

(Approved by Council 4 March 2014)

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2014 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Luckley (Chairman) Councillors Ellis, Forrester (as substitute for Councillor Scarborough), Mrs Prest, Miss Sherriff (until 11:25), Mrs Stevenson, Mrs Vasey and Wilson

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Riddle, Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder
Mr D Butterworth, Chief Executive, Riverside Cumbria
Mr P Taylor, Head of Operations, Riverside Cumbria

OFFICERS: Communities and Housing Development Officer
Housing and Health Manager
Contracts and Community Services Manager
Customer Services Manager
Deputy Chief Executive
Development Officer
Housing Development Officer
Policy and Communications Manager

COSP.08/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Scarborough. Apologies were also submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Quilter, Culture, Health, Leisure and Young People Portfolio Holder

COSP.09/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Luckley declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item A.2 – Riverside Carlisle. The interest related to the fact that she was a City Council representative on the Riverside Carlisle Board.

COSP.10/14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 9 January 2014 be noted.

COSP.11/14 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters which had been the subject of call in.

COSP.12/14 RIVERSIDE CARLISLE

The Housing and Health Manager presented Report ED.09/14 that provided the Panel with an update on joint working between Riverside Carlisle, now known as Riverside Cumbria, and Carlisle City Council. The report updated Members of the Panel on the Affordable Homes programme 2014-17, land assets, homelessness and Choice Based lettings, Welfare Reform, Affordability, the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Riverside Cumbria.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Butterworth, Divisional Director of Riverside Cumbria, Mr Taylor and the Council's Housing Development Officer to the meeting.

Mr Butterworth explained that he had taken up his post in October 2013 and was taking time to understand the challenges faced by Riverside Cumbria and the City Council. There had been considerable change at Riverside which now extended to Eden and it was hoped that in future it would take in Allerdale and South Lakes. The prime focus for Riverside Cumbria was Carlisle.

Mr Butterworth informed Members of his background and how it related to his work at Riverside.

With regard to the Affordable Housing Programme 2014-17 Mr Butterworth explained that Riverside had a good working relationship with colleagues in the City Council. The Affordable Housing Programme would ensure that there were suitable properties in place for the longer term, to meet customer needs. Riverside currently had several empty properties and it was important that Riverside understood the changing demographics of the City and acknowledged that Carlisle had an aging population. Riverside would need to ensure that future housing met the needs of all generations. The existing programme had been detailed within the report.

Mr Butterworth had confidence that the present demand for housing would ensure that every house would be allocated and Riverside would work to ensure that tenants contributed positively to their location. Riverside needed to be mindful of the changing expectations and lifestyle of tenants and ensure cohesion among age demographics and lifestyle and allocate properties accordingly.

In response to a query from a Member Mr Butterworth explained that tenants of particular lifestyles and ages were not grouped and Riverside tried to maintain a balance to minimise the impacts on tenants.

Mr Taylor advised that, across the Riverside group, the majority of complaints were in respect of noise, which may not be the fault of the tenant but could be due to poor insulation. Riverside was building a number of flats in Carlisle and Mr Taylor confirmed that they would be built with a better standard of insulation.

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

- *Would home in the future be built to Lifetime standards?*

Mr Butterworth confirmed that future housing would be built to that standard but Riverside also looked at existing houses that had already been adapted and offered those to people who required adaptations made to their homes. Mr Taylor confirmed that there was a register of homes that had been adapted and added that, due to the current financial situation, Riverside would consider whether to move to putting more priority on adapting homes but that a balance would need to be maintained.

Mr Butterworth explained that the aim of the Affordable Housing Programme was to meet local housing needs working with the Council in the future. Due to the current general financial situation there were a number of 20-45 year olds who still lived with parents. Riverside would work to ensure the flow of properties in the affordable rent programme.

