

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 22 AUGUST 2013 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Luckley (Chairman) Councillors Ellis,
Mrs Prest, Scarborough, Miss Sherriff, Mrs Stevenson, Mrs Vasey and
Wilson

**ALSO
PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Martlew, Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Resources
Environmental Health Manager
Policy and Performance Officer
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.53/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There was an apology for absence submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Riddle, Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder.

COSP.54/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in respect of the business to be transacted.

COSP.55/13 PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Panel agreed that Report LE.25/13 – CCTV Update – would be considered in the public part of the meeting as the issues therein were no longer confidential.

COSP.56/13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2013 be noted.

COSP.57/13 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.58/13 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.19/13 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 Scrutiny Officer reported that:

- The Notice of Executive Key Decisions had been published on 2 August 2013. The following issues fell within the remit of this Panel:

KD.018/13 – Play Area Review – the matter was due to be considered by the Panel at the meeting but had been deferred from the Executive meeting on 30 September 2013.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder advised that the review was ongoing and that a report would be submitted to the Panel prior to consideration at a future meeting of the Executive.

KD.021/13 – Application to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for Healthy City Status (Phase VI) – The Executive will be asked to approve the Council making an application for WHO Healthy City Status (Phase VI) at their meeting on 30 September 2013. The Deputy Chief Executive explained the background to the application and confirmed that he would circulate a copy to Members of the Panel.

- The following Minute Excerpts had been received from the Executive's meeting held on 5 August 2013:

EX.93/13 – Representatives on Outside Bodies

EX.84/13 – Arts Centre Development – the addendum to Executive Report CD.37/13 was attached for information at the request of the Chair of the Panel.

- Task Groups
 - Customer Access Strategy Task Group – the Task Group had met with the Director of Community Engagement and the Customer Services Manager on 2 August 2013. A briefing note summarising the discussion was attached as an appendix and Members were asked to note the progress made on the Strategy and agree the suggested way forward for the Task Group. A member of the Task Group stated that the Customer Contact Centre was very impressive and staff were enthusiastic.
 - Hate Crime Task Group – The Task Group held their initial meeting on 6 August 2013 to determine their Terms of Reference and scope the review. A copy of the Terms of Reference was tabled at the meeting.
- Work Programme – The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the current work programme and advised that a report in respect of Revenues and Benefits would be submitted for consideration at the meeting scheduled for October. The report would look at the performance of the service, the impact of the Welfare Reform Act and the progress of the Benefits Advisory Service.

The Director of Resources advised that Officers were required to state whether the Council would continue with the Localisation of Council Tax scheme in its present format or amend it. Due to time constraints it would be unlikely that the scheme would be amended in the current year.

The Director explained that the revenue costs of the scheme had been funded by technical changes within the budget such as empty properties project.

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

2) That the Deputy Chief Executive would circulate a copy of the application to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for Healthy City Status (Phase VI) to members of the Panel.

3) That a report in respect of the Revenues and Benefits Service be added to the work programme for the meeting scheduled for October 2013.

COSP.59/13 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013-14

The Policy and Performance Officer submitted report PC.14/13 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.

From Autumn 2013 a new service standard would be introduced, Customer Satisfaction with Environmental Services, that would be measured from customer feedback from the website and through the Carlisle Focus magazine readers' survey.

With regard to the information on the Carlisle Plan the intention was to provide the Panel with a brief overview of the current position without duplicating the more detailed reporting that had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels at earlier meetings.

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that in future only Service Standards that were relevant to the Panel would be included in the quarterly report.

The Director of Resources advised that last year the average number of days to process new benefits claims was 24 days. The current report indicated that the average figure was now 18 with the figure for July 2013 being 16.8 days which put the City Council within the top quartile.

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

- *Was the Service Standard benchmarked against other authorities?*

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that he did not have that information to hand but would find out and feed that information into the next report.

