

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 15 JANUARY 2015 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Ellis, Gee, Mrs Prest,
Scarborough (as substitute for Councillor Harid), Mrs Stevenson and Mrs Vasey.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Bradley – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder
Lisa Dixon – Advanced Practitioner – Leaving Care Carlisle and Eden
Mark Sellers – Salvation Army

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Economic Development
Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.01/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Harid and Councillor Mrs Riddle, Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder.

COSP.02/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

COSP.03/15 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

COSP.04/15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 October 2014 and 25 November 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record of those meetings.

COSP.05/15 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

COSP.06/15 AGENDA

RESOLVED – That agenda item A.3, Inter-Agency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle, be taken before agenda item A.2, Overview Report and Work Programme.

COSP.07/15 INTER-AGENCY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR CARLISLE 2015-20

A short video was played for the Panel showing the Northern Housing Consortium award winning community project which was delivered from Water Street women and family accommodation through a partnership between Carlisle City Council and Fair Meals Direct. The video showed how partnership working provided a valuable local community meals on wheels service for vulnerable adults within the district. The service prepared and delivered

hot meals daily to local people and provided learning and volunteering opportunities for the residents of the scheme.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager presented report ED.02/15 which outlined the five year Inter-agency Homelessness Strategy for Carlisle. Delivery with key partners prior to publication was developed and agreed and the Strategy would be launched in April 2015.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager introduced Ms Dixon, Advanced Practitioner – Leaving Care Carlisle and Eden and Mr Sellers, Salvation Army to the Panel.

Ms Dixon informed the Panel that she dealt with young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who were leaving care. She stressed the importance of the partnership working to avoid repeat homelessness and to provide stable accommodation.

Mr Sellers stated that he was representing Carlisle Churches Together and was the head of a small working party which looked at the support the Churches could provide in response to homelessness.

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that the report outlined the background to the Strategy and the objectives achieved to date and gave details of the Homelessness Review all of which had previously been considered by the Panel. It was agreed that the meeting would focus on the four Priority Areas and the Action Plan which had been developed with partners and had been attached to the report.

Priority Area 1: Delivery of Appropriate Flexible Accommodation and Support Pathways

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that the main goal of the first priority area was to effectively prevent homelessness. She added that the emphasis was to deliver a flexible approach to support each person in the most appropriate way to help them sustain accommodation. She highlighted a number of the actions including improvements to the Central Access Point and a review of the local access barriers and exclusions. She added that it was vital that a collective commitment to improve transparency of decision making was embedded with all key partners.

In considering the first priority Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Had it been difficult to place young people in John Street Hostel given the variety of clients in the Hostel?*

Ms Dixon responded that young people leaving care over the age of 18 who perhaps required a higher level of support which was available at the Hostel would be referred. Each case was considered individually and the most appropriate accommodation was sought.

- *Riverside Carlisle had been part of an unsuccessful pilot to bring young people who were leaving care into a controlled tenancy, would the project be readdressed?*

Ms Dixon explained that her team had been involved in the pilot called the Launch Pad Scheme. There had been six tenancies issued, two of which resulted in full time tenancies. Organisational changes within Riverside Carlisle meant that they had not wanted to continue

with the Scheme. There was a requirement for more support and accommodation for young people leaving care and Children Services were in discussions with Riverside regarding properties for care leavers possibly on a shared basis where stable support could be provided. More work needed to be undertaken to engage with young people and help them understand their own responsibility and the effect their actions had on their accommodation.

- *Was there a collaborative local directory of services?*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager responded that there was not a collaborative directory of services and this was a barrier for people. The advantage of the Strategy was that representatives of all agencies took part and had the strength to carry out the actions successfully.

Ms Dixon added that it was hoped that the directory would be established by October. Children' Services had started to develop a directory and it was envisaged that the agencies would feed into that one and pull everything together.

- *How effective was the Council at supplying housing?*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that the Council could influence nominations and administered Choice Based Letting for clients.

