

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMUNITY

Report of
Chairman:

**COUNCILLOR
PETER FARMER**

Since my last report there have been two meetings of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2009 and 26 March 2009. Members will recall that I mentioned verbally at the last Council Meeting that, although the 12 February meeting had been held prior to the Council Meeting, the closing date for inclusion of minutes had precluded minutes of that particular meeting being included.

Meeting held on 12 February included a lengthy discussion with Patrick Leonard of Carlisle Housing Association and Hugh Owen of the Riverside Group concerning the future proposed absorption of Carlisle Housing Association into the Riverside Group. This matter had already been before the Executive and been passed to this Committee for comment. Members raised the same concerns that had been the issue at a previous meeting regarding the autonomy of the Carlisle branch of Riverside should the amalgamation go ahead. Mr Leonard explained in some detail the reasons why a joint approach would be advantageous to tenants in Carlisle and the bulk of his remarks and answers to questions raised can be seen in the Minute Book. It was, eventually, agreed that the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the proposed amalgamation subject to the legal provisos laid out in Report LDS.21/09. This agenda item was followed immediately by discussions concerning the Partnership Agreement between Carlisle City Council and Carlisle Housing Association which was attended by Paul Taylor and Keith Forrester of Carlisle Housing Association. Allan Dickson the Principal Housing Officer gave an update on progress being undertaken through the partnership. Concern was expressed regarding the Mortgage Rescue Scheme which was commented on by Jeremy Hewitson, the Housing Enabling Officer. Further concern was expressed concerning the lack of financial support for the Disabled Facilities Grants scheme. Despite support from outside agencies it was certain that there would be insufficient funds to meet all requests for assistance. Again, all the questions and answers may be found in the Minute Book and it was resolved that the Committee should receive regular updates. A number of references from the

Executive and other Overview and Scrutiny Committees were discussed and noted.

Emma Titley, the Learning City Manager gave a brief report on the priorities and how they are being progressed. It was requested that a further report, containing more detail, be given at the next meeting. A report concerning Performance Reporting to Scrutiny Committees was given by Carolyn Curr which was noted and agreed and that Officers and Members continue to work in collaboration to develop the performance framework for the City Council.

Meeting held on 26 March 2009.

The bulk of this meeting was taken up with two main topics - COS.22/09 The Advice Agencies Service Agreements and COS.24/09 The Lonsdale Feasibility Study. The meeting commenced with presentations by Andy Auld of the Citizens advice Bureau, Karen Bowman of Cumbria Council for Voluntary Services and Paul im Thurn of the Community Law Centre. The Community Support Manager, Rob Burns, introduced the three guests explaining how the City Council provides funding for these agencies. He also explained that in return for funding the agencies deliver services to met some of the Council's own key objectives. The three Leaders of the agencies represented then explained in detail how their officers worked, the costs involved and the staffing implications. The Committee were impressed with the work done by each agency, particularly within the present financial constraints. The report indicated the amount of money the Council made available to each agency on an annual basis but, after due discussion it was felt that the Executive be asked to consider paying the agencies three years financial support in advance instead of the annual payment as at present. This would be in line with Government payment schemes and would enable agencies to plan ahead and draw down additional financial support. In addition, it was resolved that the Executive be requested to support the Cumbria Advice Network in lobbying the Legal Services Commission for a tendering process which would not penalise the activities of the three agencies concerned. Questions raised and answers given may be found in the Minute Book. Martin Murphy, the Director of Community and Fundraising Development for the Richard Rose Foundation then addressed the meeting. Using DVDs he gave an over-view of the proposed Youth Zone project and compared it with one already in place at Bolton. Bids for grants over £5m had already been received towards a purpose built facility in the grounds on the Richard Rose Academy in central Carlisle. Again all the questions asked and the answers given may be found in the Minute Book.

After a brief break the meeting resumed with a lengthy discussion on the Lonsdale Feasibility Study. Mark Beveridge, the Head of Culture and Community Services introduced the report prepared by Roger Lancaster Associates. He also pointed out that there had already been a number of reports prepared concerning the Lonsdale Building. He also reminded the meeting that the building is owned by Empera Estates and is also a listed building which meant that the Council has no control over the building at present. All the items referred to in the reports are, in reality, wish lists, as no decisions can be made until a firm future for the property is known. It is

essential; however, that a Business Plan be in place in anticipation of any possible changes in ownership and that a Trust be set up by the Save the Lonsdale Group. Many questions were raised and they, with the answers given are available to be seen in the Minute Book. After listening to all the discussions the committee agreed to request that the Executive support the Save the Lonsdale Group in setting up a Trust. Mr Beveridge then went on to present a paper on the Development of the Sands Centre. It has long been recognised that the Sands is not suited to being a full time sports hall and entertainment centre and so plans have been drawn up to expand the building to allow for separate locations (within the Sands) for both. The University of Cumbria has expressed an interest in being involved so that they may have a venue for their Sports Science Degree Course. The option of a 25 metre swimming pool has also been mentioned but, at this stage, that is just a wish for item. Mr Beveridge pointed out that there is currently no capital allocation for the scheme but it is anticipated that the costs when combined with the plans from the University of Cumbria would be in the region of £6 - 7 million excluding a swimming pool. The University has between £3 and £4m to contribute, again without the pool expenditure. Not surprisingly there were a lot of questions asked regarding the viability of the project and, again they and the answers are in the Minute Book. It was resolved that the report be noted and that this Committee would like to be involved from the very beginning as it had been with the Sheepmount project. Regular updates will also be requested.

A report on Healthy Communities and the Older People Group and Cumbria Local Area Agreement was given by Mr Kemp the Carlisle Partnership Manager. He highlighted some of the progress made particularly the Smoking Cessation Clinic, Lifestyle on the Road and income maximisation for Older People. After listening to the report and the answers to members questions the committee resolved that the division of the reward grant be passed to the Executive for consideration. Emma Titley returned to give members a further report on the Learning City Activity as requested at the previous meeting. The meeting was happy with this latest report and asked to receive quarterly updates. Reports were also received on Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Corporate Performance Monitoring and Recession Planning Progress. The Committee requested that the next report on Crime and Disorder Reduction should contain more information concerning drug and alcohol abuse and the work bring carried out to tackle these issues. The Corporate Performance Monitoring report was noted and concern was expressed regarding the shortfall in the budget for the immediate future and its management in respect of the Recession Planning.

Councillor P Farmer
Chairman
Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 April 2009

