



People Panel

Date: Thursday, 14 July 2022

Time: 10:05

Venue: Flensburg Room

Present: Councillor Mrs Christine Finlayson, Councillor Colin Glover, Councillor Mrs Ann McKerrell, Councillor Mrs Linda Mitchell, Councillor Tim Pickstone (until 1.00pm), Councillor David Shepherd, Councillor Christopher Wills, Councillor Pamela Birks (for Councillor Miss Jeanette Whalen)

Also Present: Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder
Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder
Mr McNulty, Chair, Carlisle Foodbank
Mr Auld, Chief Executive, Carlisle and Eden Citizens Advice Bureau
Mr Rasbash, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, Cumbria County Council

Officers: Health and Wellbeing Team Manager
Healthy City Team Manager
Policy and Communications Manager
Head of Financial Services (Deputy S.151)

PEP.16/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Miss Whalen and the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources.

PEP.17/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct Councillor Shepherd declared an interest in agenda item A.3 - Citizens Advice Carlisle and Eden Update. The interest related to his appointment as Carlisle City Council representative on the Citizens Advice Bureau Carlisle and Eden.

PEP.18/22 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

PEP.19/22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

PEP.20/22 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

PEP.21/22 FOOD SECURITY

The Healthy City Team Manager submitted an update from the Chair of Carlisle Foodbank (CS.26/22)

The Healthy City Team Manager reported that as pressures on communities across Carlisle had increased in recent years, issues relating to local food security had also increased. This was exemplified by Carlisle Foodbank facing almost a doubling in demand for their support since January this year.

Foodbank Carlisle were a not-for-profit voluntary organisation, set up 12 years ago in response to growing needs amongst local people for essential food items. They provided emergency food parcels to people through a referral system that identified households in most need of support. The Foodbank recently set up as a Community Interest Organisation (CIO) which had provided them with increased governance and potential sustainability. From their base on West Tower Street, Carlisle, they received, repackaged and distributed food parcels to those people who needed them most. Although the project started as a temporary response to the needs at the time, over 12 years later they were still providing a service which was in as much need as ever.

Lockdown was a particularly difficult time for many families, with food security issues leading to the creation of community-led responses, including the establishment of new, open-access affordable food outlets. Users of these facilities did not need to be referred. The increase in activity around affordable food also led to some confusion amongst donors regarding who was receiving the donation and created risks of competition for finite supplies of donated items. To help manage those potential problems effectively, a Food Security Network was established during the pandemic to bring together the different organisations involved in different aspects of addressing those issues. It was hoped that the Network could provide a forum for better coordinating food outlets, understanding food needs across the City and educating people on the difference between affordable food and emergency food, so that they could make an informed choice on who they donated and/or referred those in need to.

Mr McNulty, Chair of Carlisle Foodbank, stressed that the Foodbank had been a temporary arrangement and work was now needed to make it sustainable. Due to the increased demand on the service and the reduction in donations, the Foodbank had to use their own monies to provide food, this was not a sustainable situation. He explained that the welfare referral system worked well and the Foodbank were part of a network of support for people in crisis. The Foodbank worked closely with the City Council to ensure that the correct advice and support was being provided.

Mr McNulty drew the Panel's attention to the statistics in the report showing the increase in referrals and a break down of the areas in Carlisle that the referrals came from.

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

- Who was involved in the Food Security Network?

The Healthy City Team Manager responded that the Network was made up of Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council and some food hub partners. The Network met bi-monthly

however they would meet more regularly due to the 'cost of living crisis'.

Mr McNulty added that the Foodbank had some concerns regarding the Network not reaching its full potential and also the decision making process. He clarified that the Foodbank provided emergency food for those at crisis point, the referral system and welfare support which was in place worked well. He felt that the affordable food projects had impacted on the donations to crisis food. There were excellent hubs in the area but there was no evidence that the affordable food hubs were reducing the crisis need.

- Would it be possible to promote the difference between the Foodbank and affordable food to give more clarity to those making donations.

The Healthy City Team Manager explained that the matter had been discussed at the previous Network meeting and it had been suggested that Mr McNulty would look at providing training to Council staff to ensure that the correct advice and signposting was given.

- The Panel asked what Members could do to help the Network reach its potential.

Mr McNulty responded that the Foodbank welcomed the discussions of the Network, noting that actions were limited. He suggested that the terms and conditions of the Network be refreshed and that the Network be extended to include more groups.

The Healthy City Team Manager offered to support the Food Security Network in refreshing their Terms and extending the invitation to more partners and organisations.

