

**HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY 16 JULY 2020 AT 10.00AM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Paton (Chair), Councillors Mrs Atkinson, Mrs Birks (as substitute for Councillor McNulty, until 12.45pm), Dr. Davison (from 10.10am), Mrs Finlayson (until 12.43pm), Mrs McKerrell, Shepherd (as substitute for Councillor Tarbitt) and Miss Whalen.

**ALSO**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Ellis, Deputy Leader and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder  
Councillor E Mallinson, Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder  
Councillor Nedved, Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder

**OFFICERS:** Deputy Chief Executive  
Policy and Communications Manager  
Partnership Manager  
Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager  
Funding and Development Officer  
Homeless Services Manager  
Housing Development Officer  
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

**HWSP.29/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tarbitt and McNulty

**HWSP.30/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

**HWSP.31/20 PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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

**HWSP.32/20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED** – It was noted that Council, at its meeting on 14 July 2020, received and adopted the minutes of the meetings held on 20 February 2020 and 11 June 2020. The Chair would sign the minutes at the first practicable opportunity.

**HWSP.33/20 CALL IN OF DECISIONS**

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

**HWSP.34/20 RESPONDING TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN CARLISLE**

The Policy and Communications Manager provided an update on the overview of the Covid-19 pandemic initial response, stabilisation and steps towards recovery. (PC.15/20)

The Policy and Communications Manager reported that the Council had maintained business continuity for its critical services throughout the period, adjusting to continue essential needs

and meet the needs of the most vulnerable. The report detailed the activity that had been carried out by the Council, key work streams that would contribute towards Carlisle's recovery and renewal, partnership work and information on community recovery. In response to the Panel's request the report provided detailed information on the homelessness response and service recovery.

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

- The r-rating in Carlisle had risen, had the Cumbria Resilience Forum prepared plans for a second wave of the virus?

The Policy and Communications Manager noted that the increase in r-rate in Carlisle was of national interest due to the expectation that cases dropped at this stage. Work was being undertaken to understand the change and a control plan was in place for a small-scale outbreak. In addition, Environmental Health were active in the Track and Trace programme and the Cumberland Infirmary had prepared themselves by introducing special measures. He assured the Panel that the Partnership were using lessons learned from the outbreak to prepare for a second wave should it happen.

- The Panel had concerns regarding the number of Covid-19 related deaths in particular wards within the City and asked how the Council was supporting those areas and if any research would be carried out to investigate why the virus affected those areas.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder assured the Panel that there was a plan in place should there be a second wave of the virus. Cumbria County Council, Public Health and all six District Councils were part of the Cumbria Public Health Alliance who were preparing plans and gathering data for analysis regarding the impact on specific areas.

A Member agreed that the information from the office of national statistics was alarming for specific wards and reminded the Panel that some of the wards had care homes in them and had a large number of vulnerable categories. However, work to investigate what could be done to support the areas was extremely important.

The Policy and Communications Manager agreed to feed the Panel's request for local data into the consultation for the Local Outbreak Control Plan.

- The Panel noted that the report did not include information on the impact of the virus and recovery process in relation to the climate crisis as it had requested at its previous meeting.
- Had the City Council been able to deal with the increase in domestic abuse cases and provide the necessary shelter and accommodation? Was there any support that Councillors could provide to support this service and how was there any comparison information available?

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that domestic abuse was a priority for the Cumbria Safety Partnership, Cumbria County Council and all the District councils, adding that officers at the City Council worked extremely hard to deal with the increase of domestic abuse cases and were continuing to closely monitor the situation.

- A Member felt it would be useful to have a structure of the recovery and support groups, their roles and how they fed into each other.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder responded that Cumbria Police had handed the emergency group over to Cumbria County Council and Public Health and there would be an amalgamation of the groups and reduction in the number moving forward. It remained key that joint working continued to take place across the County.

The Policy and Communications Manager added that there was a wider structure diagram which he would share with the Panel.

- What was the consultation period for the Local Outbreak Control Plan and who would feed into it?

The Policy and Communications Manager informed the Panel that the consultation period would end on 31 July 2020. Environmental Health has been instrumental in shaping the report due to its role in Track and Trace. The Partnership Manager added that the consultation document was available on the Cumbria County Council website and she would circulate details to Members.

