

Report to:

Council

Agenda
Item

11(i)(b)

Meeting Date: 16 July 2013

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Chairman’s Report
Councillor Mrs Luckley**

Meeting Dates – 30 May 2013 and 20 June 2013

Since the beginning of the new civic year the Panel has met twice. The first meeting in May centred mainly around two important subjects.

Firstly, the Panel continued its oversight of the development of the Shaddongate Resource Centre. The report of the Centre’s first year of operation, outlining the financial outcomes, the service developments, together with the plans for the future led to a wide ranging discussion. The questioning was aided by the attendance of the YMCA Manager of the Centre. Emphasis in the questioning was laid on the use of the Centre by outside agencies, the development of services, particularly relating to employment, youth services and health and essentially, the Centre’s ability to retain financial sustainability.

These are difficult times for such a new facility to open, but the panel was impressed with the progress that has been made in the Centre’s first year and the Portfolio Holder commented that she was confident that the Centre would be successful. The Panel believes that the Centre could provide important opportunities to contribute to the aims of the Carlisle Plan and intend to monitor the activities of the Centre in its second year of operation.

The Panel received a report on the Scheme of Housing Assistance (Empty Properties/Disabled Facilities Grants). The Panel found the session devoted to this subject illuminating and the officers most diligent in the depth of information they provided. Concern was expressed in relation to the Council’s overseeing of the quality of work carried out on empty properties, there being three reasons in the main for this.

The first being the part a decent home can play in relation to tenants' health, well being and satisfaction with the accommodation. The productive use of public funding and thirdly in regard to the Council's policy of providing valuable assistance in housing renewal. These concerns were noted and the report that went to the Executive outlined the steps that will be taken to address them.

I should add that the Panel was impressed that this was an area of housing regeneration in which the housing department had been very successful in obtaining funding from government, therefore increasing the Council's ability to contribute to bringing about the occupancy of empty properties that can be rescued through the scheme.

The final item on the agenda of the May meeting was the 2012/13 Summary of Service Standards in which the only service standard within the Summary that came under the Panel's remit was the processing of new benefit claims.

It's the Council's aim to process claims within 28 days. It's a shared service that had difficulties regarding computer systems in its early days which caused delays. But since the Spring of last year, there has been a steady rise in performance which the Panel has been pleased to see. The Panel however did request that with the objectives of the Carlisle Plan in mind, that there should be in future reports a narrative as to how the service's results support the aims of the Plan.

Our second meeting in June was held due to a Call-in by three members of the Panel of the report GD/28/13 concerning Representatives on Outside Bodies.

The meeting produced an examination by members of the role of Council nominated representatives on outside bodies, looking at experience needed, the importance of regular attendance and the appropriateness of the nominees. The members who made the Call-in itemised their concerns about nominations, around which they had questions to ask, questions which linked with the points above.

The Acting Leader who attended on behalf of the Executive confirmed that a further report on representation would be going to the Executive and the Panel asked that the Executive should take into consideration the observations and comments made by members of the Panel.

Councillor Olwyn Luckley