

Meeting Date: 10 September 2013

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Communities & Housing Portfolio Holder's Report –
Councillor Jessica Riddle**

Homelessness Services

For the period 1/7/13 until 27/8/13:

	2013/14	2012/13	% difference
Homeless decisions	29	36	<19%
Homeless acceptances	6	12	<50%
Advice and assistance	147	128	12%>
Total presentations	176	164	7%>

There are a number of reasons why there has been such a significant drop in the number of homeless decisions and homeless acceptances, while the total number of presentations has increased. The reduction in decisions and acceptances is the result of proactive preventative approaches. These include more effective use of Cumbria Choice (the countywide choice based letting system); assistance through the homelessness prevention fund i.e. deposits and rent in advance; and utilisation of the Central Access Point referral system whereby people can access housing related supported funding through Supporting People.

Homelife - Home Improvement Agency

Over the last 3 months the Home Improvement Agency has been developing its work streams as outlined in the business plan. Work on affordable warmth measures and affordable loans has been taken forward.

The Community Neighbour Coordinator, whose role is to develop a volunteer network to provide low level support to older people in their own homes, has recruited 10 volunteers.

They are currently being checked under Disclosure & Barring Service and will then go through an induction programme before taking on referrals from Health and Social Care.

A Housing Caseworker post, who will facilitate hospital discharge where this is prevented by a housing issue, has been advertised externally and interviews will take place shortly.

We have done 41 Home visits, of these 3 were to help with issues of anti-social behaviour and 38 were to provide help with home energy advice and measures. We also provided help and advice to 78 clients over the phone.

We have delivered our first case under the Sanctuary Scheme , installing dusk to dawn security lighting ,for a victim of Domestic Violence.

We have carried out Private Works for clients under our Managed Works Service and helped 65 people with advice and measures such as repairs, affordable warmth measures and handyperson services.

Disabled Facilities Grants

The spend on Disabled facilities Grants to end of July was £334,076 from a budget of £863,000. Referrals are being dealt with as they are received by the team with no waiting lists. Spend is down when compared to this point last financial year.

Benefits Advice

Total benefit gains 1 April 2013 to 30 June 2013 ~ £384,759.19

Total benefit gains 1 July 2013 to 27 August 2013 ~ £175,481.19

The Benefit Advice Service has, with the support of the Cumbria Advice Network (CAN) and in partnership with People First commenced a trial utilising the referral system Nellbooker, with the aim of assisting those who struggle to advocate for themselves, for example people suffering from a learning disability or a mental health problem.

People First will refer clients requiring welfare benefits advice to the Benefit Advice Service and in return, clients requiring advocacy services will be referred by the Benefits Advice Service to People First. It is anticipated that closer inter agency joint working will particularly benefit people who are struggling to cope with Welfare Reform.

The Advice Transition's Fund Partnership Agreement has been agreed and signed by the Cumbria Law Centre, Carlisle and District Citizen's Advice Bureau, Age UK and the Council's Benefits Advice Service. Over the next couple of months, Telly Talk will be installed at all the participating advice services offices to enable residents living in the more remote areas of our district to access our services in a new and innovative way. The

system uses webcam technology and allows a person sitting in a local venue to speak 'face to face' with an office based adviser.

Empty Properties

The Empty Property Officer and Housing Apprentice continue to progress the empty property initiatives which have received external funding. The Cluster of Empty Homes initiative focuses on selected geographical areas where the proportion of empty homes exceeds 10%.

Following Council approval of the revised Scheme of Housing Assistance on 16 July, grants and loans are now available to owners of long term empty homes i.e. those that have been empty for longer than 6 months, in any of our 7 specified cluster areas.

The target of returning 45 empty homes back in to use is progressing well, with 11 grant approvals having been issued, 26 schedules of work having been produced and positive enquiries from 3 further clients. One potential applicant has in the mean time sold their empty property.

Communities & Housing (Equalities)

An Equality Impact Assessment is underway for the draft Local Plan. This desktop assessment has been shared with stakeholders and will be open for consultation until September.

Carlisle City Council has been invited to sign the Armed Forces Covenant as a voluntary act of support between the Armed Forces in Cumbria and the public sector in Cumbria. The agreement will be signed on 30th September at Carlisle Castle.

The first 2013/14 quarterly contract and performance monitoring meeting of the YMCA Shaddongate Community Resource and Training Centre contract has taken place.

Community Technology – Yewdale

Funding from Police and Crime Commissioner has been secured to improve communication technology through the introduction of Local Community websites. The funding provided is to contribute to promote self help and local communication.

The Communities and Family Development Officer is working alongside the Customer Service Manager using some of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding, to promote use of Carlisle City Council online services. Yewdale Community Centre has been identified as a venue which has an excellent website and evidence of some engagement with the Community through technology.

This site will be used as a pilot to install a self serve kiosk similar to the ones being installed in the Civic Centre foyer. The kiosk will be customised and tailored to the needs and issues within the community of Yewdale. Some officer resource time will be invested to train Community Centre staff on how the kiosk works effectively and how it can be programmed with local information pertaining to the Yewdale area. The introduction of the community kiosk will link into the priorities of the PCC funding as well as the Customer Access Strategy.

Design out Crime Projects

Funding has been secured through the PCC to make improvements to public open spaces such as parks, allotments and community areas to ensure the public feel safe and reassured when using them. Through the undertaking of Crime Prevention Surveys a number of 'Design out Crime' improvements have been identified to reduce the likelihood of acts of Anti-social behaviour. Improvements such as landscape management, lighting, signage, barriers, fencing, anti graffiti paint etc will be considered. Working with key partners, 10 community projects have been identified that would benefit from this funding.

Support Scheme for Victims of Anti-Social Behaviour

The Communities and Family Development Officer in conjunction with the Home Improvement Agency has designed a 1 year scheme to support victims of anti-social behaviour. The new scheme which has been funded by the PCC, will offer a free home safety check to anyone that has been a victim of ASB or is vulnerable to the threat of ASB. New leaflets have been produced and of referrals have already been received.

Community Safety Partnership

The process has started to pull together the Countywide Community Safety Strategic Assessment. The data will be collected by the Cumbria Observatory and produced as a report later this year. The Carlisle East and City West PSG's (Problem Solving Group) continues to work well and provide early interventions to ensure a quick response to community issues. Noise nuisance still remains one of the key priorities across the west of the City. A Task and Finish Group has been set up to address the issue.

The CSP has agreed to fund an Admin Support post for up to 1 year to support the work of the Partnership. The post will be hosted by Carlisle City Council, within the Community Engagement Directorate.