

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Ellis (until 11.30am), Mrs McKerrell, Osgood, Scarborough, Mrs Stevenson, Mrs Vasey and Ms Williams.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Quilter – Culture, Leisure and Young People Portfolio Holder (until 11.50am)
Councillor Mrs Riddle – Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder (until 11.50am)
Councillor Glover – The Leader (from 10.20am)

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Housing and Health Manager
Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager
Policy and Communications Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.49/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Director of Economic Development.

COSP.50/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in respect of the business to be conducted.

COSP.51/15 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

COSP.52/15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 July 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meeting.

COSP.53/15 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the new Committee Clerk to her first meeting.

COSP.54/15 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.55/15 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING IN CARLISLE

The Housing and Health Manager and the Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager gave a presentation on the private sector housing in Carlisle; a copy of the presentation had been circulated to Members.

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager opened the presentation by noting the Council's duty to assess Private Sector Housing across the District. In looking at the picture of Housing Tenure, the Officer noted that Carlisle had a high proportion of Private Sector Rental Properties, in comparison to the county and national average figures. The sector had seen recent growth of 8%, which was slightly below the national average. The Stock Profile was highlighted as it illustrated the different ages of stock in the City, and how it complied with the relevant Housing Standards. The Officer then outlined the General Housing Characteristics in the Private Sector, and the Person Profile of those who used the sector. There were six hundred and thirty-four long term empty properties in the Private Sector in the City, which were defined as those that had been empty for more than six months. Those who privately rented in the City lived mainly in terraced housing and flats, and tenants were staying longer in their homes. 58% of Private Sector renters were aged between 25 and 44. 72% of those in the Private Rented Sector were in Employment.

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager described the Housing Conditions and gave an overview of the Housing and Health and Safety Rating System, as well as the Decent Homes Standard. They covered areas on which a property was assessed; defects, thermal comfort, damp, fire, slips and trips; and how they should be categorised in relation to their severity. The presentation included photographs which illustrated some of the defects which had been found during inspections undertaken by the team.

The presentation described the statutory framework that governed the Private Rented Sector, and the Council's obligations in this area, which comprised; dealing with complaints, Duty to assess properties, Duty to take action and, Houses of Multiple Occupation. The work of the team in 2014/15 was highlighted; all of the one hundred and five licenced properties had been inspected, eighty-nine complaints had been dealt with, and fifty-four Empty Properties had been brought back into use.

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager concluded the presentation by outlining the direction of the team's work for 2015/16 that would include; a Risk Assessed approach to inspection in the Private Rented; a project to fund heating systems for off gas properties without central heating which would use part of £1.14M funding from Department of Energy and Climate Change. The project funding would be shared with Allerdale, Eden, and South Lakeland District Councils.

In receiving the presentation Members raised the following questions and comments:

- *How many long term empty properties were in the private sector?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager explained that Social Housing was not counted in the figures. Most of the empty properties in this classification were there as a result of being on sale on the open market or being in Probate.

- *How many void properties were there in the City?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that there were around 1,500 properties classed as void. This meant that they had been empty for up to six months. The figure included Housing Associations properties.

- *How did the Council know how many properties were empty?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager explained that the information came from the Council's Council Tax Database.

- *Were age and disability linked in the breakdown of the Private Rented Sector person profile?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager noted that the proportion of people with disabilities in the private sector was higher than the national average. Additionally, Cumbria as a whole has an older than average population, and there may be a causal link between the two. However, when the figures are collated the type of disability was not recorded.

- *Does the Housing and Health and Safety Rating System apply to Riverside too?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that Housing Associations had to comply with the Decent Homes standards.

- *How supportive were private landlords of the Rating Scheme?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that ninety-five percent of complaints raised by tenants were dealt with, by landlords, within three months. In many cases the reasons that the standards were not met and complaint was raised was that the landlord had not been aware of the standard requirements. The Council's approach was to focus on education and advice, rather than enforcement. If a landlord failed to comply with a standard, the Council would issue a formal Notice. Not complying with the Notice was a legal offence, the Council had only served a handful of Notices in the past three years.

