

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 23 OCTOBER 2014 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Ellis, Gee, Mrs McKerrell (as substitute for Mrs Prest), Scarborough (as substitute for Councillor Harid), Miss Sherriff (as substitute for Councillor McDevitt) Mrs Stevenson and Mrs Vasey.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Bradley – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio
Ms Bev Lucas – Director Housing and Young People, YMCA
Mr Tim Linford - Operations and Business Manager, YMCA
Councillor Allison - Observer

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Economic Development
Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager

COSP.60/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Harid, Mrs Prest and McDevitt.

COSP.61/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Miss Sherriff declared a registrable interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of items A.3 – Shaddongate Resource Centre and A.4 – Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020. Her interest related to her employment at Croftlands Trust.

COSP.62/14 PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public.

COSP.63/14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2014 be noted.

COSP.64/14 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.66/14 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.25/14 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 Key Executive Decisions, published on 10 October 2014, included the following items which fell within the remit of this Panel.

KD.22/14 – Tullie House Business Plan – the matter would be available to be considered by the Panel at the meeting on 25 November 2014;
KD.23/14 – Carlisle Homelessness Strategy – the matter would be available to be considered by the Panel at the meeting on 15 January 2015
KD.25/14 – Budget Process 2015/16 – the relevant areas would be available to be considered by the Panel at the meeting on 25 November

Members did not raise any questions or comments on the items contained within the Notice of Key Decisions.

- A short training session for all scrutiny members covering Budget Scrutiny had been arranged for Wednesday 12 November 2014 at 5.00pm in the Flensburg Room.
- The first meeting of the Asset Based Community Development Task Group had been arranged for 27 October 2014.
- The Work Programme for the Panel had been circulated as appendix 1 of the report.

RESOLVED – That the Overview Report (OS.25/14) incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

COSP.67/14 SHADDONGATE RESOURCE CENTRE

The Chairman welcomed Ms Bev Lucas, Director Housing and Young People and Mr Tim Linford, Operations and Business Manager, YMCA to the meeting.

The Director of Economic Development submitted report ED.45/14 which gave an operational and financial overview of the YMCA's management of the Shaddongate Resource Centre.

Ms Lucas gave an overview of her role and Mr Linford's role in the YMCA and reminded the Panel that the YMCA had tendered for the provision of services at the Resource Centre as the YMCA had needed a new venue to deliver and expand their services in Carlisle following the sale of the Fisher Street building. She added that, unfortunately, the services that had been on offer had not been as successful as hoped and the impact of the economic climate had affected the financial viability of the Centre.

The YMCA worked hard to deliver different services and to encourage other services into the Centre, including partnership working with Inspira, but the Centre was expensive to run and maintain. Ms Lucas highlighted the footfall information for the Centre which had been included in the report and informed the Panel that the YMCA were concerned that the Centre was costing a lot of money despite letting out rooms.

Mr Linford explained that a number of groups used the Centre and he looked carefully at the mix of uses but he felt that the only way to make the Centre sustainable was to make use of all of the space. He outlined a number of different organisations which used the Centre such as Age UK, Groundwork and the Glenmore Trust.

Ms Lucas reported that the change in the economic climate meant that funding streams were no longer available to support the work Mr Linford was doing to increase income. She added that the YMCA would continue to look to deliver leisure facilities and develop youth provision.

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

- Had the physical location of the Centre and lack of car parking been an issue? What percentage of the visitors to the Centre were local to the Castle Ward?

Mr Linford responded that the lack of car parking had been an issue and the Centre had lost potential users because there was no car parking. It was estimated that 25% of visitors came from the local Castle Ward based on the number of people who walked to the Centre.

- Did the YMCA compare the letting costs for the Centre with other facilities?

Mr Linford confirmed that the YMCA had access to a lot of information and the letting costs were comparable to a number of other community buildings but he felt that the facilities on offer at the Centre were better than many of the other buildings. He added that approximately 45% of the building had been let out.

- What was the operational cost of the Centre?

Mr Linford reported that the operational cost was £54,000 which included staff and maintenance, Business Rates were also included and the Centre received the discretionary 80% reduction. When the YMCA tendered to run the Centre it agreed to take on the full repair and maintenance of the building. He added that the utility bills for the building were also high despite the building being energy efficient. As the building developed so did the costs including additional cleaning costs and IT facilities to encourage more users. The Centre employed Mr Linford and a 0.6 cleaner, one member of staff had recently been made redundant. As a result the Centre needed reception cover. Other duties such as catering were covered by volunteers.

- How did the Centre work with John Street Hostel and the Council?

Mr Linford reminded the Panel that John Street Hostel was managed by the Council but the Supporting People service was provided by Impact Housing Association (IHA). He had held discussions with staff from IHA to find out what they would like to be provided at the Centre. Mr Linford gave an example of the activities that were being offered and explained that the Centre had received funding to provide free activities for young people and had used the funding to provide a Boxercise class but few people from the Hostel had attended the class.

A Member asked why relationships had not been developed further.

Ms Lucas felt that the approach needed to be looked and more discussions needed to take place with residents.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager suggested this issue be discussed further as part of the Homelessness Strategy as external partners were being asked to promote the Centre in relation to all homelessness/vulnerable people.

- Who covered the Centre's deficit?

Ms Lucas explained that the YMCA subsidised the deficit and commented that it was becoming increasingly difficult. Ideally the YMCA wanted the Centre to operate under their management and for this to be supported by the Council through a subsidy or use of meeting rooms to support partnership working.