- *There was a scheme to assist younger people run by Riverside and the County Council called Launch Pad but that had ended. Was Riverside considering something similar in the future and what had been the benefits of the programme?*

Mr Taylor informed Members that since the scheme ended three tenants remained with Riverside. The main challenge had been in engaging with the young people regarding filling in forms in relation to benefits and conducting their tenancy satisfactorily. Some led to anti social behaviour problems and rent arrears. Such tenants were a high risk for housing providers and as a landlord it was essential that support was put in place to reduce the risks. The Care Leaving Team had generally become involved towards the end of a tenancy which was disappointing. Young people often had chaotic lifestyles which required a lot of support.

In future it was anticipated that more self contained properties would be made available to create a cluster scheme and there would be support on site.

Mr Butterworth added that Riverside Groups three year Corporate Plan would include focus on training and employment skills for young people and would look at developing a more holistic package to maximise opportunities for young people.

- *There were several pieces of amenity land in which Riverside had expressed an interest. Was Riverside intending to turn that land, and their amenity land, into housing land?*

Mr Butterworth advised that Riverside had not gone into that level of detail but that they would look at existing land use and the housing needs in a particular location to ensure that value would be added to the community in that area. Riverside, working with Officers from the City Council, regularly looked at maps to determine what could be delivered and ensure that it would be a feasible site.

- *How did Welfare Reform impact on tenants?*

Financially Riverside had not experienced as many rent arrears as expected but there had been a considerable cost to Riverside in terms of support. Mr Butterworth explained that Riverside had been proactive in identifying which tenants would be most affected and had offered positive dialogue and advice. Riverside had seen an increase in the levels of vacant properties. At present it was not easy to find a tenant for every vacant property and Riverside had competition from a vibrant private rented sector.

- *In July 2013 Riverside had advised that they were to undertake a review of their rental arrears policy. Had that taken place?*

Mr Taylor explained that the aim of the Big Changes campaign was to educate tenants about Welfare Reform. Riverside was aware that some tenants were struggling due to income cut backs. However, he reiterated that the increase in rent arrears had not been as bad as anticipated which was due to good management and being proactive and making people aware of their options. Only one tenant had been evicted in respect of under occupancy. Riverside promoted downsizing and to date 75 tenants had downsized supported by Officers from Riverside. There were a number of issues regarding vacant stock and it was important that Riverside invested wisely in stock to ensure there was high quality stock to meet the needs of client groups.

- *Had there been any impact on the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund?*

The Housing and Health Manager provided information that compared the current number of applications to those before the under occupancy charge. The Council were on target in the current financial year to spend all of their allocation of the Fund. The number of applications had almost trebled from 107 last year to 284 applications approved this year. The Fund was ongoing and the Government had given £165,000 for 2014/15 for the Fund. The Housing and Health Manager explained that more people were applying for grants from the Fund and more were being approved.

- *How was Riverside addressing the number of empty properties that had been vacant for many months?*

Mr Butterworth explained that Riverside was focussing on two main issues – a better marketing strategy and a better Choice Based Letting system. The marketing strategy would look at how better to attract self paying tenants who were less welfare dependent.

With regard to Choice Based Letting that system worked well when demand exceeded than supply. Currently supply exceeds demand which created new challenges. Discussions were ongoing with the City Council about those challenges.

- *Was there flexibility within Choice based Lettings for Housing Associations to run schemes that were different to other Housing Authorities?*

Mr Taylor advised that Riverside was obliged to abide by the Choice Based Letting system which was based on housing needs and allowed properties to be allocated on a fair basis. People in employment who were in need of accommodation were not always aware that they could apply to Riverside for housing. Riverside wished to work with other partners to work swiftly and provide more flexibility when allocating properties. The focus in future would be on different ways to promote available properties.

