



# COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

## *Panel Report*

**Public**

**Date of Meeting:** 13th JANUARY 2011

**Title:** RIVERSIDE CARLISLE - PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND  
UPDATE

**Report of:** ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT)

**Report reference:** CD 24/10

**Summary:** This report provides updated information of a number of work areas relating to Riverside Carlisle. It covers progress on responsive and void repairs, tenants top ten performance indicators, partnership working arrangements and redevelopment of sheltered housing.

**Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:** Input relating to the updated information provided within the report.

**Recommendations:** That the contents of the report be noted.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None  
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## 1. Background

Riverside Carlisle was inspected by the Audit Commission in 2010 who looked at a number of aspects relating to the performance of the organisation. Information regarding this was presented to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the summer of 2010 by the Director of Riverside Carlisle. Updated information on progress made regarding responsive and void repairs is provided under section 2 and on the tenants top ten performance indicators under section 3.

## 2. Responsive & Void Repairs

2.1 Riverside has subscribed to Housemark. This is a national benchmarking club involving the vast majority of housing associations in England and Wales. Membership enables participating organisation to compare cost, quality and performance of different aspects of housing activity with a range of others of similar size and location.

2.2 Riverside's 2008/09 financial and performance data has been analyzed in terms of Housemark benchmarks. (2009/10 data has also been input but shows no significant variation). The conclusions drawn are as follows:

**Responsive repairs;** Riverside's repairs service, Repairline, established in 2007, is one of the most effective housing repairs units in the country. Its performance (for example, in terms of the proportion of appointments made and kept; the number of repairs fixed at first visit, and so on) is in the national top quartile. Quality is also very high, with levels of customer satisfaction (83%) well above the national average (75%). In addition, all this is achieved economically. Repairline's costs are amongst the lowest for similar sized housing associations. This combination of strong performance, high customer satisfaction and low cost has led Housemark to rate Repairline as a top performer.

- **Void repairs;** the picture regarding repairs of homes when they become empty is more mixed. Performance is at or around national average levels, taking around 35 days to repair and re-let the typical empty home. Customer satisfaction is very high, with 97% of new occupants satisfied with the quality of their home. Indeed, Housemark have suggested that Riverside prepare new homes to a much higher standard than many other associations. However, this comes at a cost. Riverside's average cost of void repair is around twice that of the best performers. The main focus for achieving value for money in 2011/12 will therefore involve addressing the issue of void costs. Housemark are facilitating a workshop on 11 January, and a verbal report on specific proposals regarding how the necessary savings can be achieved can be made at the meeting, if requested.

### 3. Tenants Top Ten Performance Indicators

3.1 Riverside has worked with tenants to identify what matters most to them. Consultation on service priorities began with the national tenant-led Service Quality Group and was then widened out to the whole tenant population. Initially a long list of 50 potential service standards was considered. Through voting and two further consultation exercises a priority list was identified. This was then sent to Tenants' Panel members and over 700 responses were received.

3.2 The resultant Top Ten is as follows:

- Keeping repairs appointments
- Keeping properties safe through gas safety checks
- Satisfaction with overall service
- Satisfaction with repairs
- Satisfaction with handling of anti-social behaviour
- Satisfaction with most recent contact or service
- Value for money of service charges
- Responding to letters within 10 days
- Repairs completed right first time
- Aids and adaptations completed when agreed.

3.3 During December the Tenants' Newsletter included a summary Annual Report. (This report has recently been sent to Councillors for their information). This reported back to tenants on performance on each of these Top Ten indicators. In the majority of cases the report confirms that performance in Carlisle is above Riverside's national average. However, two specific areas have been identified where further improvements are required:

- **Handling anti-social behaviour cases:** only around half, i.e. five out of ten tenants who complained about anti-social behaviour were satisfied with the handling of the case. Although this is roughly the same as Riverside's national average this is a poorer performance compared to other landlords. Further detailed research is being undertaken to try to identify what else could be done to improve tenant satisfaction in these cases. Early results suggest that communication should be improved.
- **Service charges:** two thirds of tenants are satisfied that their service charge represents value for money. This is better than Riverside's national average but not as good as we want to be. Further work to improve satisfaction with service charges is being planned.

- 3.4 In the coming weeks decisions will be taken about performance focus in 2011/12, whether the Top Ten will remain the same or whether there are other areas that tenants would like to see given particular emphasis.

#### **4. THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

- 4.1 Following on from the five year post stock transfer period, in December 2007 Riverside Carlisle (formerly Carlisle Housing Association) and Carlisle City Council set up a partnership agreement which covered a number of joint key objectives. These objectives were linked under a range of different themes which needed to be addressed by both organisations. This agreement also included an annual action plan which set out tasks responsibilities and timescales for specific staff within both organisations to complete.

#### **4.2 Proposed Partnership Action Groups**

Whilst the partnership agreement action plan has achieved its objectives, it has been agreed by Senior Managers from within both organisations that a more interactive approach may be more effective in the longer term. By bringing the relevant Officers together in order to discuss joint solutions on a regular basis, this would ensure that results are achieved through mutual agreement. At each meeting a representative from both organisations will be required to provide feedback on issues which need to be progressed.

