

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Caig (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Stevenson), Ellis, Gee, Harid (until 12:00), McDevitt, Mrs Prest and Mrs Vasey.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Riddle – Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder
Councillor J Mallinson – Observer
Councillor Stothard – Observer
Mr A King – Carlisle Leisure Limited
Ms K Jones – Carlisle Leisure Limited
Mr T Rice – Carlisle Leisure Limited

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Economic Development
Contracts and Community Services Manager
Customer Services Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Policy and Communications Manager
Policy and Performance Officer

COSP.51/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Stevenson and Mrs Bradley – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder.

COSP.52/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Burns declared an interest in Agenda Item A.1 – Carlisle Leisure Limited in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct. The interest related to the fact that during the period that the report related to he was Vice Chairman of the Carlisle Leisure Limited Board.

Councillor Caig declared an interest in Agenda Item A.1 – Carlisle Leisure Limited in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct. The interest related to the fact that he was formerly a Union representative for GMB and had represented members of Carlisle Leisure Limited staff.

COSP.53/14 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

COSP.54/14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 June 2014, 18 July 2014 and 31 July 2014 be agreed as a correct record of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

COSP.55/14 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.56/14 CARLISLE LEISURE LIMITED

The Chairman welcomed Mr King, Ms Jones and Mr Rice from Carlisle Leisure Limited to the meeting and invited the representatives to introduce themselves to the Panel.

Mr King circulated a report regarding the potential Carlisle Leisure Limited merger. The Panel agreed to have a short adjournment to allow Members the opportunity to study the report.

Ms Jones thanked the Panel for the opportunity to present the Annual Performance report and presented a short video that highlighted the work undertaken by Carlisle Leisure Limited in Carlisle.

Mr Rice advised that he had worked for Carlisle Leisure Limited for twelve years and was responsible for overseeing all of the sites in Carlisle. He had regularly met with Officers from the Council with whom he had a strong relationship.

Mr Rice presented slides outlining a number of issues relevant to Carlisle. With regard to the performance measures Mr Rice outlined those issues relating to health and safety, closures, customer satisfaction, usage, finance and workforce. Carlisle Leisure Limited had an excellent health and safety record across all of its sites and customer satisfaction was high. It had been necessary to close some of the outdoor sites during bad weather, and the tennis dome had been closed for 63 days.

Mr Rice explained how the subsidy per head for services were calculated. The costs varied from 42p at Bitts Park to £3.69 for golf.

Carlisle Leisure Limited employed a number of apprentices and Mr Rice advised that of the seventeen apprentices employed by Carlisle Leisure Limited last year nine were now employed with Carlisle Leisure Limited, two had gone into further education and four were employed elsewhere.

Mr Rice explained that Carlisle Leisure Limited had a good working relationship with City Council Officers and had a supportive relationship with external bodies. Investment helped to maintain income levels and different approaches would be investigated to encourage participation. One of those was the Activate Bus which was a new scheme taking leisure facilities to communities.

Looking ahead Mr Rice outlines the key challenges one of which was the contract with the City Council which was due for renewal in 2017. Mr Rice believed that Carlisle Leisure Limited were providing a very good service which they endeavoured to improve, performance was improving against key performance indicators, Officers of Carlisle Leisure Limited were working with City Council Officer on challenging projects which were not considered standard leisure activities, and were working closely with City Council Officers to work through any end of contract issues.

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

- Did City Council staff and Members benefit in any way from the relationship with Carlisle Leisure Limited?

Mr Rice confirmed that City Council staff and Members received a reduced rate for the lifestyle membership and the Council also received free room hire for election counts. Mr Rice was not sure how many people took up those benefits.

- *What was the Activate bus?*

Mr Rice advised that it was a funded scheme currently on a six month pilot and provides leisure activities in the community. The bus will be going to housing estates, rural locations and community centres and will make equipment and trained staff available.

- *The national figure for customer satisfaction was 23%. Was that across all trusts?*

Mr Rice explained that was not a normal score as the supporters and detractors had been removed which gave a below average reading. Carlisle Leisure Limited scored high against all other providers.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the one of the future challenges would be the expiry of the contract in 2017. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that from a Council perspective it was clear that it would present partners with challenges and it was important to ensure that there was a leisure facility in Carlisle.

