

PORTFOLIO:

ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING

Report of
Portfolio Holder:

**COUNCILLOR
RAY BLOXHAM**

HOUSING

Housing Strategy

Get Britain Building Scheme – Under the Government National Housing Strategy launched in November 2011 a number of initiatives were announced to encourage the provision of housing and kick start the economy.

One of these is the ‘Get Britain Building’ programme. A £570 million national programme aimed at encouraging firms to bring forward housing developments that had previously stalled. Officers from the Housing Strategy team talked to five firms regarding the programme and the submission of bids for funding in order to enable the stalled developments to be progressed. Two submissions from Carlisle firms have made it through to the 2nd stage. Allocations will be made in May.

Empty Property

Carlisle City Council has a good record for bringing empty property back into use and developing innovative ways to do this. Under the National Housing Strategy funding worth £150 million has been provided nationally for empty properties. Carlisle, Copeland and Allerdale Councils submitted a joint bid for funding and are through to the second stage. Carlisle’s bid is for £200,000 to return 20 empty properties into use. The joint bid is supported by the Homes and Communities Agency. A decision on the bid is expected at the end of April.

Under the Communities programme, the YMCA are bidding for £500,000 funding to tackle 45 empty homes. The bid has been developed with Carlisle City Council. Bids close at the end of April, with decisions made in June.

Disabled Facilities Grants

A new procurement framework system for the awarding of works for disabled adaptations will be operating from the 10th April 2012.

Homelessness, Prevention and Accommodation Services

Homelessness Services

For the year 2011/12:

- ⇒ A number of homeless applications were made during the year of which 168 were accepted as being owed a homeless duty. 1183 households in total approached for other housing advice.
- ⇒ In 2010/2011 138 applications were accepted. 1185 households in total approached for other housing advice.

Accommodation and Support Services

The accommodation and support services have undergone a transitional period in which the Housing related support element (funded by Cumbria County Council) at John Street Hostel has been transferred to Impact housing association from 2nd April 2012. Carlisle City Council will continue to directly manage and staff the provision with support services modelled and delivered by Impact housing association within Shaddon Gateway Centre. Retained hostel accommodation services are being restructured to reflect the loss of supporting people income, while enabling the City Council to meet its statutory homelessness responsibilities,

Throughout the Easter holidays the accommodation and support services team have arranged and facilitated a number of events and activities at both the men and women and family accommodation schemes including:

- ⇒ Easter meals
- ⇒ Family Easter egg hunts
- ⇒ Children's arts and crafts activities for example Easter bonnet competitions
- ⇒ Easter egg raffle which raised £46 for the Olivia Story Trust
- ⇒ Easter egg donation within Carlisle City Council staff which raised 40 eggs and toys which were given out to the 37 children currently residing within the accommodation and support services

Replacement women and family accommodation

The tenders to contractors went onto the CHEST and 5 returns were received on Monday 5th March 2012. These submissions are currently being reviewed by the external design and resource planning teams.

The anticipated next steps and timescales for the development of the build project are as follows:

Key Steps	Anticipated timescales
Review tenders	Mid March 2012
Award construction contract	End of March 2012
Start on site at Water street	End of April 2012
Completion	End of March 2013
Anticipated completion	End of February 2013

Shaddon Gateway Centre & Dispersed Foyer Services

The lease and management agreement between Carlisle City Council and Carlisle YMCA is now signed.

Carlisle YMCA is continuing to assert their local position within the City and pursuing all business leads and opportunities. Promotional literature is currently being developed which will then be sent out to stakeholders and business links.

Welfare Advice Service

Total benefit gains for **2011/12:**

1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 - **£2,251,354.13**

6 monthly break down:

1st April 2011 to 31st August 2011 - **£882,991.33**

1st September 2011 to 31st March 2012 - **£1,368,362.80**

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The National Food Hygiene Rating scheme will be fully launched within Carlisle during April. Many food businesses are already displaying their green scoring certificates which represent how hygienically food is handled and managed in the food business along with the condition of the premises. A rating of 5 is very good, a rating of 0 means urgent improvement is necessary. Premises may choose to display their certificates but all scores are now available online at **food.gov.uk/rating**. I'm pleased to say that in Carlisle 87 % of businesses inspected have scored 3 (good) or better, a number of low risk businesses are added to this national scheme which once inspected should see this percentage of good or better increase. I would like to thank all the officers and support staff within Environmental Health for working hard to ensure Carlisle successfully transferred to the new system.

