

Membership of Outside Bodies

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Summary :

Full Council on 22 March 2012 received reports on membership of outside bodies including the Cumbria Housing Executive Group, Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group and the Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body. These are attached for information as appendices A, B and C respectively following a decision at Full Council last year to report them to Committees.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Only outside bodies which elected members attend as representatives of the Council are included in this report.
- 1.2 The Council's Strategic Housing Manager attends the Cumbria Housing Executive Group and the Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body only as support for the elected Housing Portfolio Holder. No Council officer attends the Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group in support of our two elected members. Home Housing Group regional managers are present to support the eight members of that body, which includes four residents as well as two Councillors.

2. Information

- 2.1 The major landmark this year for the Cumbria Housing Executive Group was the launch of the Cumbria Housing Strategy to 2015. The attached Appendix A refers to Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) grant funding for up to 657 new affordable homes across Cumbria over the same period. In Copeland, we have 94 with guaranteed HCA grant, a further 17 where HCA funding is hoped for and 22 being developed with no HCA grant at all. The total planned for Copeland to 2015 is therefore 133 (not including 29 homes currently nearing completion in Millom).
- 2.2 The Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group is the newest housing body, created last year to replace the Copeland Homes Board. It's main (but not only) task is to oversee completion of all investment and improvement works to the stock transferred in 2004. This is known as the investment agreement by which all works are to be completed by June 2014.

2.3 The Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body, as its name indicates, commissions housing related support to enable vulnerable people to live independently in the community. Its major purpose is to ensure the provision of personal support that prevents people experiencing crises like unplanned hospital admission or homelessness. Cumbria County Council is the accountable body for the expenditure and therefore chairs the commissioning body. The big issue for 2012 is the letting of contracts to providers who will deliver the support services.

Outside Body Report

Cumbria Housing Executive – Councillor George Clements

Cumbria's six district Councils have statutory housing responsibilities. The County Council and Lake District National Park also have some housing responsibilities. Together with representation from the registered housing providers they form the Cumbria Housing Executive Group (CHEG). They recognise that by working together they can add real value to creating and sustaining homes and communities across Cumbria and responding to changing social and economic needs.

In these changing times housing is going through the biggest review for many years so it is important that we have a strong CHEG. The objective to lobby and feed into consultation locally, regionally and when appropriate nationally for a fair share of resources, as well as to influence and give Cumbria a voice to the Northern Housing Consortium, North-West Housing Forum and other local, regional and national consultations.

This year 2011/12 started slowly with us all anticipating what the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review would bring. In the meantime all partners contributed to the development of the Cumbria Housing Strategy, endorsed by our Full Council in January this year and successfully launched at Rhexed on 24th February.

One of the Government's new funding streams the New Homes Bonus has been looked at and we have been informed by the Policy and Strategy Manager from the Northern Housing Consortium that initial calculations suggest the Districts and County Councils in Cumbria will lose out as formula grant will be top sliced at a flat rate nation-wide, and the amount of New Homes Bonus brought in by the new houses built in this area will not reimburse the loss. Furthermore the access to housing was raised as a concern as New Homes Bonus is not received unless the property is occupied. We have drafted a letter from CHEG to the Housing Minister and are working together to lobby our MP's to raise the concerns highlighted in this report.

Grants of up to £13m have been submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency for up to 657 affordable homes in Cumbria. The HCA are to map by local authority and rural. Our problem is who will fund expensive support if HCA can't.

We are looking at the effect of the new right to buy which will be on a future meeting agenda.

We are also looking at the removal of the 10% subsidy on council tax for second home owners, we have an estimated 8000 second homes in Cumbria so a potential to bring extra revenue in for investment in housing.

We have been in discussions with Children's Services to decide the best approach to establish the process for dealing with 16/17 year old homeless clients. A scoping report has been drafted, which children's services are in support of, and a report will be presented at our next meeting.

We are now working with Cumbria County Council's Elderly Care to see if we can work closer when allocating our DFG's, this is on-going and a pilot scheme will be presented to us shortly.

