

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 21 JULY 2016 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Ellis, Ms Franklin, Layden, Mrs McKerrell, McNulty, Paton and Ms Williams.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Glover (Leader)
Councillor Mrs Bradley (Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder)
Councillor Miss Sherriff (Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder)
Charlotte Studholme, Work Experience Student

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Economic Development
Policy and Performance Officer
HR Advisor
Housing Development Officer
Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.40/16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence submitted.

COSP.41/16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ms Franklin declared a registrable interest in accordance with the City Council's Code of Conduct in relation to agenda item A.2 – Overview Report and Work Programme. The interest related to the fact that she was the City Council's representative on the Divisional Board Riverside Cumbria.

COSP.42/16 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That the Agenda be agreed as circulated.

COSP.43/16 AGENDA

The Panel discussed the possibility of the Vice Chairman leading an agenda item as a development opportunity and

RESOLVED – That the Vice Chairman would lead the discussion on Agenda Item A.5 – Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015 -20 – Year One Key Achievements.

COSP.44/16 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2016 and 9 June 2016 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

COSP.45/16 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.46/16 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.14/16 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and included the latest version of the work programme and Key Decisions of the Executive which related to the Panel.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Notice of Executive Key Decisions were published on 1 July 2016 and there were no items within the remit of the Panel.

The work programme for the Panel had been circulated for comment / amendment. The Panel discussed the Community Centres item and agreed the item would be moved to a future meeting.

The Panel asked what format the next Flood Update report would take and the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the report would continue to be a generic report to all three Panels along with the public documents which were available. The Director of Economic Development added that the Resilient Grants may be of specific interest to the Panel, general information on the Grants would be included in the report but more detailed information could be provided if the Panel required it.

The Chairman gave a brief update on the Riverside Divisional Board. He reported that the Divisional Director had moved positions and a replacement had not yet been appointed. When the new Director had been appointed they would be invited to attend the Panel to discuss their future plans. He stressed that the Panel had to be robust and clear about what they would be asking Riverside to provide to enable the development of a stronger relationship.

RESOLVED –1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work programme and Key decision items relevant to this Panel (OS.14/16) be noted.

2) That the Flood Update reports continue as generic reports to all three Panels unless the Panel raised a specific issue.

COSP.47/16 ANNUAL EQUALITY REPORT 2015/16 AND EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2016/17

The Policy and Performance Officer submitted the Annual Equality Report for 2015/16 and the Equality Action Plan 2016/17 (PC.13/16).

The Policy and Performance Officer reminded the Panel of the Council's duty under the Equality Act (2010), the Council must provide information about how equality was considered in decision making, policy development and engagement.

The Annual Equality Report 2015/16 provided an overview of equality work, including the workforce profile, details of equality impact assessments, customer satisfaction, complaints, consultation and engagement. The report built on the first Annual Equality Report 2014/15 by providing contextual data about the workforce and training, and an additional section on employee support.

Work was being undertaken for 2016/17 to address issues highlighted within the report and continue good practice. The Equality Action Plan 2016/17 set out the actions on how the

Council would continue to work towards achieving the equality objectives and address the issues identified.

The Policy and Performance Officer informed the Panel that the Executive had made two amendments to page 34 of the report:

Disabled employees – the title was to be changed to Employees with self-declared disabilities.

Training – the information of equality related training tied in with information set out further in the report, the section on page 34 would explain that the details were given in a different section of the report.

In considering the Report and Action Plan Members raised the following comments and questions:

- The Panel asked for further information with regard to the e-learning modules and how the use of e-learning could be increased.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the e-learning modules were a series of on line learning modules that allowed staff and Councillors to undertake limited training on a variety of subjects.

The HR Advisor added that all new staff underwent an induction which included information about the e-learning modules, in addition work was being undertaken on improving the information available on the intranet and this could include improved signposting to the e-learning modules to encourage usage. In response to a further question the HR Advisor stated that she would find out if the Disability Awareness Module incorporated deaf awareness and report back to the Panel.

