

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 12 JANUARY AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Bloxham (as substitute for Councillor Layden), Ellis, McDonald (as substitute for Councillor McNulty), Mrs McKerrell, Mrs Riddle (as substitute for Councillor Ms Franklin) and Ms Williams.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Glover – Leader
Councillor Mrs Bradley – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder
Councillor Miss Sherriff – Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder
(Observer for part of the meeting)
Councillor Bomford – Observer
Ms S Paton – Regional Director (North), Riverside
Mr P Taylor – Assistant Director Operations, Riverside

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Corporate Director of Economic Development
Housing Development Officer
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.01/17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Ms Franklin, Councillor Layden and Councillor McNulty.

COSP.02/17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business to be transacted at the meeting.

COSP.03/17 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That the Agenda be agreed as circulated.

COSP.04/17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2016 had been circulated and a Member commented that the Panel's concerns with regard to the Housing Assistance Policy 2017 (Minute Reference COSP.78/16) had not been circulated to the Executive to be considered as part of the budget consultation.

The Chairman noted the Member's comments and that detailed consideration of the Policy had taken place at full Council. He undertook to ensure that similar situations did not occur in the future.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 October 2016 and 24 November 2016 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

COSP.05/17 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.06/17 UPDATE FROM RIVERSIDE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Chairman reported that Ms Paton and Mr Taylor from Riverside would be attending the Panel. Before their arrival he asked the Panel to spend some time scoping how they would like to shape the future relationship between the Council, Members and Riverside and asked the Corporate Director of Economic Development to facilitate the discussions.

The Corporate Director of Economic Development suggested that Members consider the following:

- What did Members want from the relationship?
- Where did Members see the relationship in twelve months' time?
- How could communication between the Council and Riverside be improved?
- What mechanism should be in place to facilitate a better working relationship?

The Corporate Director reminded the Panel that Riverside wished to disband the Board which had previously had Elected Member representation on, however; the Board was part of a legal agreement which could not be ended without the permission of the Council. There needed to be some consideration and negotiations to ensure that the right mechanism was put in place which gave the Council sufficient influence and improved the working relationship between the Council and Riverside.

Members discussed the issues in some detail and made the following suggestions for areas of improvement:

Clear Processes

Members felt that there needed to be more clarity with regard to the complaints process and the options available for tenants should they not be satisfied with Riverside's response. Members should be able to access performance information regarding complaints and the entire process should be clearly communicated to tenants along with information about the Housing Ombudsman.

Panel

It was suggested that a small Panel of Members be established to negotiate with Riverside on community matters. It would be an opportunity for Ward issues to be raised and discussed with clear outcomes. Members wanted better communications, more influence on Policy and more information on changes introduced that affected local tenants.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder reminded Members of the relationship that the City Council had with Riverside when the stock transfer took place adding that access to contact information for key service areas would be very beneficial to Ward Members, especially when complaints had not been dealt with adequately.

Tenant Engagement

Members would find it beneficial to know more about Riverside's engagement with tenants.

Board Replacement

The Panel understood that the Board was no longer the appropriate mechanism for joint working but wanted to ensure that any new agreements were legally binding. They wanted the new arrangements to be more than just consultative and wanted a clear contract which set out the terms of the relationship and what was expected of both parties.

The Leader agreed that the future relationship needed to be governed by clear agreements that made sure Riverside were accountable. The previous Board had initially allowed

representatives to be part of the governance of Riverside but changes within Riverside had diluted the arrangements. He wanted to see an agreement that allowed for the two organisations to work together on shared issues and reach strategic decisions together. With regard to the Ombudsman he commented that there was a culture of fear from tenants that they would potentially lose their tenancy should they go through the Ombudsman process and Riverside needed to address this and promote the full complaints process.

The Housing Development Officer informed the Panel that following stock transfer the Council had a five year monitoring role with Riverside and when that ended the Council and Riverside drew up a Partnership Agreement but this had ceased to be operational some years ago. He suggested that the former Agreement could be ~~used~~ revisited as the first step to a new Agreement.

The Chairman welcomed Sarah Paton, the Regional Director (North), Riverside and Paul Taylor, Assistant Director Operations, Riverside, to the meeting.

