

## **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY 19 JULY 2012 AT 10.00 AM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Luckley (Chairman) Councillors Mrs Bradley, Collier (until 11.15am), Mrs Prest, Scarborough, Miss Sherriff, Mrs Stevenson, and Mrs Vasey.

**ALSO**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Riddle – Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder  
Mr P Taylor - Head of Operations, Riverside Carlisle  
Ms S Kellock – Assistant Director of Finance, Riverside Carlisle

### **COSP.45/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There no apologies for absence submitted.

### **COSP.46/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs Stevenson declared a registrable interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item A.5 Corporate Plan: End of Year Performance Report. The interest related to the fact that she was a trustee on the Carlisle and Eden District Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor Mrs Luckley declared a registrable interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item A.3 Riverside Carlisle Joint Working. The interest related to the fact that she was the City Council's representative on the Riverside Carlisle Board.

### **COSP.47/12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meetings held on 7 June 2012 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

### **COSP.48/12 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS**

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

## **COSP.49/12 AGENDA**

RESOLVED – That Agenda items A.3, Riverside Carlisle Joint Working and A.4, Disabled Facilities Grants be considered before Agenda item A2 the Overview Report to avoid any unnecessary delay to external organisations attending the Panel.

## **COSP.50/12 RIVERSIDE CARLISLE JOINT WORKING**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Paul Taylor and Ms Susan Kellock, Riverside Carlisle to the meeting.

The Director of Community Engagement (Mr Gerrard) submitted report CD.40/12 which provided an update on the joint working between Riverside Housing and Carlisle City Council.

He informed the Panel that a lot of work had been carried out to improve the relationship between the Council and Riverside Carlisle to ensure the partnership stayed strong. Senior Managers of the Council had attended a successful away day with representative of Riverside Carlisle to look at opportunities to maximise the relationship and to take advantage of any development opportunities and to resolve any issues.

An outcome of the away day had been the establishment of a senior management working group with Riverside and the meetings were currently being scheduled.

Mr Gerrard stated that an update on the empty homes funding would be provided at a future meeting.

Members raised the following comments and questions:

- A Member asked for clarification with regard to Riverside's estimation that 16.5% of their residents under-occupied accommodation.

Mr P Taylor explained that the estimation was the percentage of tenancies that could be under occupied and added that the figure could change before April 2013 due to changes in tenants circumstances.

- What measures had Riverside put in place to deal with the changes and potential shortfall in rent that the Welfare Reform could bring?

Mr P Taylor explained that Riverside had established a Group to deal with the Welfare Reform and the impact of the Universal Credit along with the significant impact of the under occupancy issues.

He stated that Riverside had written to all tenants advising them of the impact of the reform on them, they have also written to all tenants who fall within under occupancy explaining the impact on them and the options available to them.

Those tenants who were under occupying their property would face a shortfall in housing benefit support and would have to choose between finding the additional money or asked to be prioritised for a housing transfer. Mr P Taylor added that Riverside were fortunate that they still had a number of one bedroom properties available and he believed that one bedroom properties would become more popular in future due to the Reform. The letters were sent out to establish tenants' views but there had only been a 13% response rate from tenants to date.

Mr P Taylor clarified that the under occupancy regulations did not effect tenants who were at a pensionable age and the communications from Riverside had tried to make that fact clear.

- Would any of the current house stock be reclassified to deal with rooms which are counted as a bedroom but in reality are not large enough to be used as one?

Mr P Taylor confirmed that consideration had been given to the reclassification of stock but the rental revenue is estimated on the number of rooms in properties.

- There had been some issues in the past regarding communications from Riverside to its tenants; had the form of communication to tenants been looked at or changed?

Mr P Taylor responded that Riverside had established the Reform as a major project to ensure there was real focus on the issues. A newsletter containing information about the changes had been sent out to all tenants. Riverside had also written to all tenants and they would continue to send them information and advice.