- *Would the Council's new policy on Private Sector Landlords include issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour and the Environment?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager responded that the Environmental Health Manager was looking into these areas and liaising with residents to develop methods for addressing these issues.

- *Could Members be provided with a copy of the Decent Homes Standard and the Housing and Health and Safety Rating System?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that the documents were both large and technical. She suggested Members may benefit from having copies of the guidance leaflets given to tenants and to circulate a copy.

- *Did the Council have statutory time limits to respond to complaints or access properties for inspection?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager noted that there was no statutory requirement relating to response times. However, the Service Standards adopted by the team stipulated that they would; respond to a complaint in five working days of its receipt; conduct a visit within two weeks, and produce an inspection report within 14 days of the inspection. She added that prior to any visit the resident was given a leaflet that outlined what would happen during the inspection.

- *Was the Empty Homes Officer still in post?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that the post was still filled and that the Officer had been in the process of identifying the exact number of properties in the City that were currently classed as empty. This would ensure the information the team had for statistical analysis was correct.

- *What percentage of privately rented properties in the City were Houses of Multiple Occupation?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager advised that the team estimated 7% were Houses of Multiple Occupation.

- *The funding for Empty Homes had been reduced, how did this impact the work of the Private Sector Team?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager explained that there had been previously been a number of funding sources open to the team, but these were no longer available. As a result, the team could only offer advice to tenants.

- *The figures indicate that 72% of people in Private Sector rented properties were in employment. Was a comparable figure for the Social Housing Sector available?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager noted that this information may be found in the Housing Needs Survey.

- *What has been the impact of the recession on the Private Rented Sector?*

The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager explained that the recession had meant that some home owners who had experienced difficulties selling their properties had began renting them out in the Private Sector. This had increased the number of properties available in the sector. The Private Sector Housing Technical Team Manager noted that the City now had a property auction house, whereas previously it had not. It was felt that lower level stock in the market was sold through this mechanism.

RESOLVED – (1) That the presentation be noted. The Members thanked the Officer for her very professional and informative presentation.

COSP.56/15 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.17/15 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 Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, published on 24 July 2015, included the following item which fell within the remit of this Panel.

- KD.28/15 – Carlisle Plan which was included on the agenda
- KD.29/15 – Demonstration Project – Affordable Housing Provision – The Executive considered the matter on 24 August 2015.

The Panel's Work Programme had been attached to the report and Members were asked to discuss suggested topics for Task and Finish groups to decide the purpose of scrutiny and where focus should lie in order to gain maximum value and to consider the timing of the reviews.

At the request of the Panel, the Housing and Health Manager explained that the Demonstration Project was an innovative approach to building Affordable Housing and meeting skills shortages. To deliver the housing the project would utilise Council land, Homes and Communities Agency Funding, and Carlisle College building and construction apprentice skills. The finished properties would become the property of a Registered Social Landlord. The approach of the project was to re-think housing; what could housing do for the local economy? The design and construction phase would support jobs, and the new properties were addressing an evidential need for further affordable housing in the City.

In response to questions the Housing and Health Manager clarified the following;

- The age of apprenticeships would be a decision for the College.
- The Registered Social Landlord would give consideration to the type and mix of properties in the project, but would include Affordable Housing.
- *Social Housing tenants have the Right to Buy their property after three years, what impact would this have?*

The Housing and Health Manager noted the government's manifesto and the potential Housing Bill in autumn, that would potentially give the Right to Buy to Registered Social Landlord tenants. Tenants earning above the local average wage would be required to pay a market rent. The clear message from government was reward through owner occupation.

- *A Member expressed concern that the Project was focussing on Affordable properties, which could alienate some tenants, who may not be able to afford the properties in the project. They felt a focus on Social Housing might have been more beneficial.*

The Housing and Health Manager responded by defining the term Affordable Housing. They rented at 80% of the prevailing market rate; Social Housing was marketed at a lower rate than that. The properties delivered by the project were to be available to those who do not have a house, or had not been able to get into the market. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment had indicated that the needs of these people were for rental properties.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Overview Report (OS.17/15) incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

(2) That the Leisure Facilities Development Report be included on the agenda for the Panel's October meeting.