- A Member commented that the Centre had been established to assist the homeless but it appeared that they were not using the Centre; instead it was being used by the wider community.

Ms Lucas responded that it was being used for its original purpose but the offer had to be right for them.

In response to a further question Mr Linford stated that the Centre's unique selling point was the availability of all of the facilities including IT facilities. He added that it was his desire to develop pre tenancy training but there was currently no funding.

The Deputy Chief Executive asked Ms Lucas to give an overview of the Empty Homes Project and the potential income from the Project.

Ms Lucas outlined the project and explained that the YMCA had secured funding to bring empty properties back into use, the initial target had been 45 properties but only 12 properties had been brought back and were generating income. The YMCA had the opportunity to apply for further funding before the end of the year. There had been some issues with owners agreeing to the scheme then pulling out so that they could restore the properties and generate the rent for themselves.

- Were the proposals for a Foyer still on the agenda for the YMCA?

Ms Lucas confirmed that the YMCA was still working towards the Foyer proposals.

Mr Linford concluded by stating that the YMCA was optimistic about the future and had plans in place to make the Centre sustainable.

Members were given the opportunity to tour the Centre at the end of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the update on the Shaddongate Resources Centre (ED.45/14) be welcomed and that further discussions should take place between the YMCA, the City Council and other partners to seek to find ways of making better use of the facility.

COSP.68/14 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-20

Due to the delay in the development of the Homelessness Strategy which had been in the Work Programme to be presented at the meeting, the Panel had requested an update on what progress was being made on it.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager submitted report ED.44/14 which provided an update on the research and progress to date, including the consultation and implementation timescales with regard to the Homelessness Strategy 2015-20.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager reminded the Panel of the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and the key priorities specified in the current Homelessness Strategy which had been published in 2008/09, as set in the table at 1.3 of the report.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager added that as part of the review process the Council reviewed the last six years homelessness demographic data;

correlating this with information from local social services as to the current and likely future members of social services client groups who were likely to be homeless or at risk of homelessness. The information gathered had been used to ensure that future strategic priorities were based on realistic assumption as to how they would be delivered in practice and collectively owned by all stakeholders within the District.

In addition to the review and audit of repeat presentations, applications and of those residents in emergency temporary accommodation for long periods over the past six years had been reviewed and had identified 29 people annually as being multiple excluded; 1 to 1 interviews had been conducted with 10 sample cases over a two month period as part of an in dept study of Multiple Exclusion homelessness with the District.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager explained that significant socio-economic and changes in Government policy which were deemed likely to impact on homelessness had also been considered and the City Council had invested in an external audit of its homelessness and hostel services which had outlined a number of recommendation to improve the offer to homeless people within the district and which had helped shape the key priority areas and future approach to service delivery.

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager gave details of the four key priorities which had been approved by a range of key stakeholders and recognised that the key delivering the priority areas was partnership working. The four key areas were:

- Appropriate Accommodation and Support Pathways
- Multiple Excluded Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Increase and improve positive outcomes for young people experience homelessness
- Prevention of Homelessness.

The four priorities had been as a result of a number of meetings and workshops with stakeholders and there had been a good commitment from partners.

The Director of Economic Development added that there had been a real change in attitude from organisations who now understood the value of partnership working and the importance of preventative measures.

In considering the update on the Homelessness Strategy 2015/20 Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Had the Water Street development been successful?

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager confirmed that the Water Street development was an excellent facility that not only supported those who were homeless but also provided excellent preventative facilities.

The Director of Economic Development agreed that it was a fantastic facility but the real success would be when there was no longer a need for people to go into the facility in the first place.

- How would the Council help with private sector tenant issues which could result in homelessness?

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager responded that the Council would support the tenant and explore the options available. There were a number of preventative actions which could be taken and the Council would provide advice and support to the individual or families.

The Director of Economic Development added that tenants' issues could be very complex and that was one of the reasons the Council worked in partnership with organisations such as the Law Centre.

- In the past the Council had discharged its duty to Social Housing, was this now happening with Private Landlords?

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager clarified that the Council did not discharge its duties at all.

- A Member congratulated the Housing Team on the work they carried out with partners and clients.
- Was the DiGS Accommodation Deposit Guarantee Scheme (Carlisle) working?

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager stated that the Scheme worked but she felt that the £25,000 annual funding could be used in a better way which perhaps had a return on the funding. She understood that the Scheme helped families stay out of homeless hostels but felt that it could be carried out more effectively.

- Were tenants held accountable for their behaviour under the DiGs Scheme?

The Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager explained that money was not transferred and as a result any issues would be arrears or damage. She informed the Panel that the Housing Team had an excellent working relationship with a number of private landlords and the Team were careful about placements as they did not want to jeopardise the relationships. She added that a number of private landlords had contacted the Council to see if the Council could manage and rent out their properties on their behalf. The Council did not do this but it could be a consideration for the future as it could be advantageous for the Council.

A Member commended that the DiGS Scheme was for a limited period of time to enable the tenant to save up the deposit for themselves.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Homelessness Strategy 2015-20 update (ED.44/14) be welcomed;

2) That scrutiny of the Homelessness Strategy be added to the Panel's Work Programme for Spring 2015;

3) That the Homelessness, Prevention & Accommodation Services Manager and the Housing Team be congratulated for their knowledge and enthusiasm in dealing with homelessness within the City.

[The meeting ended at 11.25am]