- *Was the number of days taken to process claims the only difference in the reporting of the Service Standard?*

The Director of Resources advised that the figure indicated an average of how many claims had been processed over a number of days. He explained that some claims could take up to 22 days when dealing with people in hard to reach groups.

- *A Member stated that the Service Standard was a dramatic improvement on previous figures.*
- *With regard to the Customer Contact Centre how many people used the application on the Council's website? The Member had looked at the applications and found them to be wordy and bureaucratic.*

The Director of Resources stated that it was still early days in respect of people using the Council's website to access application forms and that there were not so many people claiming Housing Benefits who would have access to the internet. Triage staff in the Customer Contact Centre would be available to help people complete forms online when they visited the Civic Centre. Although the forms could be completed on line there was still a requirement for them to be signed by the applicant.

The Policy and Performance Officer confirmed that he would pass on the comments regarding the website to the relevant personnel.

- *Would the Director of Resources ensure that the report would include special housing payments?*

The Director of Resources agreed that it would be useful to look at that area of the work of the service.

- *Had Officers looked at other authorities to compare their figures against those of the City Council?*

The Director of Resources explained that the City Council produced their own figures as there was no longer a requirement to maintain statistics for the Government.

- *There had been an impressive improvement in performance in Revenues and Benefits. Had there been extra pressure on staff to achieve those improvements?*

The Director of Resources advised that the improvement was due in part to improved IT systems as well as the work of Officers in the Customer Contact Centre.

- *With regard to the Carlisle Plan would there be enquiries in respect of the Arts Centre, sports, health and wellbeing and Children's Trust?*

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that that detail would be included elsewhere and Officers were working with Directors to provide updates. Issues were scrutinised by other groups such as the Corporate Project Board and a report would be submitted to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

- *Was the cycle ramp at Willowholme on track?*

The Director of Resources advised that the project had gone out to tender and the first responses had been received but it was still too early to update Members on progress.

- *The Old Town Hall is looking brilliant after the refurbishment and thanks should be passed to the staff involved.*

In response to a query from a Member of the Panel the Director of Resources agreed to provide a written response in respect of funding for the Homelife Carlisle project.

- *What progress had been made on the gypsy and traveller transit site?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the information would be included in the report that would be submitted to the Panel at their meeting in October.

- *The Empty Homes Project had made a real difference. Would further funding be available?*

The Director of Resources advised that Officers had applied for as much funding as was available this year and would apply for further funding when the new allocations were available.

RESOLVED: 1) That Report PC.14/13 – Quarter One Performance Report 2013-14 be noted.

2) That the Director of Resources to provide a written response in respect of funding for the Homelife Carlisle project.

3) That information in respect of the gypsy and traveller transit site to be included in the report to be submitted to the Panel at their meeting in October.

COSP.60/13 CCTV UPDATE

The Environmental Health Manager presented report LE.25/13 that informed the Panel on the current position of the City Council's public CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) system. The report included the impact of the recent changes to the system and detailed the negotiations that were, and had been, taking place with other agencies.

The Environmental Health Manager explained the background to the system, the current arrangements for monitoring the cameras and the future arrangements following the expiration of the BT fibre optic contract.

A comprehensive consultation exercise had been conducted between November 2012 and January 2013 on the proposed reduction of the Council's public CCTV system. Publicity for the proposed changes had occurred in the local media and prior to confirming its proposal the City Council directly sought the views of Cumbria Constabulary, Carlisle and Eden Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Riverside, The Lanes Shopping Centres, Retailers Against Crime and Pub Watch. The outcome of those negotiations was included within the report.

Negotiations had taken place with the Police and the Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder had written to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Environmental Health Manager advised the Panel of the impact of the changes including the requirement of new policies and procedures to ensure data protection and freedom of information obligations were met. The Council was liaising with the Police regarding those changes.

The Council retained within its budget finance for maintenance, repair and decommissioning. A new maintenance contract had been awarded and the Council were working with the new contractor to repair and future proof the system. Faults on the cameras would be notified by the Police or picked up on weekly checks.