- Members raised concerns that staff would not want to declare their disability for various personal reasons and asked how they would be encouraged to self-declare their disability.

The HR Advisor responded that the Council had different sources of information available to them including a new working group and support programmes such as Occupational Health which helped inform them of any needs staff may have.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder added that the Executive wanted the term Disabled Employees changed to encourage staff to feel confident in self-declaring any disabilities.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder explained that it was an advantage for the Council to know of any disabilities to enable them to make any reasonable adjustments to the work place which would in turn make the Council a better place to work for those individuals. The actual figures were not the important part of the data it was the adjustments that could be made as a result of the information that was important.

- How was the Information which was collected on sexuality and religion used?

The Policy and Performance Officer responded that both sexuality and religion were protected characteristics and information had to be collated and published.

The HRAdvisor reminded the Panel that the information was voluntary and confidential. The Council used the information to ensure it did not discriminate against any employees when it was developing policies and procedures and to ensure that any required reasonable adjustments were carried out.

- Why was information such as age and marital status collected when grievances were submitted?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that if the Council had a high number of grievances the information may identify areas where there may be an underlying issue which needed to be addressed.

- A Member asked why information had to be collected which was not of use to the Council.

The Policy and Performance Officer responded that it was a legal requirement for the authority to collate and publish the information.

The Panel agreed that a wider debate on equality may be a future subject for the work programme.

RESOLVED –1) That the Annual Equality Report 2015/16 and Equality Action Plan 2016/17 be welcomed.

2) That the comments and observations of the Panel as detailed above be considered by the Executive.

3) That the HR Advisor provide a written response to the Panel regarding the elements included in the Disability Awareness Module.

COSP.48/16 HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT (2016)

The Housing Development Officer gave a presentation on the impact of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 on the delivery of Carlisle's housing needs.

The Housing Development Officer highlighted the key elements of the Bill which included:

- Starter Homes
- Right to Buy extended to Housing Associations.
- Lifetime Tenancies
- 'Pay to Stay'
- Private Sector Housing Reform
- Planning reform

The Housing Development Officer gave further details on:

- *Starter Homes*
A Government Scheme which gave first time buyers from the age of 23 up to the age of 40 a discount of 20% on homes where the discounted price was less than £250,000
- *Right to Buy extended to Housing Associations*
The scheme was difficult in the North of England as 'one for one' replacements were not viable due to the low value of properties in some areas, which did not cover the cost of replacing them with new stock. Riverside had carried out a pilot and the key findings showed take up was most popular with 50-59 age group, 3 bed houses were most popular

and the typical market value was £73,000 with an average discount of 55%. There were also a significant number of cash buyers. Previously, many Right to Buy properties had ended up with Buy to Let landlords.

- *Shared Ownership & affordable Homes Programme 2016-21*

The Programme allowed the purchaser to buy a share in the equity whilst paying rent on the non purchased share. The £4.7 billion Homes and Communities Agency Grant Programme provided 135 homes for Shared Ownership, 10,000 homes for Rent to Buy and 8,000 homes for specialised housing but there was no grant funding for general needs rented housing.

The Housing Development Officer outlined the Government initiatives which had affected Housing Associations since 2010 which included grant cuts, 'affordable' rents replacing social rents, removal of spare room subsidy (bedroom tax), benefit cap, extension of Right to Buy, 1% rent reduction for 4 years and Local Housing Allowance Cap.

The Housing Development Officer reminded the Panel that the Local Plan was a major driver of affordable housing completions and it was due to be adopted in October/November of 2016. He gave details of the results of the refreshed Strategic Housing market Assessment (SHMA) which showed a requirement for 8,000 – 9,500 new homes between 2013 and 2030.

The presentation showed the delivery of completed affordable housing from 2009/10 to 2015/16 along with the affordable housing need. The presentation also detailed the property prices and income multipliers for 2015 and local incomes for 2014 which showed the need for affordable housing.

