

Meeting Date: 16 July 2013

Public/Private*: Public

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

HOMELESSNESS, PREVENTION AND ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Accommodation and Support Services

The Accommodation and Support Services currently have a 96% occupancy rate; and the move on period from temporary accommodation is currently 7 weeks for singles and 5 weeks for families. The positive move on rate for the men's scheme is 72% and women and family and dispersed properties 92%.

The service is working hard to ensure that there is a smooth transition process from the current women and family accommodation to the new building. The official opening event took place on 15th July and gave an opportunity for stakeholders to visit the scheme prior to residents moving in. We aim to be fully operational and move in to the new facility on 31st July.

In addition to the operational development several community projects and partnership initiatives are being developed to deliver a programme of positive engagement activities:

- ⇒ Community initiative to develop the garden / play area with the Heathlands project and Laurie Brewis Trust (LBT)
- ⇒ 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 the Hebron church including a community cafe and child care

Welfare Advice Service

Total benefit gains for the period 1/4/13 until 26/6/13 are **£326,454.59**; comparative gains for the same period in 2012/13 were £329,427.19.

Welfare Reform Board

Carlisle Welfare Reform board was established in February 2013 with the agreed primary aim of ensuring effective collaboration and co-operation with key partners in response to the challenges of welfare reform. The board meets bi-monthly to collectively monitor, and analyse local intelligence and to develop pro-active collaborative preventative approaches to supporting people within the district. To date the board has focused on localised key changes such as under-occupancy; discretionary housing payments; homelessness; and 'Ways to Welfare'.

HOUSING

Homelife - Home Improvement Agency

Over the last 3 months the Home Improvement Agency has been developing its work streams as outlined in the business plan. Work on affordable warmth measures and affordable loans are being taken forward. The Community Neighbour Coordinator has been recruited and is now in post; their role will be to develop a volunteer network to provide low level support to older people in their own homes working particularly with Health & Social Care.

We are also in the process of recruiting a Housing Caseworker, who will facilitate hospital discharge where this is prevented by a housing issue.

Private Sector Housing Technical Team update

According to the Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey (March 2012), 14.5% of properties in Carlisle are in the private rented sector and, although this is slightly less than the national average, this has increased from 9.7% of the market share since 2006. The increase in the size of the private rented sector in Carlisle has implications for the Private Sector Housing Team and has increased the demands on the service to support landlords and carry out enforcement action where landlords are non-compliant.

To meet the increased demands placed on it, it is essential that the Private Sector Housing team can work efficiently and be adequately supported by available technology. With this in mind, a CIVICA/Flare database package is being rolled out across the team. The database will enable property details to be recorded, along with details of any enforcement action taken. It will be easy to interrogate the database, to produce reports, to improve work planning and result in more efficient working across the team.

The implementation date for CIVICA/Flare is scheduled for 24 July 2013.

Empty properties

The Empty Property Officer and Housing Apprentice continue to progress the empty property initiatives which have received external funding.

The Cluster of Empty Homes initiative focuses on selected geographical areas where the proportion of empty homes exceeds 10%. Activity has been focussed on generating interest in the scheme prior to grants and loans being available from the end of July onwards, subject to approval by the Council of the revised Scheme of Housing Assistance.

The target of returning 45 empty homes back in to use is progressing well, with 23 schedules of work having been produced and very positive enquiries from 8 further clients. A further mail shot will be produced in August to advertise this scheme.

REVENUES & BENEFITS

Housing Benefits

The implementation of the Benefit Cap nationwide commences from 15th July 2013 and it is anticipated will be fully implemented across the country by the end of September.

Generally the cap applies to combined income from the main out of work benefits (for working age customers)

- (Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance/Employment & Support Allowance (no support component) – refers to a term relating to the level of assistance someone on Employment & Support Allowance may need due to their level of illness or disability. If you have the Support element, in ESA the Benefit Cap will no apply)
- Housing Benefit
- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credit

The cap levels are

- £500 per week for couples and lone parents
- £350 per week for single adults

If the combined income from benefits is above the set threshold, the cap is applied by reducing the amount of housing benefit paid.

Current numbers of housing benefit claims potentially affected, (taken from the latest May 2013 data scans in Carlisle) are 28 households with 39 people directly affected (this is number of adults affected as the children shown in the households comes to 163, an average of 4.2 per household).

The City Council is working closely with Job Centre Plus and other partners to ensure that support is provided for those affected.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

The Civic Centre foyer is currently undergoing work to refurbish the area and make better use of the space. The majority of the maintenance work is due to be completed towards the end of July. However, further work will be ongoing on utilising the space for exhibitions and marketing as well as working with partners.

New self service terminals will also be placed in the foyer allowing customers the opportunity to access services directly from the terminals. This is in addition to the way customers access services now. Triage receptionists will be assisting customers with the new facilities.

CARLISLE & EDEN COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Partnership Plan

The Carlisle and Eden Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is progressing its Partnership Plan 2013/14. The plan outlines the priorities for 2013-14 and will be supported by a series of actions plans being developed and delivered by the task groups of the CSP.

The priorities for the CSP in 2013/ 14 are:

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Reduce harm caused by drugs
- Reduce Re-offending
- Violent Crime
- Impact of alcohol misuse
- Domestic abuse and Sexual violence

Funding

In 2012/13, £32,762 was made available from Cumbria County Council in order to support the work of the Carlisle and Eden CSP. The Partnership was also successful in drawing down funding from the NHS and Riverside Housing. In addition to the funds, both Carlisle City Council and Eden District Council have made available significant officer time in assisting the Task Groups and the Leadership Board with project delivery, administration and financial accounting.

Following a bid to the Police and Crime Commissioner £49,143.60 has been secured to enable the partnership to continue to support the work of the task grounds and assist the partnership in its aspirations in 2013/14.

Local crime information and statistics can be obtained through Cumbria Constabulary's website <http://www.cumbria.police.uk/neighbourhood-overview> to compare crime levels in your local area with other similar areas and see how crime levels have changed over time.

Problem Solving Groups

Problem Solving Groups across the District continue to work well and provide early interventions to ensure a quick response to community issues.

Noise nuisance still remains one of the key priorities across the west of the City. The City Councils Environmental Health Team is working closely with partners (Police and Housing Providers) to tackle the problems and develop longer term solutions.

PSG Performance Monitoring	City West (March 2011 -)	Carlisle East (March 2012 -)
Total number of actions dealt with	153	61