- *How many of the one million plus users were repeat users and which postcode areas were they from?*

Mr Rice explained that the number of members who use the facilities repeatedly could be determined and that it would be possible to track users using postcodes and map where people who used the facilities were coming from. Mr Rice agreed to forward the relevant information to the Contracts and Community Services Manager.

- *How did usage compare with other leisure facilities in Carlisle?*

Carlisle Leisure Limited only had information on how many facilities were available and not how many members other providers had.

- *Since the Sands Centre first opened the leisure market had changed and a wide range of leisure facilities were now available. Was it still relevant for a local authority to provide gym facilities?*

Mr King stated that the fitness aspect of Carlisle Leisure Limited created the bulk of the income and was still required in order to subsidise other events. Going forward that subsidy may not be available in the future and the nature of leisure was under threat. Carlisle Leisure Limited tried to maintain their position as best as they could to ensure the retention of jobs and to keep facilities open. The leisure market was very competitive and very different from when the Sands Centre was first set up.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that financial information could be broken down to the individual sites. Gym facilities did not require a subsidy but other sites did. Officers monitored the sites closely.

Mr King advised that the challenge for Carlisle Leisure Limited was to be as lean as they could be and he believed that they were. Carlisle Leisure Limited were trying to negotiate deals to provide services for other small businesses to dilute the overall costs. That would be

the weakness for Carlisle Leisure Limited when submitting a tender at the end of the current contract. Mr King confirmed that he would provide percentage cost figures for the individual sites.

- *Were Carlisle Leisure Limited the only provider to receive referrals from the health authority?*

Mr King explained that Carlisle Leisure Limited had a contract with the health authority but believed that other providers may also take referrals. Carlisle Leisure Limited had qualified staff and were working with the college and Active Cumbria and the public health providers on preventative measures. There was an aging population and Carlisle Leisure Limited were looking at what could be needed in future. The Activate Bus was going into communities and outlying areas to provide activities for those who could not get to facilities. Funding had been obtained through Sporta to be used for health purposes. This demonstrated that Carlisle Leisure Limited were bringing money into the shared agenda and therefore the required subsidy would diminish over time.

Carlisle Leisure Limited staff were trained to the highest level and wages corresponded to that. Competitors may not have as many highly qualified staff.

Mr Rice believed that the private market could be more financially motivated than Carlisle Leisure Limited.

- *What percentage of the subsidy was spent on management/administration costs and was it possible to distinguish the subsidy from the City Council from others that Carlisle Leisure Limited received?*

The Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that the subsidies were broken down by site across the Carlisle contract and there was a split between the Carlisle Council contractual figure and the Carlisle Leisure Limited head office figure. Officers then add up the surpluses and deficits which had caused concern in the past. The Contracts and Community Services Manager confirmed that quarterly monitoring meetings were held with Carlisle Leisure Limited and the information could be included in future reports.

- *How much investment did Carlisle Leisure Limited put into facilities and what was that investment?*

Mr Rice confirmed that Carlisle Leisure Limited had had a good year financially and the surplus had been invested. Mr Rice explained that Carlisle Leisure Limited had invested in a new climbing wall, and adventure golf course, additional facilities at the skating area, golf rebranding and improved drainage at Stoneyholme.

- *Carlisle Leisure Limited were obviously doing a very good job at present. What would be the advantages of a merger with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)?*

Mr King explained that one reason Carlisle Leisure Limited had done so well was due to the work done by the Contracts and Community Services Manager and the Deputy Chief Executive and Mr King thanked them for that. The potential benefit of the merger would be that the merged new company would better fit the future needs of the City. With regard to the subsidy from the City Council Mr King was confident that when the Pools relocated less subsidy would be required. Getting that subsidy down further would be a struggle to enable Carlisle Leisure Limited to compete in the tender process. The downside of losing the tender

would be that Mr King and Mr Rice and the support team at Carlisle Leisure Limited would no longer be working in Carlisle. Carlisle Leisure Limited were doing what they could to reduce costs but if they were standing alone it would be difficult when it came to the time to submit a tender bid.