- There was concern that there was some stigma in using the Foodbank and that those in need may not have the confidence to seek the help needed. A Member asked if other ways of providing food had been considered such as prepaid cards for supermarkets.

Mr McNulty agreed it could be difficult for people to access the help they need. The Foodbank tried to ensure that the users experience was as valuable as possible, they aimed to make a difference to people as soon as they walked through the door. He added that welfare agencies worked hard to make the users feel valued and reduce the stigma. He explained that the Food Pantry model was a good example of a subsidised shopping experience, however there were waiting lists to join those schemes and they did not provide the crisis support that the Foodbank did.

In response to a further question Mr McNulty explained that the emergency bags of food provided were as nutritionally balanced as possible and were tailored to users. It was difficult for some affordable food places to provide a variety of food as they relied on what was available to them.

- Were there any Foodbank collection points outwith the City Centre?

Mr McNulty explained that if a referral was from outside of the City but could not afford to travel to the Foodbank they would be provided with a bus ticket, this arrangement had been reached in partnership with Stage Coach. The Foodbank was keen to establish collection points in Brampton and Longtown, however he felt that the Food Security Network should be looking at the good projects which were in rural areas which needed additional resources.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder agreed that more joined up thinking was required, and that the membership of the Food Security Network should be considered. There were many issues, globally, that would impact food security in the country and consideration needed to be given to how this would be managed. She noted that food

security was linked to the wider picture of poverty / poor diet / poor housing. There needed to be better engagement with local communities, including rural areas, to work together and support each other.

-Welfare support such as the Foodbank relied heavily on volunteers, how could some resilience be built into the system?

The Health and Wellbeing Manager replied that the CVS led the Carlisle Community Groups Network, the City Council did support this.

- How did the Foodbank manage food donations from large supermarkets?

Mr McNulty responded that the Foodbank warehouse was set up to hold all of the food donated, including fresh and frozen, The food was sorted and distributed by excellent volunteers and the Centre Manager. Some supermarkets donated food or provided food at a discounted price. The opening hours of the Foodbank were being reviewed to deal with the increase in demand and to ensure that those being referred were being supported properly.

- A Member commented that the current situation with regard to food security and cost of living was an emergency and something needed to be done to address it.

- Community food production was highlighted as an opportunity to help alleviate food crisis in the community.

The Healthy City Team Manager highlighted successful community food production projects within the City and acknowledged that allotment holders may have surplus food that could be donated. She agreed to explore this opportunity further.

- How were those in crisis supported with costs of cooking as energy costs increase.

Mr McNulty acknowledged the issues those in crisis had in heating food, as a result the Foodbank were providing more food that could be cooked using a microwave only. In addition support was available for those individuals who were struggling with the energy costs via a voucher scheme.

- There was concern that individuals who had disabilities or limited mobility were not able to access crisis support, in addition those that were not able to leave their house needed the heating etc on and would be significantly impacted by the energy price increase.

The Healthy City Team Manager responded that the Citizens Advice Bureau were very good at providing help and circulating information on support that was available to people in need.

RESOLVED - 1) That Mr McNulty, Chair of the Carlisle Foodbank be thanked for his informative presentation to the Panel (CS.26/22);

2) That the Panel welcomed the training from Mr McNulty and asked that the training be extended to Members;

3) The Panel welcomed the offer of support from Council Officers to the Food Security Network to make the best use of the resources available;

4) That a Cost of Living Crisis Task and Finish Group be established to investigate further the impact of the cost of living crisis and food security on residents. The Task and Finish Group would provide evidence based reports which would be submitted to the Cumberland Council.

PEP.22/22 CITIZENS ADVICE CARLISLE & EDEN - UPDATE PRESENTATION ON WORK AND ISSUES FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

The Healthy City Team Manager presented the work of Citizens Advice Carlisle and Eden (CAB), as they worked with City Council support, to assist residents of Carlisle and District.

Mr Auld, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Carlisle and Eden, was in attendance to brief Members on the issues facing local residents.

Mr Auld informed the Panel that the CAB provided an independent, impartial advice service via a mixture of paid and voluntary staff. The CAB received financial support from the Council but it had not received an uplift in support for ten years.

Mr Auld set out the top five enquires for support for 2021/22 adding that there had been an increase in employment advice and utilities advice in the last twelve months. Mr Auld provided the Panel with detailed statistics from the CAB and the changes to the demographics of those who sought advice. He explained there had been an increase in those presenting with mental health issues and he outlined the holistic approach that provided by the CAB and partners.