Ms Paton presented report ED.01/17 Update from Riverside Housing which provided the Panel with updates on: Flood Recovery Work; Voluntary Right to Buy; Proposed Changes to Riverside Tenancy Policy; the impact of rent reductions; Changes at Riverside and Key Performance Indicators.

In considering the Riverside Housing Update Members raised the following comments and questions on each section of the Report:

Update on Flood Recovery Work

- In 2016 Riverside had been undertaking a stock review exercise to identify which properties had flooded in the last decade, had this been completed?

Mr Taylor responded that Riverside had received feedback from tenants but it had been difficult to identify houses at risk because different properties had flooded in 2005 and 2015.

Update on Voluntary Right to Buy

- How did the number of properties that had taken up the Right to Buy option relate to the total stock in Liverpool?

Ms Paton did not have the exact numbers and agreed to add the details to the next report to the Panel. She added that the requirement to replace properties like for like had caused issues and the research from Sheffield Hallam University would help Riverside to understand demand from residents. Ms Paton agreed to share the findings from the Sheffield Hallam study and investigate if Riverside had undertaken any modelling on the potential uptake and impact of the Right to Buy Scheme in Carlisle.

The Housing Development Officer informed the Panel that initial estimates had been included in an earlier report from Riverside's previous Divisional Director were that Riverside would lose 500 properties in Carlisle; however, in light of evidence from the recent Right to Buy pilots it was possible this may have been an overestimate. He added that the stock numbers in Carlisle had reduced significantly within a relatively short period of time following the stock transfer due to a large uptake of Right to Buys from former Council tenants (who still benefitted from the Preserved Right to Buy) who were concerned they may lose the Right to Buy post-transfer, and the demolition of older stock, mostly at the Raffles estate.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel that the size of the stock had almost halved since the transfer and nearly all of the stock in rural areas had gone. Mr Taylor reported that Riverside had approximately 7,500 houses ten years ago and the figure was now just over 6,000.

Proposed Changes to Riverside Tenancy Policy

- What would happen if the proposed two year fixed term tenancy failed?

Ms Paton explained that Riverside worked with tenants to encourage them back to work or assist them in finding shared accommodation if possible. Riverside engaged with tenants and worked with them to try to prevent failure. Riverside also informed tenants of changes which could potentially impact them in the future to try and address the impact early. Shared tenancies had not been offered previously but preparation work was being carried out in case there was demand for them.

The Corporate Director reminded the Panel that the Council's Homelessness Team worked closely with Riverside on homeless prevention and provided excellent support and advice for tenants.

- Which demographic had the biggest demand for tenancies in Carlisle?

Ms Paton agreed to provide information on demographics in the next report to the Panel. In response to a query from the panel over a high level of younger tenants/ applicants, the Housing Development Officer advised that even prior to stock transfer a report, also prepared for the Council by Sheffield Hallam University, from 2000 had identified a "hollowing out" of the tenant profile, with a disproportionate level of younger and older tenants compared to families. This was because the vast majority of properties sold through Right to Buy were family homes.

- Were there properties available which were big enough for shared tenancies?

Ms Paton confirmed that there were properties suitable for conversion to shared tenancies if there proved to be demand for them. The Housing Development Officer recommended any proposals to convert family homes to shared accommodation for younger people should be handled sensitively alongside an analysis of continuing demand from families – especially in areas where there had been high levels of sales of family homes through Right to Buy. Ms Paton confirmed Riverside would take this into consideration.

- Would there be any opportunities for Riverside to increase the number of properties in the Garden City proposals?

Ms Paton confirmed that Riverside would be interested in providing homes in the development and the Corporate Director added that the Council would be working with a number of housing associations to provide a variety of housing.

Impact of Rent Reduction

- Were the increases to the service charges linked to the required rent reductions?

Ms Paton responded that the two were linked to some extent. Service charges were based on the actual cost of providing the service and there were guidelines for setting the charges. There had been an increase in the service charges as Riverside had been subsidising some

of the charges and, following the rent reduction, they could no longer do this. She added that the increases had to recover the cost of the service to ensure the contracts performed and the tenants had value for money.

If tenants were not clear what their charges were for or had an issue with the charges they could contact Riverside to discuss the issues.

A Member asked if it was possible to provide Members with a map of the areas where service charges were in place and an explanation of the service charge. Ms Paton agreed to undertake to provide the information to all Members of the Panel.