Mr King was concerned that if Carlisle Leisure Limited submitted an aggressive bid they may not be able to deliver on it. Officers had looked at different ways of working with partners and had not seen much improvement until GLL had contacted them. Mr King further explained that Carlisle Leisure Limited had been modelled on GLL who were now looking to increase business in the north. They had recently taken over centres in Manchester, York and Sunderland and were growing rapidly. When they had approached Carlisle Leisure Limited they were aware that Carlisle Leisure Limited did a good job and were keen for them to take lead on the northern hub of the business. The Carlisle Leisure Limited support team would remain in Carlisle. Some of the HR and payroll staff had been to GLL to meet their staff. Initially they were sceptical about the merger but after meeting GLL staff were excited and were convinced that more resources would be required in Carlisle. The support team were moving into the Civic Centre which would reduce costs, but if more staff were needed as a result of the merger that facility may not be big enough.

Mr King explained that Carlisle Leisure Limited staff would vote on 15 September 2014 on whether they wished the merger to go ahead. A 66% majority was required. The Carlisle Leisure Limited brand would remain as it was strong in Carlisle and now incorporated the Carlisle Story branding. There would be a GLL board and a stand alone Carlisle board which would look at Carlisle issues only. Carlisle Leisure Limited had been assured that they would retain autonomy and their expertise.

GLL were excited about the way in which Carlisle Leisure Limited work in respect of the Sands Centre. Users would not notice any difference as a result of a merger but there would be more support by using GLL's expertise. Mr King believed that Carlisle Leisure Limited would be able to submit a much more successful bid for the new contract as a result of the merger. Mr King was confident that Carlisle Leisure Limited could go forward with their own staff but it would be a big change for them. Mr King believed that the vote in respect of the merger would be close but as more members of staff understood the issues they would be more reassured. Mr King had been assured that staff would not be asked to move to Manchester and that the support team was good.

- *There had not been a lot of time for discussion. Why was there a rush?*

Mr King explained that a lot of time had been taken up looking at the details and a consultant had been employed when Carlisle Leisure Limited were first approached by GLL to look at the process. There was potentially one other organisation that may be interested in working with Carlisle Leisure Limited but GLL fit better with the ethos of Carlisle Leisure Limited. Staff needed to be reassured about terms and conditions and pensions, etc but Mr King believed that these had been resolved. There had been a number of meetings with staff, some larger meetings, smaller meetings and one to ones. The former Managing Director of Carlisle Leisure Limited had been involved in the discussions and he believed it made sense for the merger to go ahead. GLL will meet with Carlisle Leisure Limited staff on 15 September 2014 ahead of the vote to answer any questions they may have. If staff decided that they needed more time to consider the merger a vote could be taken and the merger delayed.

Mr King advised that Carlisle Leisure Limited had a business to run and that the potential merger had taken up a lot of officer time. If the vote was delayed or staff voted against the

merger there was the risk that the lead on the northern hub could be taken to Manchester. Following the vote on 15 September 2014 there would be another vote which would be decided on a majority so the future of any merger would be decided at that stage. If the merger was agreed there would be a phased approach between January and March to tie in with the new financial year in April.

Mr King believed that a merger would reduce overhead costs and Carlisle Leisure Limited were in a position to move ahead and put something in place. GLL were the flag bearers for social enterprise. They managed the Olympic park in London and had connections with a number of Olympic athletes and had been the model which Carlisle Leisure had been based.

Ms Jones added that she had been on a sub group and had been party to staff briefings which had been supportive of the proposals. There had been some pressures around terms and conditions but Carlisle staff were passionate about being in Carlisle and that decisions would be made in Carlisle. GLL had been impressed by Carlisle Leisure Limited staff and were contacting them for advice. Carlisle Leisure Limited were working with partners including those in education.

- *When the discussions were being held with staff were the career opportunities being emphasised as much as they could be?*

Mr King advised that staff retention and improvement were some of the main concerns and Carlisle Leisure Limited wanted to retain and grow their own staff. Staff had been impressed with what GLL were offering. GLL had shown a £2million turnover in 2013 but only a tiny profit. Carlisle Leisure Limited had one HR officer who did not have the resources and time to develop staff. Being part of a larger team and the opportunity of support elsewhere would allow somewhere for apprentices to go as Carlisle Leisure Limited were struggling to provide those opportunities.