- *Was there a Gypsy and Travellers Council which could assist the Council in improving access to local community services?*

The Director of Economic Development confirmed that there was a Council but they did not necessarily engage with the authority.

- *In what way were gypsy and travellers classed as vulnerable?*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that under the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance gypsy and travellers would be vulnerable if they had mobility issues, were 16/17 years old or if there were children in the family. The action had been to provide better support and offer the necessary prevention measures. The safeguarding of children locally was a priority for the Council.

Priority Area 2: Multiple Exclusion Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager reported that the Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH) was a specific separate category of homelessness. MEH was a client who had experienced homelessness, was engaged in street culture activity, substance misuse and often had mental health issues. The MEH group were the minority in the homelessness groups but often had the most complex and challenging needs. One reason that this group was a priority was due to the cost and resources needed to deal with the issues. The age group was usually older and issues became more visible when all other options had been explored or exhausted. The priority area looked at how the agencies could deal with the group better and prevent younger clients ending up in the group later in life.

In considering the second priority Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *How were the MEH dealt with currently?*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that in the past clients had been passed around various agencies and became caught in a homelessness cycle. A personalised and flexible approach was required to improve the service.

The Director of Economic Development agreed that more communication was needed between partners to ensure the right agencies were working together to provide the right support.

- *What prospects were there for young people, were the young people coming out of care NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training)?*

Ms Dixon explained that Children's Services worked with Inspira and the DWP to ensure that young people were aware of all of the options available to them. Unfortunately some of the care leavers were not in an emotional position to attend school or work and they required additional support.

Mr Sellers commented that the Churches usually dealt with people in the MEH category over the age of 30 and, unfortunately, some of the people had been in the cycle for over ten years. People in that group were often difficult to deal with and although the Churches wanted to help them they often had conflicting groups to deal with.

- *The report stated that there were no rough sleepers found during the official rough sleepers count yet the report also proposed the No Second Night Out (NSNO) rollout.*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager stated that the zero count was excellent news for the City. She explained that a large number of single young people stayed on friends' sofas etc until they had no other options. Homelessness was not necessarily rough sleeping and the Strategy aimed to ensure that those who did stay with friends did not end up rough sleeping. The NSNO addressed more than just rough sleeping and put preventative measures in place to ensure the Council not only fulfilled its statutory duty but also supported those that were not within the duty.

Mr Sellers felt that there was a perception of homelessness by the Churches that was perhaps different to the actual statistics and this could be due to the help that Churches provided and the lack of interaction with other agencies. He also thought there may be more rough sleepers in the warmer months, he agreed that the NSNO rollout was an excellent an idea for the City.

A Member commented that there had been a dramatic decline in the number of homeless both locally and nationally.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio agreed that there had been a reduction in the number of statutory homelessness acceptances but drew the Panel's attention to the report which stated that 1200 people consistently approached the Council for housing advice each year. She also highlighted that there had been a significant increase in the number of people who had received preventative support. She felt that the authority should be proud of the Strategy and of the way it approached homelessness.

Priority Area 3: Increase and improve positive outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager reported that the focus of priority area 3 was 16/17 year olds and the aim was to embed local commitment for Carlisle through the implementation of a Local Joint Protocol for Homeless 16/17 year olds. It was important that there was a flexible approach to working along with a much more responsive approach to young people.

A Member asked if there was an update on the situation with regard to Shaddongate Resource Centre and its role as a central community hub for young people identified at risk.

The Director of Economic Development responded that discussions were taking place with the YMCA to deliver certain support.

Priority Area 4: Prevention of Homelessness

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager reiterated that prevention was the main theme throughout the Strategy. The Council felt that it was important to be involved in the Gold Standard Challenge. Only one authority had reached the Gold Standard to date nationally. To start the process there would be a peer review which would take place in Carlisle in April 2015. The peer review was an in-depth look at the effectiveness of the homelessness service compared to national benchmarking set by the DCLG. The Priority covered all of the actions that would be required to reach a Gold Standard service including the review of all protocols, procedures and policies, in particular the discharge policies, to ensure they were up to date and most importantly to ensure they worked. It was anticipated that the Gold Standard award would take at least 18 months to achieve.