Mr Butterworth added that if a property was advertised three times and was not let Officers would actively look to find tenants for those properties. Such tenants may already be on the register but in a lower category

- *Private landlords with three bedroom properties had different constraints to housing Associations. That allowed private sector landlords to provide properties superior to what Riverside could offer.*

Mr Butterworth agreed with the comments from the Member and had personal experience of looking for accommodation within Carlisle. He queried what sort of things new tenants expected such as broadband/white goods/carpets or good neighbours/good repair services. Some of the challenges related to peoples' perception of areas which were often historical. There were currently a lot of privately rented properties on the market but if the financial situation changed people may sell properties rather than let them which would change that position and reduce the competition for Riverside.

Riverside also had to look at the affordability of their product and acknowledged that they were at the lower end of the market. Rents were due to increase in 2014/15 and Mr Butterworth outlined those increases. The proposed rent increases were less than others across the Local Authority stock in other Local Authority areas. He informed Members that Riverside had spent £3million improving fire safety in their properties.

- *The year to date figure for the number of people accepted by the Council to secure settled accommodation was 46. How did that compare to the previous year?*

The Housing and Health Manager advised that the figure would be lower than the previous year as Officers were working with other agencies to prevent people becoming homeless. The Cumbria Choice Based Letting system was a useful tool to prevent people from becoming homeless.

- *The figure for the number of tenants who were affected by the changes within Welfare Reform and would not have made any contribution to the rent shortfall had fallen from 50% to 9%. What was the reason for that decrease?*

Mr Butterworth explained that initially there was some misunderstanding of the guidance and Riverside had been proactive in how they engaged with tenants. The aim was to reduce the figure to 5%. Riverside wanted to reduce the turnover for unsuccessful reasons of tenancy and support those tenants most in need.

- *The number of homeless people was a third lower than a decade ago. Was that figure reflected in Carlisle?*

The Housing and Health Manager explained that the key indicator relating to homelessness had been improved and that accurate figures for Carlisle could be provided if required. Carlisle was currently within the context of regional and national figures.

- *A number of Riverside properties had been fitted with solar panels as part of their energy and efficiency measures. Was it right that Riverside received revenue from those solar panels and tenants received some of their electricity free of charge?*

Mr Butterworth advised that tenants received a payment for usage and Riverside were using assets to draw down the additional costs. The scheme would not be as successful as anticipated due to the reduced feed-in tariff. It was expected that Riverside would not break even on the scheme for 25 years.

With regard to energy efficiency in general, Riverside were looking at properties where heating was leaking from lofts and windows and were investigating measures such as external cladding. However such schemes would take time to invest the necessary resources and relevant properties would have to be identified.

- *Claims had been made that properties in Longtown where solar panels had been installed had not been improved and that energy efficiency was poor in terms of insulation. There had been allegations that there had been threats of evictions as a result of subsequent high energy bills that prevented tenants from paying their rent. How was Riverside addressing those issues?*

Mr Butterworth refuted the allegations and challenged peoples' perception of the heating systems installed. One to one sessions had been arranged in respect of tenants' concerns and of 160 tenants only four attended a session. If any properties were identified where there were problems they would be looked at part of the new asset management programme.

With regard to allegations that energy bills had increased by 400% Mr Butterworth stated that if a tenant provided bills to evidence that claim and assessment of electricity usage would be carried out and compensation could result. Of the 160 new heating systems that had been

installed only four tenants had raised concerns and Riverside would deal with those. However Mr Butterworth did not believe that the situation was as it had been circulated.

The Chairman thanked Mr Butterworth and Mr Taylor for their attendance at the meeting. Mr Butterworth, Mr Taylor, the Housing and Health Manager and the Housing Development Officer left the meeting.

Members discussed the suitability of Choice Based Letting to the Council in terms of accessibility, location and affordability and requested that the Executive look at those issues and ensure that all aspects of housing needs were encompassed within the Housing Strategy and Action Plan. Members acknowledged that the position was more positive than the previous year.

The Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Executive could look at the development of panel choice.

It was suggested that the Council's relationship with Riverside could be included in the work programme for the coming year and that a ½ day meeting be arranged to focus on the issues. The Portfolio agreed with that suggestion and along with representatives from Riverside could look at the impacts of Welfare Reform, homelessness and the spare room subsidy.