Ms Jones informed Members that the issues of apprentices moving onto senior roles had been discussed as part of the staff consultation and it was believed that it was a good training process.

- *Had the Trades Unions been involved in the discussions?*

Mr King confirmed that Trades Unions had been involved. There had initially been some concerns in respect of terms and conditions but were now satisfied. Mr King stated that Carlisle Leisure Limited did not want to promise something that they could then not deliver on.

- *Please explain the issues around the northern hub.*

Mr King advised that some organisations would strip out a support team and employ their own staff. GLL did not work like that and did not want to centralise to London as they wanted a base in the north of England from which they could, if required, oversee other operations in the north. A team could also be created from scratch. Manchester were currently run by SERCO and did not have the infrastructure in place. Carlisle Leisure Limited had a good proven infrastructure with good office space, wages and access. However if Carlisle Leisure Limited staff did not vote in favour of the merger the hub could move to Manchester.

The Chairman confirmed, in response to a query from a Member, that the Arts Centre was not part of Carlisle Leisure Limited.

- *How would Carlisle Leisure Limited drive efficiencies to make a difference to enable them to submit a competitive tender?*

Mr King explained that GLL would pay for the services of staff. For example if Mr King had to travel to York or Manchester they would be paid for that service. Carlisle Leisure Limited staff would take on roles in the north and therefore costs would be reduced. Carlisle Leisure Limited had done as much as they could to date if their affordability set a zero subsidy it may be possible to reduce costs to £100,000 by reducing overhead costs.

The Chairman thanked Mr King, Mr Rice and Ms Jones for their input which had been informative and well presented. However he believed that the issues in respect of the merger were worthy of further discussion and requested that Carlisle Leisure Limited be invited back to the Panel following the vote on 15 September 2014.

A Member was concerned that information tabled at the beginning of the meeting had been the second time in recent meetings when Members had not been given sufficient time to consider papers presented to them. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that he and the Contracts and Community Services Manager had received copies of the documents earlier in the week and that they had been aware that Members would want to see the information contained therein.

RESOLVED: That following the vote on the merger on 15 September 2014 representatives from Carlisle Leisure Limited be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to enable further discussions on the proposed merger with GLL and its potential impact on the future management of the Council's leisure facilities.

COSP.57/14 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.21/14 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Environment and Economy 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 15 August 2014, included the following items which fell within the remit of this Panel.

KD.19/14 – Proposed Leasing Arrangement – the Executive would be asked to approve the principle and terms for the transfer of a property by lease at their meeting on 15 September 2014. This would be a private item on the Executive agenda.

- The Executive had considered a report on the Business Plan – Arts Centre on 18 August 2014. The decision had been called-in and scrutinised at a special meeting of the Panel held on 8 September 2014.
- Member Involvement and Empowerment Task Group – Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel had commissioned a cross-panel Task Group to look at Member Involvement and Empowerment. Councillors Burns and Mrs Prest from this Panel volunteered, and were subsequently appointed, to sit on that group. The first meeting of the Task Group would be held on 19 September 2014.

- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) – At the last meeting of the Panel it was agreed to appoint a Task Group to undertake work on ABCD. Councillors Bloxham, Burns, Mrs Mallinson and McDevitt volunteered and were subsequently appointed to the Group. The first meeting of the Task Group would be arranged as soon as possible.
- Scrutiny Training – a training session for all Members of Overview and Scrutiny Panels, led by John Cade, Visiting Lecturer from the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) had been arranged for Wednesday 17 September 2014. All scrutiny Members were invited to attend the session and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer requested that Members confirm with her whether or not they wished to attend the training.
- Work Programme – The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the current work programme.

RESOLVED – 1) That, subject to the issues raised above, the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

COSP.58/14 FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014-15

The Policy and Performance Officer presented report PC.11/14 that updated the Panel on the Council's service standards that helped measure performance and customer satisfaction, and included updates on key actions contained within the Carlisle Plan.

Details of each service standard were included in a table appended to the report. The table illustrated the cumulative year to date figure, a month-by-month breakdown of performance and, where possible, an actual service standard baseline that had been established either locally or nationally. The updates against actions in the Carlisle Plan followed on from the service standard information which was attached to the report. A note of the performance of the Customer Contact Centre was also included as an appendix to the report.