The increase on demand to the service had resulted in budgetary pressures. The CAB used statistical data to identify the key areas of required support and forward plan potential challenges. Mr Auld highlighted the challenges with staff recruitment and retention, the CAB had excellent staff who were trained to a very high level, this meant they were in demand and the CAB could not match wages being offered elsewhere.

Mr Auld stated that the Local Government Reorganisation created funding uncertainty at a time when all available grants had reduced. He outlined some of the work the CAB were involved in including rural services and projects with the NHS. He reiterated that services were under a tremendous amount of pressure due to debt, energy costs, benefits demand and it was likely to get worse.

In considering the report and Mr Auld's presentation the panel raised the following comments and questions:

- Referring to the increase in energy prices, a Member noted that some companies were offering reduced payments which would not, ultimately, cover the cost of the energy bill. Would this impact the service as debt increased?

Mr Auld was aware of the offers being made by some companies to help with fuel costs but agreed it was moving the problem to a future time as the debt would still be there. The CAB provided advice on switching energy providers but this had become limited and there was now no long term help for people. He was aware of grants being given to eligible households, the money was often needed elsewhere and was not being used on energy costs, it would have been helpful for the grants to go direct to the energy bills.

- The eviction embargo had ended, and cases were being progressed through the court system. Was the potential impact of the evictions being monitored?

Mr Auld confirmed that the CAB had been made aware that social housing providers were beginning to start eviction processes, the situation and potential impact on the service was being monitored closely.

- Was there a change in the demographic of people accessing the CAB services?

Mr Auld responded that there had been an increase in households with up to £30,000 annual income accessing services. There was also an increase in request for advice from women under 35.

- The strength of the CAB were the staff, Members were concerned to hear that there was difficulty in recruitment / retention and asked what could be done to assist with the issue.

Mr Auld explained that the CAB had managed to retain contracts and had applied for additional funding to support the service. The CAB were looking at recruiting people who could maintain the remote service and free up local people to deal with face to face matters. The CAB were trying to be creative in how the services were provided in order to help as many people as possible.

The Healthy City Team Manager added that Age UK were training energy advisers and it was hoped that this would alleviate some of the demand on the CAB.

- How did the CAB support individuals who had mental health issues who did not know where to turn or how to access support.

Mr Auld responded that it was difficult to support people who did not reach out for help. If the CAB were contacted they would provide advice, support and signposting as required. A lot of work was being carried out with other organisations such as Mind to help those with mental health issues.

- Was there a waiting list to access CAB services?

Mr Auld confirmed that there was a 2 - 3 day waiting list for triage, then depending on the service required, there was a 1 to 4 week wait for an appointment.

- The CAB covered areas which would be in both of the new Unitary Authorities, was there anything the new authorities could do to support the work?

Mr Auld did not expect a lot of change for the CAB initially. The Reorganisation presented another challenge for the CAB but collaborative work already took place within Carlisle, Copeland and Allerdale areas and less so in the south of the County.

RESOLVED - 1) That Mr Auld, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Carlisle and Eden, be thanked for insightful and informative presentation (CS.25/22)

2) That the work of the CAB and the statistical information they hold be incorporated into the work of the Cost of Living Crisis Task and Finish Group;

3) That the Panel asked, in light of the current cost of living crisis and the impact on demand for services, that the Executive give consideration to increasing the Carlisle City Council grant funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 and reconvened at 12:05.

PEP.23/22 CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL COST OF LIVING PROGRAMME

Mr Rasbash, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, Cumbria County Council, provided information on Cumbria County Council work on cost of living issues.(OS.18/22)

Mr Rasbash reported that costs of living were rising nationally, this picture was reflected in Cumbria. Impacts of the rising cost of living were disproportionately felt by lower income households. He gave an overview and background of the statistics included within his report.

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

- Given the increase in energy costs, what support was in place to support older people who were living on their own?

Mr Rasbash confirmed that the DWP funding had a condition that at least 33% of the funding had to go to households with pensioners, this meant £1m was ring fenced. This was an area with low uptake as a result Cumbria County Council were working with agencies and care providers to encourage those who were eligible to access the money,

- The increase in the number of children eligible for free school meals would lead to an increase in Pupil Premiums for the schools, were there any opportunities to work with schools to help alleviate food poverty?