RESOLVED: 1) That report ED.09/14 – Riverside Carlisle be noted.

2) That a further report be submitted to the Panel in six months.

3) That the Panel request that the Executive examine the Choice based letting scheme with regard to suitability for the people of Carlisle.

COSP.13/14 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

- The Deputy Chief Executive presented report OS.04/14 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and included the latest version of the work programme and Key Decisions of the Executive which related to the Panel.

- The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, published on 10 January 2014, included no items which fell within the remit of this Panel. The Notice of Key Decisions published on 7 February included one item that fell within the remit of the Panel:

KD.02/14 – Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership Annual Plan 2014/15 – the item was on the agenda for consideration later in the meeting

- The following minute excerpts were from the meeting of the Executive held on 15 January 2014.

EX.07/14 – Carlisle Sports and Physical Activity Strategy, and

EX.08/14 – Private Sector Housing Enforcement – a Member was concerned that recommendations had been made by the Panel to the Executive but had not receive a response in respect of the suggested information leaflet or the improvements to the website.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that following the meeting of the Executive Officers had looked at the website but no changes had been made to date. He confirmed that he would investigate what was happening and suggested that a briefing note to Members could be submitted to Members between meetings to keep them updated on issues.

- Councillor Bowditch, the Council's representative on the Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and the Cumbria Police and Crime Panel was in attendance and updated Members on the items discussed at the meetings held on 22 January 2014 and 30 January 2014 respectively. Councillor Bowditch advised that he had attended seven out of a possible eight Police and Crime Panel meetings and five out of a possible six Health Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Councillor Bowditch updated Members on the issues considered and the work undertaken by both panels and the issues that had been raised. There had been strong administrative support from Tracy Ingham. Councillor Bowditch had felt that the Health Scrutiny Committee had been most challenging as it covered a wider area than the Police and Crime Panel and the issues covered more diverse. Councillor Bowditch had passed a copy of a letter to the Chairman of the Panel requesting applicants for the post of Chair for North Cumbria University Hospital NHS Trust should any Members be interested in applying.

In response to a query Councillor Bowditch confirmed that there had been training provided in respect of the Police and Crime Panel but none for the Health Scrutiny Committee. A Member was concerned that Carlisle did not appear to be doing well in the Crime Statistics report to be considered later in the meeting. Councillor Bowditch confirmed that Carlisle had been deemed the second safest place in England to live.

In conclusion Councillor Bowditch stated that should any Members have any issues they would wish him to raise at either of the Committees that they should send the information in an e-mail and he would raise the issue at the next available meeting.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Bowditch for his attendance at the meeting and stated that the Panel would be pleased to receive further reports on the two Committees, possibly on an annual basis.

- A meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs Group was held on 6 February 2014 and the Deputy Chief Executive advised that following discussion it had been agreed that the structure of the three Scrutiny Panels would remain the same. Members of the group were in agreement that it would be helpful to Members if they had a detailed list of services delivered which would be more expansive than the current performance monitoring reports. That would enable the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen to focus Scrutiny and identify areas for Task and Finish work. It was also agreed that it would be more beneficial to have more officers involved in scrutiny work and in particular Task and Finish work.

The Annual Scrutiny Report 2013/14 would be submitted to each of the Panels in March and April before going back to the Scrutiny Chairs Group for approval. The final report would then be submitted to Council on 29 April 2014.

- The Overview and Scrutiny Officer had sent an e-mail to all Members who sat on Scrutiny Panels requesting whether there were any particular issues they wished to see discussed in the annual report. Members were invited to give their views either at the meeting or

shortly thereafter by e-mail. A draft of the annual report would be submitted to the Panel's final meeting of the civic year on Thursday 27 March 2014.