With regard to the service standard relating to average number of days to process new benefits claims the Policy and Performance Officer explained that he had received information 48 hours prior to the meeting advising that a plan was being rolled out to improve performance. Team Leaders and Managers were working with organisations to solve some of the difficult problems and an action plan had been signed off the previous week. The results of that plan would not be evident until Quarter 3.

With regard to the priority relating to skilled workforce the Policy and Performance Officer advised that the City Council had taken on three apprentices in the garages at Bousteads Grassing and DIS and a graduate in Policy and Communications.

At a previous meeting the Panel had requested information in respect of Gypsy and Traveller sites and the YMCA. Information with regard to those issues had been included in the report. The YMCA target to return empty properties back into use was now ten and it was anticipated that they would be back in use by December 2015.

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

- *Clarification was sought on the profiling and targeting of problematic empty homes.*

The Director of Economic Development explained that the Empty Homes programme identified empty homes and whether there were any issues in respect of condition. Officers were working with landlords to provide grant money to enable the properties to be put back onto the market.

- *With regard to the Gypsy and Traveller sites the report states that it would not be viable to build a transit site at Low Harker Dene but a report to be considered later in the meeting states that an example of good practice would be the provision of a permanent gypsy and traveller site in that location.*

The Director of Economic Development explained that that priority had been identified some time ago and a number of travellers were setting up unauthorised encampments therefore it was decided that a transit camp was required. Since that time those numbers had fallen and Officers would have difficulty in justifying a special transit site for travellers. Discussions had taken place with the relevant Portfolio Holder on how the issue could be addressed. Officers were also working with the police on the matter and an action plan was being developed. A full report on the issues would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

- *There were a number of posters in respect of a business in the City Centre on lampposts which goes against Council policy on fly posting. Who would be responsible for any fine?*

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that there was currently a pilot underway in respect of posters advertising events being put onto lampposts. More discussions were needed in respect of planning issues but initial comments were positive.

The Policy and Communications Manager explained that lampposts had been used in the past and those currently attached were linked to a programme of events. The success of the pilot would be evaluated. The matter had not been discussed by the Executive or Overview and Scrutiny as it was a pilot scheme.

In respect of the concerns that the posters were advertising a business the Deputy Chief Executive advised that if the posters were in contravention of existing policy there would be discussions and the matter would be taken back to the business in question. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he would be happy for the matter to be brought to a future meeting of the Panel for further discussion.

- *One of the reasons given for the rise in days taken to process new benefits claims was an unprecedented level of sickness and vacancies. Was there any evidence that the sickness was due to stress?*

The Policy and Communications Manager advised that a report on sickness levels was submitted regularly to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel but that information could be shared with other Members.

- *Which service standard dealt with the benefits advice service?*

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that that information was not included in the performance report but was included in regular reports to the SMT and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The information was also included in the Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder's report.

- *Had it been difficult to fill staff vacancies in respect of benefits claims?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it had been difficult to recruit to key posts and the Council were keen to recruit from within. There were a number of benefits to encourage the retention of staff but it had been difficult to recruit staff to fill those vacancies.

The Customer Services Manager updated Members of the Panel on the Customer Contact Centre performance. Previously the performance indicators were that calls would be answered within 18 seconds and face to face within 5 minutes. Figures could not be compared across the shared service as Allerdale and Copeland had a different approach to customer contact than Carlisle. For example telephone calls received in Allerdale were passed to the relevant Officer but in Carlisle, in many cases, that query would be dealt with by the Officer taking the call. That prevented the customer having to repeat information to a number of different Officers. That method of working also dealt with changes in demand.

Over the last year 88% of calls had been answered within the specified timescales which left 12% that were not. However facilities were in place to allow a caller to leave a message which Officers would respond to that same day.

When speaking to customers few expressed complaints about the services they had received in the Customer Contact Centre. Issues in relation to benefits were more complex and there were times when customers would have to wait up to 8 minutes but at other times would be seen without waiting.

The Customer Contact Centre also provided services for the Police and the County Council's adult and children's services for which the City Council was paid.

