

Meeting Date: 5 November 2013

Public/Private*: Public

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

Housing & Health Services

Accommodation and Support Services

Residents moved into the new scheme at Water Street on 2nd October; and we are currently clearing the old scheme on London Road to ensure vacant possession prior to the sale of the building.

As well as a new building the team have introduced a new approach to service delivery based on an individually tailored support plan that offers choice and independence. In order to support these new systems, paperwork, interventions and staff approaches are being implemented, including a development and training programme for staff and residents.

In addition to the operational development several community projects and partnership initiatives are being developed to deliver a programme of positive engagement activities for residents to improve health and wellbeing and confidence:

- ⇒ Community initiative to develop the garden / play area with the Heathlands project and Laurie Brewis Trust (LBT)
- ⇒ Financial / money management advice to be delivered in co-ordination with Barclays Bank
- ⇒ A programme of arts and crafts and practical living sessions with the LBT and Barnardos
- ⇒ Partnership working with Hayton School and Carlisle College to develop art work for the replacement women and family accommodation; teaching worksheets for children within the hostel; and teaching worksheets to be developed for the children

attending Hayton School to promote homelessness awareness as a pilot for future prevention initiatives with young people and schools

- ⇒ A programme of education and training sessions with students from Carlisle College for residents including childcare, health and beauty, daily living skills etc
- ⇒ Drop in sessions planned in partnership with Children's services and the Hebron church including a community cafe, crèche and child care services
- ⇒ Art and crafts workshops with families and children, first session to take place 19.10.13

Welfare Advice Service

Total benefit gains for the period 1/4/13 until 30/9/13 are **£701,747.85**:

Telephone calls	1491
Total Appointments	640
Total Home Visits	75
Total Appeals	64
Referrals	100
Benefit Gains	701,747.85

Feedback from Clients

The service routinely seeks feedback on the services it provides. An extract from a letter written by a client is enclosed below;

"I would like to thank you for your help and advice regarding my benefit application which was disallowed. You lodged an appeal for me. The case was reconsidered and the benefit allowed.

I would not have been able to deal with the case myself as I have a daughter with multiple disability, who has been very ill over the last few months and her condition has deteriorated. Apart from this, I don't know enough about benefits and the appeal system and you were able to deal with this swiftly for me. This was a great relief as the situation was very stressful.

Thank you again for your support and expert advice."

Cumbria Affordable Warmth Project

The Energy Company Obligation

Carlisle City Council has led on a procurement process to select ECO Preferred Providers for Cumbria. Carlisle has chosen to work with SIG Energy Management who is expected to deliver around £5m investment in the District to alleviate fuel poverty and deliver carbon savings. The roll out of the programme is expected to commence in early spring 2014.

Homelife - Home Improvement Agency

In September we did 16 home visits. We had 4 referrals under the Sanctuary Scheme for victims of Domestic Violence. We also provided help and advice to 33 clients over the phone.

The Community Neighbour Coordinator, whose role is to develop a volunteer network to provide low level support to older people in their own homes, has recruited 16 volunteers, of which 5 are currently being matched to clients.

A Housing Caseworker, to facilitate hospital discharge where this is prevented by a housing issue, has been recruited and will be in post early November. We have advertised for an Apprentice to help with dealing with clients and expect to appoint someone in November.

Empty Homes

The City Council is leading on the Cluster of Empty Homes initiative. The City Council's target of returning 45 empty homes back in to use is progressing well, with fifteen grants approved to date.

Affordable Housing

Two Castles Housing Association is welcoming residents into their new homes after work completed on a £1.4million affordable homes scheme in Mayfield Avenue, Carlisle

Built in partnership with developers Cubby Construction and part-funded by the Homes and Communities Agency, the energy efficient scheme includes nine three-bedroom and two four-bedroom properties.

With support from Carlisle City Council, the development has been constructed to Code for Sustainable Homes Level Three Standards. Each individual home incorporates a range of energy-efficient features including photovoltaic solar panels helping to make each home even more affordable and reduce overall energy bills for tenants.

Cubby Construction sourced all labour, materials and sub-contractors from the local area, providing a welcome boost for growth and jobs.

Revenues & Benefits

Welfare Reform

Discretionary Housing Benefit (DHP) applications, are continuing to be received. 392 applications have been made from March – September 2013, an increase of 390% compared to the same period in 2012. 166 awards have been made resulting in payments of £42,519 and this represents 28% of the available funding. The increased volume of applications is still anticipated to increase as rent arrears arise, benefit cap reductions take effect and utility bills rise over the coming months. At present, enquiries are at lower than anticipated levels considering the numbers of customers affected, but this is in line with the experience of Councils generally across the country.

Crime & Disorder

Operation Roman Candle

On the build up to Bonfire Night, Carlisle City Council is joining forces with Cumbria Constabulary, Riverside Housing and Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service to stamp out dangerous 'hot spots'.

The City Council is leading on a multi-agency initiative to tackle anti-social behaviour. Operation Roman Candle will run between Friday, 25 October and Wednesday, 6 November. The partnership venture will deal with anti-social behaviour and nuisance fires during the half term, Halloween and Bonfire Night period.

This will include a series of co-ordinated activities including visits to schools, activities for young people, skip drops for Riverside tenants alongside enforcement measures including test purchasing, removal of unauthorised bonfires and high visibility patrols by the police.

Support Scheme for Victims of Anti-Social Behaviour

Referrals are now coming in for the new scheme which has been funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The scheme which offers a free home safety check to anyone that has been a victim of ASB or is vulnerable to the threat of ASB has been working well and more than 10 residents are now receiving additional support.

Customer Services

Foyer Re-design

Work on the refurbishment of the Civic Centre foyer is nearing completion. The self serve pedestals are in place and the statistics indicate they are being used frequently. Triage receptionists are now in post and assisting customers to self serve where required. The

introduction of triage receptionists means a new way of service delivery at the first point of contact within the Civic Centre. The receptionists will ascertain what the customer needs prior to them entering the contact centre. In some cases the receptionists will be able to assist the customers themselves. In other cases the receptionist will ensure the customer gets the correct information to answer their query or directs them to the contact centre. This will enable the advisors within the contact centre to serve those customers who really need them. This is especially important as welfare reform changes bed in and claims for benefit get longer and more complex.

The decoration of the foyer to reflect the Carlisle Story should be complete by mid November. New heaters in the foyer and the entrance area have been ordered and will also be in place for mid November. Work is scheduled to be done on the automatic doors to the entrance of the Civic Centre to ensure the foyer stays warm in the cold weather for the benefit of staff and customers.

Councillor Jessica Riddle
Portfolio Holder for Communities & Housing