In November the Government introduced a new National Housing Strategy, this document has many challenges. CHEG has touched on most of them at length. The document is too far reaching to list in this report. Within Copeland we have had numerous presentations that have highlighted the implications.

CHEG has met three times this year in Penrith, Workington and Whitehaven. Our next and final meeting of the municipal year is scheduled to take place in Barrow

Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group

Background

The Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group came into existence in 2011 in order to replace the Copeland Homes Board. The latter was formed to oversee the management of the housing stock transferred to Home Group under the large scale voluntary transfer completed in 2004.

Under the stock transfer agreement all investment and improvement works (“the Works”) to the transferred stock would be completed within 10 years of the transfer (i.e. by 7 June 2014). This is also known as the investment agreement.

The transfer agreement provided for the eventual dissolution of the Copeland Homes Board but Home Group sought a dialogue with the Council in order to agree on replacing the Board with another body to oversee compliance with the investment agreement.

Mutual agreement was reached to create the Copeland Homes Joint Steering Group (JSG) to replace the Board when the latter was dissolved. The JSG provides the means by which Home Group and the Council monitor the delivery of the investment programme embedded in the stock transfer agreement.

Role & terms of reference

The Steering Group has overall responsibility for the following:

- Receiving progress reports on the investment programme
- Monitoring performance of contractors and sub-contractors employed on the works
- Commenting and making recommendations on the designs and plans for the works
- Considering any proposed variations to the phasing of the investment programme and making recommendations on the same
- Monitoring the Community Investment Fund
- Considering the impact of change on the commitments made under the stock transfer agreement.

Membership & Meetings

The Group consists of eight members. Two are nominated by the Council and are currently Councillors Jon Downie and Alan Jacob. Two are nominated by the Home Group. The remaining four are current tenants or leaseholders of a property transferred to Home Group under the stock transfer agreement. The Group must meet at least four times annually. They elect their own chair and vice chair. The Group was created in September 2011 and has since met twice.

Dissolution

Unless Home and the Council agree otherwise the Steering Group shall automatically be dissolved 12 months after the date of completion of the investment programme. As referred to above, the programme is currently scheduled to complete by June 2014.

Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body

This body went live in 2003 following a period as a shadow organisation preparing for the transfer of many different funding streams into just one overall grant to pay for housing related support services across Cumbria. It was part of a national reorganisation under the title of Supporting People.

The Commissioning Body is a partnership between the six District Councils, the County Council, Probation Services, NHS and Primary Care Services. It is chaired by Cumbria County Council which, as the grant receiving authority, is also the accountable body for the grant provided by the DCLG. The County and District Councils are represented by elected members accompanied by officers.

Housing related support is the non-landlord services provided to help vulnerable people live independently in the community. Typically, but not exclusively, it refers to the personal support services provided, for example, by the wardens in sheltered housing schemes for older people and by visiting staff (often referred to as floating support) in homes dispersed around the community. The most numerous group who receive such support are older people (because of historic provision and demographic trends) but there are many other schemes. These include, but are not limited to, those for people with learning disabilities, mental health needs, younger people and other vulnerable groups who are able to live independently but need support to prevent crises like unplanned hospital admissions or homelessness.

Until 2010 the annual grant for Cumbria (called the programme grant) was ring-fenced, meaning that it could only pay for housing related support services. Many providers were (and still are) traditional housing associations but some specialised in delivering support to schemes owned and managed by others. In that year the ring-fence was removed and, sadly, the County Council is in process of making savings to reduce the spend on housing support from over £10M to around £7.5M over the next 4 years. These include some efficiency savings, for example on not funding the maintenance of equipment or “landlord” services but there will be no overall growth in the provision of housing support in Cumbria over the short term.

The Commissioning Body’s current major issue is completing the formal tendering process for all housing related support contracts that have come to an end. This is a major task that is too complex for explanation in an outline report such as this but outcomes for Copeland will be reported to our Strategic Housing Panel at the first opportunity together with an update on changes to the provision of community alarm services (commonly referred to as Careline).