- How much of the Track and Trace programme was being dealt with at a local level?

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder reported that Public Health were monitoring and following up cases in the Carlisle area.

- A Member commented that there was a real need for wider, longer term community resilience. There was a risk of an economic recession which communities would need to be resilient for as well as the longer-term impacts of the climate changes such as further flooding and food shortages.
- There had been an increase in the number of people presenting as homeless and an increase in the number of people who were unemployed. A Member sought reassurance that City Council staff dealing with vulnerable individuals and families were receiving the required support from the Council to cope with the increase in work and the ongoing issues that would arise as mortgage and rent breaks come to an end.
- A lot of individuals and families had insecurities and anxiety relating to the lack of financial support available, concerns regarding employment and homes and isolation. Had the developing mental health crisis been considered by the recovery groups and what work was being carried out to deal with it?
- There was a large range of community and voluntary groups and organisations that had provided support to communities and were under financial pressure. Was it possible to lobby government to ensure that organisations and councils received financial support to continue to provide vital services and ensure that residents had sufficient money to cover their basic needs?

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel of the financial support which was available to residents from the City Council including the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme. He also highlighted the £23m in grants which the City Council had issued using central government funding. The City Council had been successful in protecting its finances to date, but work was needed to increase income through growth in the economy which in turn would provide employment.

- Members had concerns that a number of public houses and barbers in the city centre had not adhered to the social distancing rules and asked how the public could be made aware that the rules would be enforced, and action would be taken.

A Member of the Panel (Chair of the Regulatory Panel) had made the Police and Licensing officers aware of the issues in the town centre and they had responded immediately. The Police had no powers regarding queue management, it sat with premises managers to ensure the premises were Covid 19 secure. The City Council's Environmental Health Team had to ensure that premises were Covid 19 compliant and officers had been reiterating the message to premises owners. She added that many premises were following the regulations extremely well.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder agreed that it was disappointing to see the lack of adherence to social distancing guidelines, however, each person had their own personal responsibility to follow guidelines and help reduce the spread of the virus.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager addressed the Panel in response to questions regarding domestic abuse, reassuring them that the number of domestic abuse cases had been fairly consistent in comparison to previous years, trend analysis throughout lockdown to date for Carlisle indicated a small increase which was now beginning to reduce. There had been significant concerns, moving into lockdown that those who needed support would not be able to access it and an increase in cases had been anticipated. The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager highlighted the range of organisations that worked hard to promote the support available and drew attention to social media campaigns that had been undertaken.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager reported that the emergency temporary provision for families that required crisis placement had been retained and specialist staff worked with families to try and prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse. In addition, the Council issued safety equipment to individuals and would continue to do so. She urged Members to encourage households or individuals who were having issues in their wards to contact the City Council at the earliest point possible.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager drew attention to the Domestic Abuse Bill which was being discussed in Parliament and the potential changes to district council's statutory responsibilities.

Referring to the potential increase in presentations of homelessness in the second wave of crisis due to economic impact, the Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager reminded the Panel of the prevention work that the City Council already had in place, including regular discussions with registered landlords relating to pre-possession proceedings. It was vitally important that households that faced eviction or severe financial stress contacted the City Council as soon as possible to allow for prevention work to begin. In addition, the Benefits Advice Service had been open during the period to support those who had financial issues or required support in navigating the welfare system. In addition, Carlisle had a successful multi-agency Welfare Reform Board which focussed on welfare issues. The Board had consistently focussed as a collective on the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals.

- Was the men's homelessness accommodation open and were there enough resources available to protect staff and residents in the accommodation?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager responded that the key to effectively managing increased demands with limited available temporary accommodation for all

client groups was developing and maintaining a high level of throughput and move on options. The Council did not provide long term emergency accommodation as it was not good for individuals or households to live long term in emergency accommodation provision, even in the good standard of accommodation that the Council provided. The goal of temporary accommodation was to move people into independent living as quickly as possible. The Homelessness Team did not feel that the pressure on services had reduced since coming out of lockdown and there continued to be limited availability of accommodation particularly for those with additional challenges in relation to their support needs.

