

Report to: Council

Agenda
Item

Meeting Date:

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairman's Report – Councillor
Olwyn Luckley**

At the Panel's meeting in November a substantial part of the agenda was taken up with the 2013-14 Budget items, relevant to its remit.

First was scrutiny of the Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Business Plan (2013-2016). Questions from the Panel ranged over; how the Trust was to attract higher visitor numbers, the needs of the Fundraising Strategy, the future of the Learning Programme, and City Council funding for Tullie House, bearing in mind the savings the Council will have to make in coming years.

The Roman Frontier Gallery has resulted in a rise in visitor numbers, and although the current economic climate is harsh, it is an aspiration for the Trust that, with planning a variety of exhibitions the numbers will increase. Tullie House staff have had training on fundraising and considerable sums have been raised this year, but it is envisaged that there would be a permanent member of staff for fundraising when the budget allowed.

In regard to the Learning Programme, and Adult Engagement Officer is in post until 2015. The Panel were pleased that the Culture Portfolio Holder could confirm that the Executive has no plans to alter the Council's contracts with the Trust.

The Panel considered Budget Reports beginning with the Revenue Spending pressures and noted the LCTS will come in, in April. Welcomed was the New Homes Bonus, allocated until 201/18, and the additional government grant towards extra support for the Council's Homelessness responsibility. The Panel noted the Summary of New Savings Proposals and Additional Income.

The Review of Charges for 2013/14 produced a vigorous discussion on the increased charges and activities at Talkin Tarn. The effect of on the users of the park was a subject of concern for Members and difficulties for regular users were fully outlined. The Executive have now put an amendment to the proposals that parking should be free up to 10am and after 6pm.

Those items in the Capital Budget reports that were subjects of scrutiny for the Panel, drew questions relating to a requirement for more details on each item. Some of the details e.g. Disabled Facilities Grants for 2013/14 were not yet announced. Other items where projects were in the early stage of development would be subject to future reports to the Panel.

A report was received relating to Council Tax Technical Reforms of Discounts and Exemptions. Members questions centred around possible exemptions to the proposals, outcomes of consultations, and the public reaction to changes to the current discount provision.

The Overview Report on the Work Programme was discussed and dates agreed for scrutiny of those coming issues, applicable as subjects for the Panel.

The Panel received the response report to the Community Centres Task and Finish Group's recommendations. The Panel still had concerns regarding the relationship between the Centres and the Council that they still felt should have further work applied to them, and resolved that the Task and Finish Group should meet with the Community Centre Managers in April 2013, to monitor what progress or otherwise had been made.

Following the first year of operation of the Cumbria Choice Allocation Policy, the Panel received a report setting out the operational outcomes. The conclusion was that the Allocation Policy had largely performed as anticipated, requiring no major overhaul. However, there were changes proposed by the Partnership Board to improve further the fairness of the policy.

Questions were put as to the accessibility of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for those who (as applies to many in the rural areas), do not have access to the internet. We were informed that this issue had been addressed and methods to be used were outlined in the policy. As were those changes for applicants who were experiencing financial hardship or requiring housing flexibility, taking into regard issues arising from national policy reform.

The final item for the Panel was a Performance Update about which the Panel recommended that consideration should be given to including a target against which Performance Updates could be measured.

Olywn Luckley