The Panel discussed the issue of service charges in some detail and how they were recovered from properties that had been purchased under Right to Buy Schemes or in private areas. Ms Paton explained that service charges were recovered through covenants in the sale agreements.

Ms Paton clarified that repair and maintenance of properties were included in the rent and not service charges. The service charges were set using Riverside policy but local charges were based on local information.

Update on Changes at Riverside

- What did the move towards 'hub' working mean for Carlisle?

Ms Paton explained that Carlisle, Leicester and Liverpool were hub offices which delivered shared services to all areas by one team either nationally or regionally. The hubs would reduce the duplication of some services and would enable Riverside to make necessary savings whilst maintaining and improving services to customers. The Customer Contact Centre was an example of shared services; the Centre was based in Carlisle but answered telephone calls from all over the Country. She explained how the telephone system worked and added that there would still be local people in front line and repair roles to deal with regional differences.

Ms Paton agreed to make arrangements for Members to visit the Customer Contact Centre in Carlisle.

Ms Paton added that she wanted to make sure that her region received the best deal and that tenants received the service they deserved, she would also ensure that national services catered for regional variations.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Did Riverside compare its performance to other housing associations?

Ms Paton confirmed that Riverside used HouseMark as their benchmarking tool and would include comparative information in the next report.

Members commented that the performance indicators showed that Carlisle was ahead of other Riverside areas. Ms Paton confirmed that Carlisle was performing well and the average time taken of 17.4 days to re-let an empty property was very good performance.

- Members asked that contact information for key services be circulated to Members.

Ms Paton agreed to circulate the information when all of the changes had been implemented and the staff structure had been finalised.

Future Relationship with Riverside

The Corporate Director gave a recap of the Panel's discussions with regard to future working and the Housing Development Officer suggested that the Council and Riverside use the previous Partnership Agreement as the starting point for drawing up a new agreement along with an action plan.

Ms Paton agreed that the Partnership Agreement would be a good start adding that it was a good opportunity to review and modernise the relationship.

RESOLVED – 1) That Ms Paton and Mr Taylor be thanked for the open discussion and their willingness to engage with the Council;

2) That a 'workshop' including officers and Members, should be arranged prior to any further meetings with Riverside, to determine the key issues the Council would like to see included in any future governance agreements which might be suggested to replace the 'Board'.

3) That the following information be provided by Riverside in their next update report to the Panel:

- Information relating to the number of properties which had taken up the Right to Buy and comparison details for total stock in Liverpool
- The Sheffield Hallam University research outcome
- Any modelling that had been undertaken for Carlisle on potential Right to Buy take up and the potential impact
- Demographics on tenancies in Carlisle
- HouseMark benchmarking information providing comparison information between Riverside and other Housing Associations

4) That contact information for key services and personnel be circulated to all Members when the staff structure at Riverside had been finalised;

5) That a map of the areas where service charges were in place in Carlisle and an explanation of the service charges to be circulated to all Members of the Panel;

6) That arrangements were made for Members of the Panel to visit the Riverside Customer Contact Centre in Carlisle.

COSP.07/17 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.02/17 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 following references from the Executive 19 December 2016 were included in the report at Appendix 1

- EX.128/16 – Charges Review
- EX.130/16 – Tullie House Business Plan 2017 - 2020
- EX.141/16 – Reference from Overview and Scrutiny

The Panel's Work Programme for the current year had been circulated and Members were asked to consider the framework for the meeting on 16 February 2017. The following items had been included in the Work Programme for the next meeting of the Panel:

- New Leisure Contract Procurement
- Flood Update Report (tentative)
- Housing Strategy (tentative)
- Response to Welfare Reform
- Performance Report Options
- Performance Monitoring
- Impact and Two Castles Housing Association (tentative)
- Carlisle and Eden Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment (tentative)

It was agreed that the following items be placed on the agenda for 16 February 2017:

- Response to Welfare Reform
- Performance Report Options
- Performance Monitoring
- Impact and Two Castles Housing Association
- Carlisle and Eden Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work programme and Key decision items relevant to this Panel (OS.02/17) be noted.

2) That the following items be included on the agenda for next meeting on 16 February 2016:

- Response to Welfare Reform
- Performance Report Options
- Performance Monitoring
- Impact and Two Castles Housing Association
- Carlisle and Eden Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment

(Meeting ended at 11.50am)