A number of initial meetings have now taken place between Senior Managers from the Council and Riverside and the format each forum has been proposed. These meetings will be known as 'action groups' which will cover the following specific areas:

- The Estate Management and Environment action group (Place Action Group)
- The Development and Investment (Property Action Group)
- The Housing Options and Vulnerability (People Action Group)

#### **4.3 Initial Meetings**

Agreement has been reached that the Place Action Group will be piloted first with an initial meeting due to take place at the Council offices today (13<sup>th</sup> January). The frequency, attendance and format of future meetings to be agreed at this point.

Priority will be to address environmental issues of mutual concern to both organisations.

## **5. REDEVELOPMENT OF SHELTERED HOUSING**

### **5.1 Overview**

Since the presentation made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2010 Riverside has made significant progress in the redevelopment of sheltered housing at Carlisle. The improvement plans were linked to the Riverside corporate objective: 'Supporting vulnerable residents to live with dignity in their own homes'.

Funding for the refurbishment has been obtained on the basis that the most cost effective outcome is being delivered to include a redevelopment of the most sustainable schemes possible going forward.

It is important to recognise that Riverside sheltered housing located in Carlisle represents only a very small proportion of the total housing stock which meets the needs of older persons. Whilst the figure varies from month to month, the total housing stock managed by Riverside Carlisle is around 6,000 units. With over 40% of these properties linked to the Careline emergency alarm response service, there are a total of 106 units which benefit from communal facilities and a Warden / Scheme Manager Service. Riverside Carlisle are continuing to develop new schemes throughout the region many of which meet the needs of older or disabled people.

### **5.2 Scope of existing sites**

The scope of existing scheme sites to deliver either short, mid or long term requirements of the client group has been considered. It is now accepted that the overall initial approach to provide the optimum number of units (40+ being the industry norm), meet decent homes standards and achieve aspirations of customers is not achievable within the scope of the existing sites. Significant progress has therefore now been made in providing the best possible solutions for each individual site.

### **5.3 Financial viability**

Whilst a recent analysis of housing need for each scheme neighbourhood would indicate a favourable position for redevelopment on existing sites decisions made have been required to focus on achieving financial viability going forward. In order to achieve this, scheme service provision has to operate on a cost neutral basis. Largely due to the relatively small number of units on each site prior to 2009 / 2010 Riverside has continued to provide significant subsidies on sheltered housing scheme service charges. In addition to careful consideration of capital funding requirements scheme services have now been reviewed to ensure that in future that this subsidy is eliminated.

#### 5.4 Progress On Overall Scheme Plans

##### Westhill House Brampton (now to be known as 'The Martins')

The new scheme both meets the needs of older people as well as now in addition potentially meeting general needs purposes. Original facilities consisted of 16 bedsits with shared bathing facilities and poor space standards, 4 flats, Wardens accommodation and communal facilities. A redevelopment on the existing site footprint now provides 10, 2 bedroom flats, 2, 1 bedroom flats and 2, 2 bedroom houses with on - site parking. Allocation priority is being offered to applicants over the age of 55, in particular those who are under occupying larger family accommodation.

##### Freshfield Court, Botcherby

Full refurbishment of Freshfield Court is now complete. The scheme now incorporates improved communal facilities including an additional 5 apartments with a total of 35 one and two bedroom units each with walk in shower facilities.

##### York Court, Upperby

The current scheme is being redeveloped to increase the total number of units from 31 to 33 by converting the current unoccupied Wardens accommodation into 2 additional units. A revised package of improvements involves reconfiguring rooms within each existing bedsit to create individual double sized bedrooms, shower rooms and living rooms with compact concealed modern kitchen facilities. The work required should entail minimal structural disruption.

##### Arnside Court, Harraby

Although well located for local facilities, this scheme fails to meet decent homes standards and consists of 20 bedsits and 2 flats only 1 of which has an individual

bath room. The options appraisal process has indicated that this scheme is not viable to redevelop for sheltered housing and has therefore now been fully decanted with a proposal to proceed for disposal through sale or demolition.

#### Ladyseat, Longtown

Ladyseat consists of 16 bedsits and 4 flats all with en – suite facilities. There are no significant decent homes issues at this scheme and facilities within the immediate neighbourhood are adequate. The size, scope and rural nature of the site does however raise questions about long term sustainability and a decision regarding long term investment will not be made until a full review of each of these factors has been taken into account over the forthcoming year. Some immediate improvement work will still be undertaken during this time to include specific disability discrimination act requirements. In addition this scheme has been identified as a possible location for an innovative “green energy” initiative which may potentially attract further funding in future.

#### Morton Court, Morton

There have been major concerns about stock investment requirements and non compliance with decent homes standards at Morton Court. The few remaining tenants were decanted earlier this year and demolition has now taken place. The proposal is to proceed with developing replacement bungalows on this site.

#### Barras House, Dalston

This scheme is well located and meets decent homes standards. Some stock investment work has been undertaken and an additional two units have been created out of the former Wardens accommodation to provide a total of 18 units with additional communal facilities. Further improvement work to the central heating system has recently been undertaken which will reduce overall service costs significantly.