The average transaction time in the Customer Contact Centre is 12 minutes. 77% of contact is made by e-mails and a transactional website is currently under development. Customers can now access their Council Tax online from either their own home, the library or the Council's reception area which had reduced the waiting time. Access for the payment of business rates had just gone live and the process was integrated directly with the back office system. That would allow customers to monitor the progress of those issues online. The system was intended to be smart and efficient to assist with the progress against the new benchmarks.

Officers were looking at customers' needs and it was hoped that what the customer now wanted was available.

- *Had additional staff been employed to cope with the increase in the services provided?*

The Customer Services Manager explained that the way in which the Customer Contact Centre worked was being run differently. Rather than having triage staff in reception, calls which were previously taken on the switchboard would be taken by staff in the Customer Contact Centre. Benefits claims would be scanned in directly to enable Officers in that section to access them immediately. By cutting down the administration process the Customer Services Manager believed it would save time for the customer.

In response to a query from a Member the Customer Services Manager advised that when an e-mail was received it was acknowledged automatically and answered by the receiving Officer. If the issue was more complex it would be passed to the relevant Officer. If the customer came back to the Customer Contact Centre Officers would chase up the matter.

With regard to Council Tax and benefits the Customer Contact Centre staff dealt with all issues up to summons stage so were able to answer most queries.

- *People sometimes telephone the Council and when they were put through the Officer is not available and no-one answers the call. Would it be possible to have some system whereby a message was available to advise that the Officer was not available and would deal with the call on their return?*

The Deputy Chief Executive noted that request.

- *When Carlisle Leisure Limited moved into the Civic Centre would they have access to the Customer Contact Centre services?*

The Customer Services Manager advised that the Customer Contact Centre already worked with Carlisle Leisure Limited and would be able to work more closely with them when they moved into the Civic Centre.

RESOLVED: That Report PC.11/14 – First Quarter Performance Report 201-15 – be noted.

COSP.59/14 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY REVIEW

The Policy and Communications Manager presented report PC.09/14 that outlined proposals to review the Comprehensive Equality Scheme and equality objectives, to enable the Council to continue to fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty. The report also provided an overview of the progress of equality work since 2012.

The Policy and Communications Manager explained the background to the review and the needs for which the Council should have due regard. The Officer advised that the Comprehensive Equality Scheme outlined how the Council met the duties of the Equality Act. The scheme was adopted by the Council in September 2010 and update in April 2011 following a successful peer assessment. In 2012 the Council set its equality objectives for the period to 2015 and it was now considered appropriate for the Council to refresh their approach to ensure it continues to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. The review would look at the Comprehensive Equality Scheme, equality objectives, equality impact assessment process and equality information published by the Council to identify how the Council can improve their performance.

The review would be undertaken by considering a range of information including consultation with staff, community/user groups' feedback, customer information and surveys. The Council's progress would be benchmarked against other local authorities and information available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. A Public Sector Equality Duty training session was scheduled to be held in October 2014 to assist managers in implementing the duty. Outcomes from that session would feed into the review.

The review would be ongoing throughout 2014/15 and it was proposed that the refreshed approach would be brought back to the Executive in April 2015.

The Policy and Communications Manager stated that experience had shown that working with the Panel in the early stages was valuable consultation. He asked Members of the Panel to consider how they would like to be involved in the review and developing the new approach. Members could look at issues within the Work Programme to determine whether there was an active role that could be taken in respect of Equality issues.

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

- *Equality was about individuals as well as specific groups and individual needs should be considered.*

The Policy and Communications Manager explained that the health and wellbeing of Members and staff was critical and people needed to be as comfortable as possible when making decisions.

- *How were good relations fostered between people who shared a protected characteristic and those who did not? Everyone had a protected characteristic.*

The Policy and Communications Manager responded that the word was taken from the Act, the duty stated that the Council must have due regard to the need to foster good relationships between people who shared a protected characteristic and those who did not. However, it was understood that protected characteristics such as race, age, gender, sexuality and belief were held by everyone and that fostering good relationships was between people with different, particular, ages and races for example.

- *How could the Panel get involved in the future?*

The Policy and Communications Manager advised that the Panel could be invited to join focus groups and a partnership had been set up in which Members could be involved. The Officer stated that he would work with Members of the Panel through the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That Report PC.09/14 – Public Sector Equality Duty Review – be noted.

[The meeting ended at 12.17pm]