



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 14 February 2013

Title: JOINT WORKING WITH RIVERSIDE CARLISLE

Report of: The Director of Community Engagement

Report reference: CD 14/13

Summary: This report provides Members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel with an update on joint working between Riverside and Carlisle City Council.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

Input relating to the updated information provided within this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the report and its contents.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

AFFORDABLE HOMES PROGRAMME 2011-15

Carlisle City Council and Riverside continue to work together to bring forward affordable housing schemes in Carlisle.

Riverside are looking to develop affordable housing at Arnside Court in Harraby, Borland Avenue in Botcherby, and on City-Council owned land at Thomlinson Avenue in Raffles. The schemes will deliver at least 42 units of affordable housing for the district, with the possibility of delivering a further 17 units as a second phase of the Thomlinson Avenue scheme. The schemes will deliver a mixture of family accommodation and bungalows, with all units being let at an affordable rent. It is anticipated that all these developments will be completed by autumn 2014.

The anticipated units delivered through these schemes replace and exceed the 36 units lost at the former Morton Primary School site, which fell through after the County Council and Riverside were unable to reach an agreement on the land value.

DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS

Changes made to the way that Riverside approach disabled adaptations have produced positive results. Riverside funds disabled facility grants (DFGs) for tenants when the value of the grant is less than £7,000, unless it is a second assessed referral within a 12 month period. Riverside has funded 82 major adaptations in this financial year, with 98% of the work completed within six months.

Where Riverside judges that a DFG request is unviable or impracticable, it offers to relocate the tenant to a more suitable property. In this financial year, Riverside has relocated nine tenants in lieu of providing a DFG. Taking into account the provision of a financial support package, this approach has resulted in estimated savings of £92,700 in this financial year, and a total of £145,700 since the implementation of the policy.

As ever, ongoing communication between the City Council's private sector housing team and the adaptations team at Riverside takes place, relating to specific cases, processes and work with contractors.

HOMELESSNESS

Carlisle City Council's homeless team continue to work effectively with Riverside's allocation team on the administration of the Cumbria Choice allocation scheme, and meet regularly to discuss nominated Council-accepted homeless clients. Since the beginning of the financial year, 69 people have been nominated by the City Council as being owed a homelessness duty; 49 of these people have been housed by Riverside.

HOUSING STRATEGY AND THE CARLISLE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Joint working with Riverside continues in order to realise the priorities of the Carlisle Housing Strategy. Diane Hill, Major Works Team Leader at Riverside, has been elected chair of the Decent & Healthy Homes sub-group of the Carlisle Housing Partnership.

LAND ASSETS

Riverside is in possession of GIS information on the City Council's land assets. Officers from Riverside are in the process of analysing Riverside's own land holdings, with a view to working with the City Council's housing, planning and property teams to unlock land for market and affordable housing, and other types of development.

WELFARE REFORM

Riverside has calculated that around 950 of their tenants in Carlisle under-occupy their homes; these residents may face reductions in housing benefit payments under reforms to the welfare system that come into force in April 2013.

It is anticipated that many Riverside tenants affected by benefit changes will have to find an additional £8 a week to make up the shortfall in rent, and other tenants, especially those with two or more spare bedrooms, will face making up a larger shortfall. Nationally, it is anticipated that the changes may lead to an increase in rent arrears and eviction proceedings. Riverside has estimated that, should no tenants pay the difference between their reduced housing benefit and their rent, it stands to lose up to £10,400 a week in rental income.

Riverside has implemented an information campaign to inform these tenants of their options, and the Revenues & Benefits team at Carlisle City Council have also written to all local tenants who may be affected by the changes. Of the 570 people who have engaged with Riverside following this campaign, 28% will not be affected by the changes, 51% wish to remain in their properties, 15% wish to leave their property and 6% remain undecided.

To assist those tenants who wish to leave their homes, Carlisle City Council and Riverside, along with the other local authorities and major housing associations in Cumbria, have revised the county's allocation policy (Cumbria Choice) to give some priority to those who wish to downsize. Riverside has a target of helping 50 tenants who wish to move into smaller accommodation by April 2013, and has set aside a small fund to help people move, which can be used for removals, redecoration, carpeting and other expenses.

Those tenants who wish to remain living in their homes may require benefit advice and support to help them cover the shortfall in rent. It is therefore vital that communication and joint working between Riverside and various services within the City Council, including the homelessness team, is effective. The Cumbria Choice allocation policy has been amended to ensure that customers who accrue debt as a result of under occupancy

regulations will not automatically be given reduced preference for a new property; this will enable tenants to downsize quickly if they struggle with making up the rent shortfall in their existing home.

Impact assessments

Does the change have an impact on the following?

Equality Impact Screening	Impact Yes/No?	Is the impact positive or negative?
Does the policy/service impact on the following?		
Age	N/A	
Disability	N/A	
Race	N/A	
Gender/ Transgender	N/A	
Sexual Orientation	N/A	
Religion or belief	N/A	
Human Rights	N/A	
Health inequalities	N/A	
Rurality	N/A	

If you consider there is either no impact or no negative impact, please give reasons:

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If an equality Impact is necessary, please contact the P&P team.