The Strategy also included the monitoring of changes introduced through the Welfare Reform and the effect they had on the community and potential effects on homelessness. She added that the Team also ensured that all agencies and clients were aware of Discretionary Housing Payments which proved vital to those moving into properties without furniture.

In considering the fourth priority Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Was the issue regarding bare accommodation as a result of the authority not using private landlords to carry out their homeless duty?*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager explained that private landlords were used by the authority as often this was the only option available. Social Housing was the preferred route as it was deemed more secure by the clients.

- *A Member asked if the homelessness team felt that the Council's financial situation had affected their work.*

The Homelessness Prevention and Accommodation Services Manager responded that the financial situation focused all of the agencies priorities to achieve more with less. The Council met its statutory responsibilities and did this well, it also continued to assist those who the Council did not have statutory responsibility for.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed the Panel that there had not been a significant reduction in the homelessness budget although there had been some changes in staffing.

Mr Sellers added that resources was an issue for charitable organisations and there was a greater need for co-ordinated working to maximise the available resources.

- *Would the joint strategy be presented to all agencies that had been involved?*

Ms Dixon stated that she had regular contact with the homelessness team and hoped that next year there would be more opportunity for the panel to see a more robust document with examples of what was actually being achieved through the partnership approach in line with the strategy.

In closing the item the Chairman thanked all those who attended and contributed to a worthwhile meeting and added that it was clear that there needed to be more co-operation between all agencies and inter agency working should be embedded in the culture.

RESOLVED: 1. That Ms Dixon and Mr Sellers be thanked for their attendance and input in the meeting;

2. That Report ED.02/15 be noted;

3. That the observations of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, as outlined above, be conveyed to the Executive;

4. That an update on the Action Plan be submitted to the Panel in twelve months time.

COSP.08/15 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.31/14 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 15 December 2014, included the following items which fell within the remit of this Panel.

KD.22/14 – Tullie House Business Plan – the matter was considered by the Panel at their meeting held on 25 November 2014;

KD.23/14 – Carlisle Homelessness Strategy – the matter would be considered by the Panel later in the meeting;

KD.25/14 – Budget Process 2015/16 – the matter was considered by the Panel at their meeting held on 25 November 2014;

KD.30/14 – Carlisle Plan – since the publication of the Notice of Executive Key Decision, KD.30/14 had been deferred to enable further action planning around the draft Carlisle Plan priorities. A new date had not been scheduled.

Following publication of the agenda, a further Notice of Key Executive Decisions had been published on 31 December 2014. The following items fell within the remit of this Panel:

KD.01/15 – Energy Supply Partner – the Executive would make a decision on the proposal at their meeting on 2 February 2015.

Members did not raise any questions or comments on the items contained within the Notice of Key Decisions.

The following items within the remit of the Panel had been considered by the Executive on 9 December 2014 and 15 December 2014:

- EX.136/14 – Budget 2015/16 – Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Panels on the draft Budget reports;
- EX.138/14 – Charges Reviews;
- EX.140/14 – Tullie House Business Plan 2015-2018.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Panel of the LGA Future Council Review which took place in September 2014 and had suggested that it was timely to review the Council's scrutiny arrangements. At their meeting on 4 November 2014 the Scrutiny Chairs Group agreed that a facilitated discussion be arranged for scrutiny members. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) had been appointed to facilitate the session on Thursday 12 February 2014. The session would cover the role and function of scrutiny, the resources to carry out the role and the structures to support the role within the resources available.

The Work Programme had been attached to the report. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer asked Members to give consideration to items they would like to include on the agenda for February.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed the Panel that the joint arrangements for the support of young people had been disbanded approximately 18 months ago. He suggested that the Panel consider what could be done to make co-ordinated provision better.

RESOLVED – That the Overview Report (OS.31/14) incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

[The meeting ended at 12noon]