- How was the Choice Based Letting progressing?

Mr P Taylor reminded the Panel that Riverside were one of a number of partners with Cumbria Choice and did have some input into policy but they were not in control. He felt that the Choice Based Letting system had some advantages and disadvantages and Riverside regularly reviewed their position within Cumbria Choice and listened to the opinions of stakeholders, applications and the City Council regarding the process.

- Were the referrals for homelessness increasing?

Mr P Taylor responded that Riverside accepted the majority of referrals and a large proportion of the tenancies awarded were to homeless people. He added that Riverside had to be aware of the longer term implications of the under occupancy regulations when awarding tenancies to ensure they were not given tenants properties that they could not afford in the future.

- Were affordable homes automatically built to Lifetime Home Standards?

Mr P Taylor explained that Riverside had begun to review the type of accommodation that would be provided in the future. Riverside were limited in how they could move forward due to the changes to grant but they did have regular meetings with all departments to discuss future development. Part of the

discussions were to consider the Welfare Reform and the under occupancy issues and the need for lifetime homes. He added that it was difficult to build properties to Lifetime Home Standards due to the increased costs and Riverside had to balance building Lifetime Home Standard properties or a larger number of properties that cost less to build.

- A Member congratulated Riverside on the successful redevelopment of Seatoller Close.
- How was the social/affordable housing within new developments allocated? Were Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) invited as partners by developers?

Mr S Taylor (Strategic and Private Sector Housing Manager) explained 25% of new developments had to be available for social/low cost/ affordable housing. The developer would sell the affordable properties to Registered Social Landlords if they wanted them but in the current climate RSLs do not always have the resources to purchase the properties. The Section 106 agreement would allow for different options such as shared ownership.

RESOLVED – 1) The Panel thanked Mr Taylor and Ms Kellock of Riverside Carlisle for their input into the meeting and welcomed the update on the partnership.

2) The Panel looked forward to receiving a further update, to include information on the impact of the Welfare Reform on Riverside tenants and how this was being addressed in January 2013.

## **COSP.51/12    DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS**

The Director of Community Engagement (Mr Gerrard) submitted report CD.41/12 which provided an update on the Action Plan from the Disabled Facilities Grants(DFGs) Task and Finish Group which provided their final report on 24 November 2011.

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

- What was the waiting time for an initial assessment by the Occupational Therapists?

Mr S Taylor (Strategic and Private Sector Housing Manager) responded that he did not have the initial assessment time because the Occupational Therapists worked for Cumbria County Council. He did inform the Panel that it took approximately ten weeks from the referral from the OTs to the approval of the grant; however, this figure had increased slightly.

- The Department of Health had awarded a further £54,000 to Carlisle, was there any opportunity to allocate monies or carry them forward to enable higher funding?

Mr S Taylor explained how the funding had been allocated and informed the Panel that all of the monies had been spent. The £54,000 had not been secured from a bid or application but had been awarded to the authority and it was unclear if there would be further monies awarded to the authority at this point.

Mr S Taylor added that there was continuing lobby regarding short term and long term funding.

- Who checked the quality of the adaptations that were being carried out by Riverside?

Mr S Taylor informed the Panel that the Riverside adaptations were inspected by Riverside and the City Council adaptations were inspected by their own in house technical officers. He reminded the Panel that adaptations were now undertaken through a procurement framework so contractors would be removed if their work was not of a satisfactory quality.

- Were adapted properties let out to people who require the adaptations?

Mr P Taylor stated that each property had a profile when advertised through the Choice Based Letting scheme and the profile allowed for all adaptations to be listed. Riverside would try and place a tenant in the property who required the adaptation but it was not always possible to identify a suitable tenant.

- Had there been an improvement the time it takes to place some adaptations in properties when they fall under the Riverside commitment?

Mr P Taylor stated that he would submit the information to a future meeting of the Panel. Ms Kellock added that Riverside had a key indicator with regard to adaptations and had made changes to improve the service.