The Housing Development Officer reported that the Supported Housing Review had implications on housing in Carlisle due to the proposed cap in Housing Benefit at LHA rates from 2018 which represented significant concern for supported housing. It would mean that service charges were higher due to greater maintenance costs and scheme closures would increase pressure on the NHS.

In addition it was not yet known what impact the departure from the EU or the recent change to central Government would have on housing in the future.

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

- The recent population growth figures indicated a population increase of 2,000 individuals by 2030 in Carlisle yet the presentation stated that 8,000 – 9,500 new homes were required in the same period. How was the figure for new home requirements formulated?

The Director of Economic Development explained that the SHMA figures had been refreshed for the Local Plan and were based on a variety of information including population growth, housing backlogs, households and economic growth. Carlisle needed good housing stock to attract new businesses into the area; in addition the broader economy had to be considered. New developments and improved rail links to the West Coast meant that people would be looking for suitable housing in the area.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel that Carlisle had an ageing population and had to attract people of working age into the area to keep the City going.

The Chairman asked that a short guide to the reasons for new homes in Carlisle be produced for Members to use when discussing issues within their Wards.

- Concern was raised that many of the new schemes and incentives were aimed at first time buyers and most of the affordable housing was taken by people outside of the Carlisle area which resulted in local people moving away. There was a shortage of affordable properties for rent which resulted in young people remaining with parents or again moving out of the area.

The Housing Development Officer agreed that there were issues with people remaining in the local area and low cost rental properties. He explained that the Council's scheme had a local connection criteria, as did Housing Association rental properties negotiated through planning obligations, and the Council had tried to get a fair balance of affordable rented properties but the new Starter Home Scheme would now take priority.

- Would the Right to Buy Scheme affect properties in Carlisle?

The Housing Development Officer confirmed that the Right to Buy Scheme would be applicable to homes in Carlisle and Riverside had estimated a loss of 500 of their 6,000 stock. Details had not yet been received on how housing associations would replace their stock but the Government would subsidise the difference between the value of a property and the sale price of a property, however, it would cost significantly more to build new properties as replacements.

- The delivery update for completed properties varied significantly each year, would this continue in the future?

The Housing Development Officer explained that the completion was dependent on the funding programme cycle, higher affordable completions signified more grant funding in that period. The majority of grants came from the Homes and Communities Agency and were front loaded which leads to a cluster of affordable housing completions.

- How long would it take to replace a home following a Right to Buy purchase?

The Housing Development Officer reported that it was anticipated the Government would expect a property to be replaced within three years but the relevant legislation had not yet been released. In addition the replacement property did not have to be in the same area or tenure, this meant a property could be sold in Carlisle and replaced in Liverpool.

The Director of Economic Development added that the 1% rent reduction had impacted on housing associations ability to replace properties making it more difficult to borrow money so it would take longer to replace a property.

- There were a lot of schemes and support for first time buyers but what support was available for older people to move into appropriate homes?

The Housing Development Officer responded that the national focus, notably Starter Homes, was on first time buyers up to the age of 40 however the City Council scheme was more flexible and had no age limit.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Housing Development Officer be thanked for an excellent, well presented and detailed presentation on the Housing and Planning Act.

2) That the Director of Economic Development produce a short guide for Members clarifying the criteria used to project future housing need, when there seems to be a conflict between the estimated population growth and the apparent disproportionate number of new houses identified.

COSP.49/16 INTERAGENCY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR CARLISLE 2015-20 – YEAR ONE KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Managersubmitted report ED.27/16 which briefed Members on the key achievements and progress made to date in relation to the Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015-20 in relation to the priority areas and action plans.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Managerreminded the Panel that Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gave housing authorities the power to carry out homelessness reviews within the district areas; and S.1 (3 and 4) placed a statutory responsibility on housing authorities to formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the ongoing results of the reviews.