- In order to continue to monitor the implementation of the Community Centre Task and Finish Group's recommendations made in October 2012, Members of the Task and Finish Group had attended the Community Centre Managers' meeting on 11 February 2014. Councillor Prest, Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group advised that relationships with Community Centre managers had improved. A remote terminal had been installed in Yewdale Community Centre but not many residents were aware. It was suggested that signage could be provided and information that the kiosk was in the Centre given to customers from that Ward using the Customer Contact Centre. Managers had been concerned about the request for a business plan. The Contracts and Community Services Manager advised that it was just an update to the plan drawn up last year that was required. He confirmed that he would contact centre managers to that effect.

A Member was concerned that the Council's link with the Community Centres had been lost. Councillor Mrs Prest confirmed that managers had a good relationship with officers. Managers were concerned that they were having difficulties recruiting members for their committees. Councillor Mrs Prest queried whether the matter could be raised on the Council's website or on the social media networks. The Contracts and Community Services Manager agreed to work with the Council's Communications Officers on the matter.

In response to a query from a Member the Contracts and Community Services Manager confirmed that there was budget available to provide training for Community Centre staff.

In respect of the Customer Contact Centre the Contact Centre Supervisor stated that they wished to work with Community Centre staff and provide basic training on Council services.

- The Overview and Scrutiny Officer drew Members attention to the Work Programme and the reports which were scheduled for the March meeting.

RESOLVED – 1) That, subject to the issues raised above, the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Forward Plan items relevant to this Panel be noted.

2) That the Contracts and Community Services Manager contact Community Centre Managers to clarify the issues in respect of the business plan.

3) That the Contracts and Community Services Manager work with the Council's Communications Team regarding recruitment of staff to the Community Centres.

4) That the Deputy Chief Executive would provide a briefing note to update Members on the issues that had been raised regarding the Council's website and information leaflet.

COSP.14/14 CARLISLE AND EDEN COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT 2014-15

The Contracts and Community Services Manager submitted report SD.05/14 presenting the Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Draft Strategic Assessment for 2014/15. The Strategic Assessment provided partners, and other responsible authorities, with an understanding of the levels and patterns of crime, disorder and substance misuse within the County and local areas. The technical report and local summary, which were

appended to the report, provided the evidence base that would be used by the Community Safety Partnership to identify their key priorities for the year ahead. Comments from the Panel would help to shape the plan on strategic assessment and would be taken back to the CSP and included in the plan to address the issues in relation to Carlisle.

Overall crime had decreased in Carlisle but there were still challenges for the Council and the CSP.

The Communities and Housing Development Officer explained that priorities had not changed much from the previous year. She outlined the more problem areas including violent crime, domestic violence, and alcohol and drug misuse. More information had been available in respect of hospital admissions and there had been a reduction in the number of incidents related to the night time economy. Hate Crime was one of the priorities of the CSP and a lot of work was being undertaken on awareness and reporting of incidents. The aim was to reduce re-offending and the group were working closely with the Probation services.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager advised that the plan would include year to date figures which would be more accurate than the strategic assessment figures due to data lag.

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

- *Did the CSP consider the Police Crime Commissioner's priorities in respect of issues relating to Carlisle?*

The Communities and Housing Development Officer confirmed that the information was included in the Strategic Assessment and would be taken into account. The Commissioner's focus on hate crime would also be included.

- *Evidence from the Hate Crime Task and Finish Group indicated that hate crime was continuing and that they were not always included in reported crime incidents. The Task and Finish Group was a good tool as they spoke to people who were suffering from such crimes.*

The Contracts and Community Services Manager advised that the CSP relied on anecdotal evidence from the police and in some cases people had no confidence to report such crimes.

The Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder explained that the aim was to increase reporting and that it was possible that the reported decrease was due to the fact that fewer people were reporting incidents of hate crime and domestic violence.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager advised that the key measure was the reporting of offences and guidance would be taken from the police.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager confirmed, in response to a comment from a Member, that alcohol abuse would be a key priority as the effects of alcohol ran throughout the report.

- *The information was useful to Members in monitoring their own Wards.*
- *It was suggested that the panel should also look at speeding.*

The Communities and Housing Development Officer explained that vehicle crime was included in the Action Plan and would focus on prevention and enforcement work.