Mr S Taylor stated that the Council's budget had reduced and the work Riverside undertook had allowed for more money to be used for larger adaptations.

- Would the new GP Consortia help with DFGs?

Mr S Taylor highlighted section 7 of the report and informed the Panel that health and social care had committed £3m over a three year period to the six District Councils to develop an integrated health pilot which would help the whole DFG process. As a first step in the process, Carlisle had been accredited as a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) by Foundations, the national body for HIAs. This had given Carlisle access to additional funding streams and increased the range of options available to clients needing help. It was expected that through Foundations, the Department of Health would provide monies for a Handyperson Scheme in Carlisle. This would be, as in other areas, a chargeable service so would be self funding.

Ms Kellock added that Riverside operated a Careline service and offered a repair service by the Riverside Repair Team to anyone using the Careline service.

- Were there any projections for the cost of providing adaptations?

Mr S Taylor confirmed that projections had been carried out but it was very difficult to do and the requirements could vary greatly. There had been national studies carried out based on average costs. He agreed to provide the Panel with more detailed information at a future meeting.

- Carlisle City Council had received £300,000 from Riverside, was it known if Riverside would continue to contribute to DFGs and if so how much?

Ms Kellock responded that she would report back to the Panel at a future meeting.

- A Member felt strongly that developers would not build homes to the Lifetime Homes Standards until the legislation was changed.

The Panel agreed to refer the issue to the Executive and ask them to lobby the appropriate Government Department to support a change in legislation.

RESOLVED – 1) That the update on the Action Plan from the Disabled Facilities Grant Task and Finish Group be welcomed:

2) That the next update contains:

Information on the effect on the Council budget of the Riverside commitment to fund the first £7,000 for approved Disabled Facilities Grants relating to their properties.

Details of projections made on the future cost of adaptation provision and the outcome of national studies.

Details of future contributions from Riverside.

3) That the Executive be asked to lobby the Government Department for a change in legislation regarding lifetime homes.

## **COSP.52/12 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Officer (Mrs Edwards) presented report OS.18/12 which provided an overview of matters relating to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work and included the latest version of the work programme and Forward Plan items which related to the Panel.

Mrs Edwards reported that:

- The Forward Plan of Executive Key Decisions, covering the period 1 July to 31 October 2012 had been published on 18 June 2012 and there had been one item in the Forward Plan within the remit of this Panel:

KD.021/12 – Localisation of Council Tax – The matter was scheduled to be agreed by the Executive on 6 August for consultation during September. Members agreed that the Panel would consider the report during the consultation period.

- The new Work Programme for 2012/13 had been appended to the report. The Panel were asked to give further consideration to three matters:

*Sports* - The Panel had previously highlighted that they would like to look further at the provision of sports in the District. Following a discussion between the Chair and the Director of Community Engagement it had been suggested that the Panel were involved in a study which had been commissioned.

The Director of Community Engagement (Mr Gerrard) informed the Panel that a consultant would be brought in to carry out a review of the sport facility stock within the City. It had been agreed informally that the costs for the review would be met by the City Council, County Council, University of Cumbria, Richard Rose and Sport England. The review would include consideration of the future of the Pools, possible development at Harraby, possible use of the Richard Rose Academy Morton, open spaces and playing pitches.

Mr Gerrard added that all schools, community centres and village halls would be included and any other organisation that may provide facilities for community use. He confirmed that he had a copy of the 2006 Sports Review.

The Panel felt strongly that they should be involved in the Review and be given an opportunity to provide input and Ward Members views on any recommendations or proposals.

*Community Centres* - Members had highlighted that they wished to look further at the issue of Community Centres and it had been suggested that initially a one-day scrutiny would be undertaken. Volunteers were required for this piece of work.