COSP.57/15 CARLISLE PLAN 2015-18

The Policy and Communications Manager submitted report PC.16/15 presenting the draft Carlisle Plan. Attention was then drawn to the draft Carlisle Plan 2015-18 (attached as Appendix 1) which set out the Council's overall vision for Carlisle, supported by five priorities. The vision gave a clear direction and context for all of the Council's activities. Opportunities

to improve health, wellbeing and economic prosperity would be maximized through the five priorities that supported the vision.

The Leader explained that a programme of 'Listening Council' events had been held from 24 August 2015 to give residents the opportunity to comment on the draft plans for Carlisle's future. In addition to consultation with partners, community and voluntary groups consultation would also be carried out the Youth Council to seek their views on the plan. He outlined some of the issues which had been brought up during the events thus far; the future of independent retailers in the city; making the city's retail offer stand out; improving branding of the Fair Trade City status; making the housing market sustainable; the importance of promoting the city's heritage and arts facilities; the leisure facilities offer in the city; making the Mayor's Charity able to benefit from Gift-Aid.

In considering the Carlisle Plan Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *How well attended had the Listening Council events been?*

The Leader responded that they had not been as well attended as hoped, but they had been worthwhile. Those who had taken part in the events had stayed for some time and made contributions. He also noted that residents now had a lot of opportunities to contact the Council, for example, through electronic mail which had not previously been available.

- *A Member asked how the events were advertised.*

The Leader explained that; a large advert had been included in the Cumberland News, along with and article leaflets had been distributed, and the events had been advertised on social media, in Community Centres and on local radio. There had also been a stall in the city centre during the week of the Pageant, where people had been able to take part in the process.

- *A Member highlighted the change in people's shopping habits, due to the internet, and asked was it time to think outside the box and include more cafes and restaurants between shops in the city centre?*

The Leader did feel that this was important, and noted the increasing number of bars and restaurants in the city centre. Housing and restaurants were other potential parts of the mix for growing the city centre. He further observed that it was important to balance both large retailers and smaller independents to give Carlisle a unique offer and the Plan could help to develop this.

- *One of the priorities was to develop sports, arts and culture: would current venues be protected?*

The Leader responded that each offer would need to be considered on an individual basis. Factors such as frequency of use, and other potential uses could be looked into.

- *A Member felt that it was very important that the retail shops in the city were protected to maintain an incentive for visitors. The move towards including a greater proportion of bars and restaurants should not impact too greatly upon the shopping offer of the city.*

The Leader noted the change in people's shopping habits, which now relied more in internet shopping. However, he felt that the city's events offer increased footfall into the city, and thereby offer some support to retailers in the centre.

- *How realistic was it to expect each of the priorities to be met when the Council's finances were being reduced?*

The Leader replied that they were very realistic. The Council had strong partnerships in the city, which would help to deliver priorities. He added that the Council would continue to build partnerships to grow the city.

RESOLVED – That the Carlisle Plan 2015-18 (PC.16/15) be welcomed and the comments of the Panel as set out above be considered by the Executive.

COSP.58/15 1ST QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

The Policy and Performance Officer submitted report PC.12/15 updating the Panel on the Council's service standards that helped measure performance. The report also included an update on key actions contained within the Carlisle Plan 2013-16.

The Policy and Performance Officer reported that the revised priorities contained within the Carlisle Plan 2015-18 would be reported from the 3rd quarter onwards following full Council in November. Details of each service standard were included in the report in section 1. To coincide with the introduction of a new Complaints Policy, Corporate Complaints had been included in the report as a new service standard.

RESOLVED – That report PC.12/15, 1st Quarter Performance Report 2015/16, be welcomed.

(The meeting ended at 12.00)