The Environmental Health Manager believed that the next few months would be challenging but the Council was pleased with the performance of its new maintenance contractor and new policies and working practices were being put in place to manage the change process and meet the Council's legal obligations.

One of the outcomes of the changes in policy had been the need to look at the purpose of the CCTV system. Within the City Council the cameras were now monitored by Officers at their desks and the Council's Keepers and car parking officers also had access to the system. The main issue for the police was crime and disorder and the Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder had met with the Police Commissioner to discuss the matter.

The Environmental Health Manager confirmed that the City Council was committed to the maintenance of the 9 cameras to be retained by the Council.

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

- *When is a response expected from the Police Commissioner?*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder advised that she had had long discussions on police input into CCTV and discussed the recommendations with the Acting Chief Constable who was looking at a county wide solution. The Portfolio Holder had received a response from the Police Commissioner who had confirmed that the police were looking at a county wide service.

- *The report stated that from June 2013 the City Council was unable to immediately respond to requests for images. Why was that?*

The Environmental Health Manager explained that previously there had been someone in the control room at all times. Now there was no-one whose time was fully allocated to CCTV. However, the Environmental Health Manager reminded Members that the police had the facility to view images at the Police station at Durranhill and there was also a link to the Police station at Penrith. All images were retained for 28 days.

The Environmental Health Manager further explained that an officer checked that the cameras were functioning on a weekly basis. The cameras had been maintained more regularly than had initially been agreed to make any handover to the Police an easier transition. However, the budget would be tighter next year so it would not be possible to maintain those cameras.

- *A private security company had expressed an interest in monitoring the cameras for free. Would it be possible for someone to do that in the future?*

The Environmental Health Manager advised that images from the cameras were currently the responsibility of the City Council and if they were used inappropriately the Council could be held responsible. There were several issues to be taken into account in respect of allowing a 3rd party access to the images and the sensitive information they contained. The Officer was not aware of any other authority using 3rd parties for the monitoring of data.

- *An article in the press had stated that Carlisle had the second safest car parks in the country.*

The Portfolio Holder was pleased with that report and believed that it was related to the provision of the CCTV system.

- *What was the current situation in respect of the five redeployable CCTV cameras funded by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership?*

The Environmental Health Manager advised that one was maintained by the City Council and the remaining four by the Carlisle Strategic Partnership (CSP). Since the responsibility for the highways had passed to the County Council there was now a cost implication in the use of the cameras on street lights. The CSP, through the “accountable body” Eden District Council, cover the costs for the redeployable cameras.

- *Had there been any impact in not monitoring the cameras at all times?*

The Environmental Health Manager advised that there had been no issues and that the images had been available.

The Portfolio Holder advised that discussions with the police had been positive and they had acknowledged that the cameras were an essential police tool. Since April there had been 80 hours of evidence used by the police in comparison to 2 requests per week from insurance companies.

- *Were all of the cameras being maintained at present?*

The Environmental Health Manager explained the City Council had a contract to maintain some cameras but had used the carry forward money to maintain other cameras to assist the Police and help with any future transfers. Cameras used most often were the ones that needed most maintenance.

- *A Member was surprised that the police were taking so long to make a decision on the CCTV system.*
- *Had there been any increase in crime rates where CCTV coverage had ceased? And how did that compare to other authorities?*

The Environmental Health Manager and the Portfolio Holder advised that as the system was still operating they were unable to comment on the increase in crime in Carlisle without the cameras. The Environmental Health Manager and the Portfolio Holder were unaware of the impact on crime in those authorities such as Eden and Allerdale, who had switched off their cameras. Crime generally was falling in Carlisle.

- *As CCTV was within the police jurisdiction the onus was on them to take on the monitoring of the CCTV system.*

The Environmental Health Manager advised that he was the Council's representative on the Violence and Crime Task Group on the CSP which had determined that crime figures were falling.

RESOLVED: That Report LE.25/13 – CCTV Update be noted.

(The meeting ended at 11:00am)