In terms of additional support for people during the pandemic, the City Council had purchased mobile telephones for people to maintain contact with relevant support agencies whilst face to face support was not available. Since the production of the report a resident in accommodation had tested positive for the virus, however, due to the procedures in place the person had minimal contact with others and the risks had been mitigated successfully. The main priority for the service was keeping staff and people safe.

- There had been an alarming amount of homelessness presentations during the pandemic, had this been a direct result of the pandemic or was this an ongoing issue?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager confirmed that the team had been exceptionally busy. The number of statutory presentations had reduced, however, there had been an increase in the requirement for rehousing and emergency accommodation. A number of those presentations would not have come to the Council under normal circumstances because alternative accommodation, such as family and friends' homes, would have been available to them.

- Had the Council been able to accommodate individuals leaving the armed forces or prison?

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Manager reported that they had not had any requests from individuals leaving the armed forces, however, accommodation had been provided for a number of people released from prison. Due to the increased pressure on temporary accommodation those released from prison were able to apply for additional funding from the Ministry of Justice, the funding would then be used to source alternative accommodation. There had been some issues regarding the timing of the application and the funds being release, however, this had improved. There were also issues in finding suitable accommodation that was approved, met the requirements of the release terms and the needs of the individual.

The Partnership Manager commented that it had been an exceptional time for everyone involved in the pandemic and reminded the Panel that a considerable amount of people continued to work throughout the period providing council services and supporting the communities across Carlisle. She set out the structures that were in place in Carlisle, due to strong partnership working, for dealing with the impact of the virus and the recovery stage.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder added his thanks to all Council officers and staff for their phenomenal work during the pandemic. The Homelessness Team had worked particularly hard in providing accommodation, not only to those who presented to them but also to those rough sleeping, ensuring everyone had a safe place to stay. It was now critically important to keep the economy moving, funding had been secured for improvements in the city centre and the Council worked hard to grow the city and provide employment. The Portfolio Holder added his dismay that social distancing measures were not being followed in the city.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel had considered and commented on the Covid-19 Pandemic in Carlisle report (PC.15/20).

2) The Panel thanked all City Council staff, partners, voluntary organisations and community groups for their ongoing and outstanding work in keeping the communities and residents of Carlisle safe.

3) That a further update on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Carlisle be submitted to the Panel in three months' time.

4) That the Policy and Communications Manager circulate a wider diagram of the support structures that were in place to the Panel.

5) That the Partnership Manager circulate the consultation information for the Local Outbreak Control Plan to the Panel.

### **HWSP.35/20 NEW CUMBRIA CHOICE ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services introduced the final draft of the Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy review supported by the updated Equality Impact Assessment and a summary of the key changes from the previous policy (GD.27/20).

The Housing Development Officer reported that the updated Policy related to homelessness as well as allocations, approval of the updated Policy would ensure that there was greater clarity for households in Carlisle who were registered for social housing or who may register in the future. As it was a shared Allocations Policy, which had to be approved by thirteen partners, it was proposed that minor changes from the consultation process would be signed off by the Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder.

The Housing Development Officer highlighted the changes that had been made to the Policy (as set out at in appendix 3 of the report) and informed the Panel that some amendments and recommendations had been received after the publication of the report, and had been approved in principal by the Partnership. The amendments, which covered information governance, statutory guidance regarding armed forces personal and veterans and those who had a connection Northern Ireland, had been included in the draft Policy for consideration by the Executive on 20 July 2020 along with the minutes from this Panel.

The Homeless Services Manager reiterated that the new Policy would be compliant with all new and amended legislation including the Equality Act and would be a clearer Policy for both the customers and those implementing the Policy. He drew the Panel's attention to the Cumbria Choice Headline figures which demonstrated the effectiveness of the Allocations Policy and how successful the County wide approach had been.

The matter had been referred to the Panel by the Executive at their meeting on 22 June 2020 (Minute Excerpt EX.68/20 refers).

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder commented that the amended Policy was a vast improvement on an already excellent County wide document and she supported the reduction in bands and the inclusion of armed forces and veterans and those with Northern Ireland connections.

In considering the Allocations Policy Members raised the following comments and questions:

- The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder asked for clarification with regard to the consideration of the Equality Act in applications and questioned how it would be possible for someone to not have a protected characteristic.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services responded that everybody had the benefit of the various legal protections and the policy catered for the possibility that an applicant may argue that they had a protected characteristic which was allegedly being infringed. This would need to be properly considered and responded to.

