of the City.

4. Homelessness

The new Homelessness Act, implemented in part in July 2002 brings about some significant changes to the way that Councils must both plan for and assess the needs of homeless persons.

While it is yet too soon to assess the extent to which the extended duties placed on Councils by the Act have started to impact, all indications are that the effect could be significant, particularly in areas where shortages of rented accommodation already exist.

Part of the new duty includes a requirement to draft, consult on, adopt and monitor a formal Homelessness Strategy for the district. In Cumbria the 6 districts have taken the innovative step of seeking to collaboratively produce a unified county-level strategy for the area and I hope we will see the first draft of this in the autumn.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

Recent Government Legislation within environmental services has put additional pressure upon the department. There are a number of changes and target setting that will increase the workload of the section. The external pressure from the Food Standards Agency and the Health and Safety Executive are but two examples.

FOOD SAFETY

Due to the full complement of staff in the Food Safety Section the inspection rate has improved significantly. The first quarter this year saw 91% of high risk and 96% of all other food premises inspected. Compared to 62% and 68% respectively in the third quarter of last year. This goes to show that set targets do not allow for absences of staff for any reason.

From Customer Satisfaction Surveys, it is quite clear that 94% of premises would like recognition for achieving high standards. To this end we will be launching a "Healthy Eating Award" covering hygiene as well as healthy eating menus and smoke free areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

We are seeing an increase in abandoned vehicles of late. For the past two months this has been running at over 13 per week a 30% increase over the past 18 months. Although the law has changed to enable a speedier response it has done nothing to reduce the number abandoned, nor have the changes made it easier to hold the previous owner responsible, although such changes were promised they have up to now not materialised.

More cars are being burnt out to hide the identification meaning they have to be removed with specialist equipment and increased costs, just over £13,000 in the last financial year.

There has also been an increased demand for the services of our Pest Control Unit, the mild winter seems to have led to an increase in the vermin and pests. Rodent and insect treatment is running at high levels, making it difficult to meet the 48 hour response rate.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Energy Efficiency Advice Centre based within this department has achieved some notable successes. Most notably Carlisle is one of the few authorities in the North to meet the Government target of 30% improvement in energy efficiency.

The Council's Housing Strategy will have to address the unfit homes problem identified by the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey. There will be a report for the Executive at a later date on the new funding arrangements for home improvement, a scheme to replace the grant scheme currently in operation.