*Rural Meeting* – The Panel had previously discussed holding a meeting in a rural area and the Chair of the Panel would discuss the possibility with the Chair of CALC in order that arrangements can be made for a focussed meeting which can add value to the provision of services in the Rural areas of the District.

The Panel the scrutiny of the Tullie House Trust Contract and agreed to hold a joint scrutiny review or meeting with the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

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 Forward Plan item KD.21/12 – Localisation of Council Tax be considered during the consultation period.

3) That the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel be involved in the review of sports facilities within the City.

4) That Councillors Mrs Sherriff, Mrs Stevenson, Mrs Prest and Mrs Vasey undertake a one day scrutiny session on Community Centres.

5) That the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel hold a Joint Review or joint meeting with the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel to scrutinise the Tullie House Trust Contract.

## **COSP.53/12    CORPORATE PLAN: END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Community Engagement (Mr Gerrard) presented the end of year performance report against the 2011/12 Corporate Plan (PPP.07/12).

The report contained summary of the progress made in the delivery of each of the Corporate Plan Key Actions and further details were provided in the report. The contents of the report had been determined by the Senior Management team on 14 May 2012 and the Key Action Red, Amber, Green (RAG) ratings had been assessed by the relevant Director. The RAG rating column related to work that had been carried out during 2011/12.

The Scrutiny Officers reminded the Panel that the format of previous corporate plan reports had not been useful to Scrutiny and that the Scrutiny Chairs Group had met to discuss the layout of the new Service Standard report. The new report would allow for meaningful scrutiny and would be clearer for members of the public.

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

- How well was the Council working with community based organisations?

Mr Gerrard responded that the Council worked with community based organisations on a daily basis and now the Council had to facilitate events etc rather than carry them out. The Council had employed a Development Officer who was working as closely as possible with Community Centres as they were well placed within the community to deliver activities.

The Communities and Housing Portfolio Holder added that the Cumbria Voluntary Service would be holding a six week training course for community centre managers and management committees, the course would assist the Centres in becoming more sustainable and would include accessing their own funding, business planning and identifying new ways of delivering their core business. She urged all Ward Members to encourage their Community Centre Management Committees to attend the training and agreed to circulate the course information to all Members.

- Members raised some issues with regard to facilities and staffing at Talkin Tarn and Hammonds Pond and asked that some scrutiny work was undertaken on the issues.



RESOLVED – 1) That the Corporate Plan End of Year Performance Report be welcomed.

2) That the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel be asked to undertake some scrutiny work on the condition of Talkin Tarn, the facilities available and the staffing levels at both Talkin Tarn and Hammonds Pond.

#### **COSP.54/12    CDRP JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer (Mrs Edwards) submitted report OS.19/12 which outlined options available on the future scrutiny of issues related to the Carlisle and Eden Crime and Disorder Reduction Panel.

Mrs Edwards reminded the Panel of the background to the Joint Scrutiny Panel and the reasons for its establishment. Following a delay the Joint Panel had held meetings over a full Civic Year and it was therefore timely to review the Panel.

She also reminded the Panel that they had raised concerns at their meeting on the 7 June 2012 regarding the achievements of the Joint Panel and had resolved to give consideration as to whether Carlisle should continue to be involved in the Joint Scrutiny or whether this should return to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Mrs Edwards outlined the concerns that the Panel had previously raised which included issues with officer support from Eden, whether the Joint Panel added any value to the scrutiny of the Carlisle and Eden CDRP and the lost link between the Community Panel and Community Safety.

Mrs Edwards explained that the Terms of Reference for the Joint Panel had been agreed on 10 June 2010 but they did not contain an exit strategy other than there should be an end of year review of the effectiveness of the Panel.

RESOLVED – 1) That Carlisle withdraw from the Joint CDRP Scrutiny Panel with Eden;

2) That the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel scrutinise all activities of the CDRP and general Community Safety issues relating to Carlisle.

(The meeting ended at 11.55am)