Mr Rasbash responded that there was an excellent network of schools working with child poverty along with a dedicated County Officer specifically for the poverty programme. He suggested that the Panel's Task and Finish Group could engage with schools in the process of developing a holistic approach as they knew what the needs of the children were.

- As fuel costs rose was there any funding that could support people with travel costs to work or for education?

Mr Rasbash explained that it was difficult to provide direct support through the funding, however, the funding helped with other household costs which would impact on the affordability of travel costs.

- The presentation detailed a shortfall between financial support provided during the pandemic and now, how much of a shortfall was there given the funding that was being provided.

Mr Rasbash stated that the funding gap was significant, the £20 uplift that had been provided during the pandemic was a significant amount of money that was difficult for local authorities to replace.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder noted that the answers to many of the questions being asked by the Panel were available in other places, she suggested that a fact sheet be produced to provide Members with signposting information to the support available.

- There had been a significant rise in those in employment claiming Universal Credit, was there anything in place to support families with child care during the summer?

Mr Rasbash responded that there was limited support available, he agreed to look at early years support further with providers.

A Member highlighted the changes that were taking place linking tax credits to the Universal Credit and the impact this may have on families income.

Mr Rasbash confirmed that he was aware of the changes, stating that stronger lobbying was required to make government aware of the impact of the changes they proposed.

RESOLVED - 1) That Mr Rasbash, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, Cumbria County Council, be thanked for his in depth presentation and responses to questions (OS.18/22);

2) That the communications channels for the support available be enhanced and promoted through local and social media;

3) That the work being undertaken by the Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Adviser be incorporated into the Cost of Living Crisis Task and Finish Group.

PEP.24/22 THRIVING COMMUNITIES

The Healthy City Team Manager provided a report on the first phase of Thriving Communities Carlisle and update the Panel on the plans for the next stages. (CS.24/22)

The Healthy City Team Manager informed the Panel that the overarching aim of the Thriving Communities Carlisle was to help deliver Healthy City outcomes by developing a network of social prescribing partnerships and activities that met the needs of residents in Carlisle & North Cumbria, with a particular emphasis on people impacted by loneliness and isolation following Covid-19.

It was a partnership project involving Carlisle City Council, Susie Tate, Carlisle Healthcare, Prism Arts, Tullie House and Cumbria Wildlife Trust. Funding had been secured from the Thriving Communities Fund, thanks to the National Academy of Social Prescribing, Arts Council England, Natural England and Historic England, with support from NHS England, NHS Improvement, Sport England, the Office for Civil Society, the Money and Pensions Service and NHS Charities Together.

The Healthy City Team Manager outlined the Carlisle Programme and outcomes. She reported that the Thriving Communities Evaluation Report 2021/22 had been received prior to the meeting and agreed to circulate a copy to Members.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio expressed her gratitude to all officers involved in the very successful programme. Officers had worked in partnership with organisations, supported by Members, to produce a programme which gave real benefits to the community.

A Member felt that planting orchards through community food production programmes was achievable and something that the Council could do as a legacy for the new authority.

The Healthy City Team Manager agreed it would be beneficial and highlighted a community allotment in Upperby where fruit trees had been planted.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Thriving Communities report be received (CS.24/22);

2) That the Healthy City Team Manager circulate a copy of the Thriving Communities Evaluation Report 2021/22 to all Members of the Panel.

PEP.25/22 STANDING ORDERS

RESOLVED - That Council Procedural Rule 9, in relation to the duration of meetings be suspended in order that the meeting could continue over the 3 hour time limit.

PEP.26/22 BUSINESS RATES OUTTURN 2021/22

The Head of Financial Services submitted a summary of the 2021/22 provisional outturn and performance position for Business Rates and the impact it would have on the overall general Fund Balance (RD.26/22).

The Panel congratulated the Financial Services Team for their excellent work in delivering the successful Business Rates Outturn.

RESOLVED - That the Panel asks the Executive to consider how the additional transfer of £425,000 to the General Fund Reserves could be used to support communities and build a solid foundation for the new authority (RD.26/22)

PEP.27/22 OVERVIEW REPORT

The Policy and Communication Manager submitted report OS.17/22 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the People Panel.

In considering the work programme the Panel agreed to defer the Youth Projects item until the schools returned.

A Member requested that homelessness be added to the Panel's work programme. The Chair responded that homelessness fell within the Place Panel's remit and discussion were taking place to determine where the matter should be scrutinised.

RESOLVED - That the Overview Report, incorporating Key Decision items relevant to the People Panel be noted. (OS.17/22)

The Meeting ended at: 13:22