Section 3(1) of the Act required the local housing authority to have a strategy which sought to:

- prevent people from becoming homeless
- ensure that there was sufficient accommodation in the area for people who might become, or were homeless
- ensure that people who might be, or were homeless, had sufficient support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- consult with other relevant agencies in carrying out the review and in preparing the strategy

The Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015-20 was developed in consultation with key stakeholders following a comprehensive review of local trends, gap analysis and a review of National Policy.

Building on the strengths and achievements of the previous strategy, the 2015-20 Strategy was developed to focus on four key priority areas:

- 1) Appropriate flexible accommodation and support pathways
- 2) Multiple Exclusion Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- 3) Positive outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness
- 4) Prevent and relieve Homelessness

Following a full public consultation process the Strategy had been agreed by full Council in 2015 and members of the Interagency Group agreed a delivery action plan for year one with shared ownership of actions. The Group met quarterly to review and monitor progress. A copy of the year one actions had been attached to the report.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager circulated appendix 2 which had been omitted from the report. The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager gave a detailed review of the 24 key achievements for Year One which included the implementation of the Local Strategic Interagency Commitment which had been signed by all members; no 16-17 year olds or families placed in bed and breakfast; one stop volunteer host in place in Carlisle with two further hosts undertaking training and the implementation of a multi-agency approach to identify, report and refer rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness.

Carlisle City Council had achieved the Bronze Standard as part of the DCLG Homelessness Gold Service standards and were on track to attain the Gold Standard by the end of the Strategy.

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

- Had the Discretionary Housing Payment allocation been utilised?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager reported that 95% had been used in Year One. The money had been used to keep people in their homes and data had come from the Revenues and Benefits team. Applicants could reapply for the support and had in the past been successful.

- Did the partners report to the City Council?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager explained that the meetings were very well attended and she asked partners to provide data prior to the meetings. The data was being collected in a spreadsheet for future use and analysis. The relationship between the partners was very good and allowed for open discussion and challenge which had proved very useful. Stakeholders included Cumbria County Council, DWP, Job Centre, Drug and Alcohol services, social housing providers and Churches Together. Some of the actions in the Action Plan belonged to partners and the City Council had been clear from the beginning that, although the Strategy was a City Council Strategy, it was a Strategy for the whole City.

- Was there support for families who had broken down following domestic violence?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager confirmed that specific support was detailed in the Year Two action plan for females at risk of domestic violence, homelessness and sexual exploitation and Water Street provided family accommodation.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder added that the Council had always provided support for those at risk of or who had suffered domestic violence.

- Why was the Rough Sleeper Count zero?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager responded that the Count was a statutory return which had very specific definitions of rough sleeping and was a snap shot of one night which had to be taken in November/December nationally. The Count took place between midnight and 5am and the definition stated that the person must be bedded down or asleep and no one had been found.

- What was the Council's assessment of rough sleeping in Carlisle?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager explained that the Council received reports of rough sleeping which were investigated. The homelessness team regularly went out to check for rough sleepers to provide support or advice and address any welfare needs. On occasion people did refuse help, when this happened the issue would be reported to a statutory service to protect the person's welfare needs.

There was a more visible element of people begging in the area and the Team were working closely with the Police as not all of them were homeless. The begging was part of the Street

Culture Activity which was monitored and included shoplifting, prostitution, street drinking and general anti-social behaviour.

- How were the services and information available communicated to those who needed them or to other stakeholders and service providers?

The Director of Economic Development stated that there had been media coverage when the Strategy was launched and there had been a public advice and information session. It was hoped that the strength of the Partnership would convey the information to the target areas.

RESOVLED –1) That the update on the Interagency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle 2015-20 – Year One Key Achievements (ED.27/16) be welcomed;

2) That the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager and the Homelessness Team be thanked for their dedication and hard work, in particular for the prevention work they undertook.

(Meeting ended at 12.35pm)