RESOLVED: 1) That report SD.05/14 – Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment 2014-15 – be noted.

COSP.15/14 QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14

The Policy and Performance Officer submitted report PC.01/14 that updated the Panel on the Council's service standards that helped measure performance and customer satisfaction, and included updates on key actions contained within the Carlisle Plan.

Details of each service standard were included in a table appended to the report. The table illustrated the cumulative year to date figure, a month-by-month breakdown of performance and, where possible, an actual service standard baseline that had been established either locally or nationally. The updates against actions in the Carlisle Plan followed on from the service standard information which was attached to the report as Appendix 2.

With regard to the average time taken for new benefits claims to be processed the Policy and Performance Officer explained that Carlisle was still in the second quartile compared to other authorities and the blip in performance in October had been rectified.

A more detailed overview of the progress made in the delivery of the Carlisle Plan would be included in the end of year report due at the Panel in the summer. The Policy and Performance Officer agreed with Members that a lot of the issues within the Carlisle Plan updates were not relevant to the Panel and it was agreed that only issues relevant to the Panel would be included in future reports.

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

- *How is the Council's relationship with the managers of the Gypsy and Traveller sites?*

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that relationships had improved. The Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder informed Members that the proposed meeting with residents had not taken place.

- *Was there any information in respect of the arts and culture facilities that were currently available in the old Fire Station and information regarding the business plan, scheme and work to date?*

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the information would be included in the end of year performance report and would be included in the programme for the next municipal year. He confirmed that Harraby campus would also be included.

RESOLVED – 1) That Report PC.01/14 – Quarter Three Performance Report 2013/14 – be noted.

COSP.16/14 – CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

The Customer Services Manager presented report CE.10/14 that updated the Panel on the Customer Access Strategy following on from the Task and Finish Group comments in August 2013. The Customer Access Strategy was produced in early 2013. In February 2013 the Senior Management Team endorsed the recommendations to turn strategy into an Action Plan with timescales and responsible officers. Throughout the financial year 2013/14 the aims and objectives of the Action Plan, and thus the strategy, had been achieved. The Customer Access Strategy had allowed Carlisle City Council to realise its potential in regard to customer accessing services and ensuring that experience was customer centric, efficient, effective and sustainable.

There would be enhanced training for staff and customer services would be included as part of the induction training. That would look at how to deal with customers face to face, by e-mail, telephone and in writing as well as by text messaging.

As had been reported earlier in the meeting one information kiosk had been installed in Yewdale Community Centre which had been funded by the Police. It was anticipated that two further kiosks would be installed in Brampton and Greystone Community Centres by the end of the month. The Customer Services Supervisor confirmed that the kiosk at the Yewdale Community Centre had been used to report incidents of crime.

Kiosks had also been placed in the Civic Centre reception area and the area refurbished to provide more usable space. Interview rooms were available at the rear of the foyer and Officers were looking at increasing partnership working. It was hoped that the Council would become a one point of contact service centre as people viewed the Council as a place to go to for help.

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

- *How was the location of the kiosks decided?*

The Customer Services Manager explained that the kiosks were placed in areas of high crime statistics. While Yewdale was not high it backed onto the Raffles estate which did not have a Community Centre. Software was available to enable people to use computers that were already in Community Centres. That software could be made available to all Community Centres while the roll out of kiosks depended in funding.

- *Would the push for more internet services lead to a reduction in the number of staff required in the Customer Contact Centre?*

The Customer Services Manager explained that would not happen in the short term. The website was currently information based and not clear or concise. A new website was being built that would be easier to use. That would leave more staff available in the Customer Contact Centre to provide a face to face service for those customers who required more help.

- *Members appreciated that the Council had used local telephone numbers rather than 0800 numbers.*

RESOLVED – 1) That Report CE.10/14 – Customer Access Strategy – be noted.

(The meeting ended at 12.25pm)