- The Panel welcomed the incorporation of the Equality Act into the Policy, however the inclusion of transgender in the Equality Impact Assessment was incorrect. The Equality Act guidelines were for gender reassignment only and the inclusion of transgender was in direct opposition to the protected characteristic of sex in particular to men and women. There had been no legislative change to include transgender as a protected characteristic and it was proposed that the word be removed from the document.
- A Member felt that it should be mandatory for applicants to complete all sections of the application to be eligible.
- There was a large number of people registered for Cumbria Choice, how many people were in each band and was there an appeals process for those who were not happy with their placement in the new bands?

The Homeless Services Manager responded that the reduction in the bands should provide greater clarity and transparency for customers and would not significantly change the banding they were in. If, however, applicants were not satisfied there was an appeals process that was managed by the appropriate housing association. There was support available for individuals who wanted to appeal from local authorities or from a number of charities.

- Given the demand for housing through Cumbria Choice, how many social housing properties were available in Cumbria?
- If an applicant to Cumbria Choice did not have a local connection could they only apply to band C or return to their local area?
- How did the changes to the Policy impact those applying to Cumbria Choice?
- Was the Policy prescriptive for applicants or was there some discretion for individual cases?

The Homeless Services Manager confirmed that the Policy was purposefully prescriptive for transparency. The previous Policy had been vague and ambiguous which had led to different interpretations across the County. Although the Policy was prescriptive local authorities' statutory duty for homelessness did take priority and matters such as the local connection would not be required in those cases.

- A Member was concerned that changing the Section 106 details in the Policy could cause issues in rural areas where there was a risk of losing social housing.

The Housing Development Officer advised that Section 106 agreements were legal agreements which would not be superseded by the Policy.

- The IT system which was used was outdated and difficult to use, the Panel asked that the new system should be simple, use plain English and be easy to access and to use. They also asked that consideration be given to having paper copies of the application available to those who could not access or use IT equipment. The Panel asked that a demonstration of the new system be given to the Panel at a future date.

The Homeless Services Manager agreed that the current system was no longer fit for purpose. The procurement of a new system would begin when the Policy was adopted and would be tailored to the requirements of the Policy. He agreed that a demonstration of the system could come to the Panel.

Referring to the paper applications he explained that the Partnership Board was moving to paperless applications, however, he agreed that not everyone could access IT equipment and he would raise the Panels concerns with the Partnership Board.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder praised officers for their part in the production of the Policy. He highlighted the high level of housing delivery in the City and commented that the current and future offer looked promising.

REOLVED – 1) That the Panel have considered and commented on updated Cumbria Choice Allocations Policy and Equality Impact Assessment (GD.27/20).

2) That the Executive and the Partnership Board be asked to consider the following amendments and proposals:

- Clarification of the wording for protected characteristics on page 25 in the 'Qualification rules adopted under the Policy' section;
- Removal of the word 'transgender' in the Equality Impact Assessment;
- That paper applications for Cumbria Choice are still available for those who cannot access or use IT equipment.

3) That a demonstration of the new Cumbria Choice ICT system be given to the Panel following the procurement in 2021

## **HWSP.36/20      OVERVIEW REPORT**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.14/20 providing an overview of matters relating to the work of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel.

A Member commented that the climate and environment agenda should remain a top priority in the Panel's work programme. She asked that statistics detailing the impact of lockdown on emissions, recycling, cycling and walking be prepared as a baseline for the Council to move forward with the positive outcomes from the pandemic. She noted that the Local Environment (Climate Change) Strategy had not been included in the programme until January 2021 and she felt that this was not soon enough.

The Panel discussed the matter and agreed that the Climate Change Task and Finish Group needed time to prepare a draft Strategy which would then be scrutinised by the Panel and therefore January was the appropriate timing for the report. Regarding the work programme, the Panel felt that the scrutiny of the impact of the pandemic on the climate and the health and wellbeing of residents would be most appropriate in October when the Air Quality Monitoring report and Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans would be scrutinised.



RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel be noted (OS.14/20);

2) That statistical information regarding the impact of the pandemic on the climate and the health and wellbeing of residents in Carlisle be submitted to the Panel's meeting on 8 October 2020.

[The meeting ended at 12.48pm]