The number of stray dogs being collected in the District continues to rise

Number of Stray Dogs Collected

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of Stray Dogs Collected	346	408	422 (15 th March)

Stray dogs are a potential hazard not only because they are not under control but they also contribute to the problem the District faces with dog fouling. The Council arranges for the collection and detention of stray dogs and a fine is payable by the owners on collection. It is important for dog owners to always ensure their dogs are supervised and wear a collar and tag. Our Clean Neighbourhood and Enforcement Officers have recently received training by the Dogs Trust on micro chipping dogs; it is likely that this service can be offered during future educational campaigns on dog fouling.

The Clean Neighbourhood Officers have also been active recently in deterring fly posting which can blight the environment. Fly posters need to be aware that each poster is a separate offence and liable for its own fixed penalty ticket. A company recently had to pay six fixed penalty tickets for fly posted material after they failed to remove it within a specified time.

WASTE SERVICES

Round Review for Green Waste.

The Green Waste rounds have been reviewed in preparation for the transfer of the Eden Garden Waste contract to a new service provider taking over the service on 1st July 2012. The Green Waste rounds in Carlisle and district will be collected by more efficient use of the remaining waste vehicles and staff. The round review has gone well and we are experiencing no problems to date.

Transfer of Street Cleaning to Waste Services

After the recent lean systems review of Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces, it was decided that the street cleaning operation would function more efficiently with the waste services team, forming a new Environmental Services team. The transfer of street cleaning will be completed by 1st May.

The street cleansing team work will align more closely with waste and recycling collection rounds to ensure that

City Centre Clean Up

The city centre clean up has commenced and improvements are clearly visible especially outside the Civic Centre and the Hardwick Circus subway. The clean up is on a rolling programme of work and subject to continuous improvement.

The initial feed back from the public regarding the clean up has been positive, with compliments coming every week.

NEIGHBOURHOOD & GREEN SPACES

Weed Spraying 2012

After a comprehensive tendering process, the contract for highway weed-spraying in Carlisle and district in 2012 has been awarded to Environmental Husbandry. With funding coming from the County Council, this year there will be 3 complete treatments spread throughout the growing season – April, June and September are the agreed months with the first spray due in the week commencing 30 April.

Allotment Management

The City Council is looking to change the way it manages its allotment sites by building a closer working partnership with the association of allotment holders. There is real appetite for self-management of allotments across the

city and Green Spaces team will be working with the plot-holders to enable them to realise their ambitions.

Volunteers at work!

Our group of Countryside Volunteers have been working hard – at Kingmoor Nature Reserve they have been resurfacing the paths for walkers; at Talkin Tarn they have been shoring up the lakeside to make it safer for visitors and the Friends of Rickerby Park have been busy renovating a number of the park benches – sanding them down and re-coating them with preservative. In total this voluntary effort represents about 40 man-days of labour - an invaluable contribution to the Council's work.

HIGHWAYS SERVICES

Talkin Tarn

Work is underway to improve the Car Park. Council staff are regrading the existing surface, installing drainage and kerbs in preparation for bitmac surfacing which is due to be carried out by a specialist contractor in late April.

Concrete Road Repairs

Repairs to damaged concrete roads at Knowefield Avenue and Holmeacres are still ongoing.

Verge Improvements

A number of verges are being improved , mainly in Harraby, Upperby and Morton. Grasscrete is being used to strengthen the verges to prevent damage from vehicles that may overrun the verge.

Lighting Improvements

The lighting at Lochinvar Close is being improved in conjunction with Riverside to resolve a number of long running problems.

Car Parking

A marketing campaign is emphasising the benefits of purchasing the new Saver Parking permits following the introduction of new parking charges. The new permits are available to the public and businesses alike and offer more flexible parking on a range of car park options and new discounts. Keep a look out for the adverts appearing on buses and on posters.

Pay by phone is also coming into service offering an alternative to pay and display. This offers a convenient alternative to cash payment and has the added benefit of being able to purchase additional parking over the phone whilst out and about in the City if you want to stay longer than expected.

**Councillor R D Bloxham
Environment & Housing Portfolio Holder**