

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT

COUNCILLOR DAVID KERR, CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOUSING, HOUSING REGENERATION, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT



EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP:

- Cabinet
- District Wide Tenants Cabinet Liaison Group
- Mellishaw Park Cabinet Liaison Group

EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES etc:

- LSP Health and Wellbeing Group
- Morecambe Bay Tobacco Control Alliance

OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES:

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

- Improvements continue to be made within the Cemeteries Service, for example:
 - Improved grounds maintenance standards
 - Substantial path repairs and improvements
 - New signage programme
 - Increased biodiversity through active management of woodland and meadowland burial areas
 - Introduction of wildflower meadows and involvement of Friends Groups.
 - Green Flag Award applied for Torrisholme Cemetery for 2008.

The recruitment of an assistant cemeteries officer should help the service pursue further improvements including the Charter for the Bereaved and processing memorial registrations.

- The Food Safety service has managed the implementation of a major change in regulations affecting port health and has met performance targets despite having 2 key posts subject to staff turnover.
- The Smokefree regulations were introduced smoothly following an intensive period of preparation and partnership working with the PCT. Compliance levels have been generally good. The funding for the Smokefree Officer post ceases at the end of May and enforcement work will be incorporated into the Health and Safety team's workplan.
- Contaminated Land – the council's Contaminated Land Officer and contractors have carried out extensive research to identify all land within the district where potentially

polluting activities have taken place. So far about 2,250 sites have been found and many will require more detailed inspection. This work, which is nearing completion, is the first operational stage in the published Inspection Strategy for Contaminated Land.

- Air Quality - working with external partners, a draft Air Quality Action Plan has been published for the Lancaster air quality management area. A second air quality management area has been declared in Carnforth and further work is being carried out at the crossroads in Galgate. Officers have reviewed the existing network of air pollution monitoring sites and extended it. This work will place the council in a good position of knowledge when approaching difficult decisions about how to reduce local air pollution in the worst affected areas, particularly in Lancaster city centre.
- **Enforcement activity:**
 - The Food Safety service also played an integral part in multi-agency enforcement operation around illegal cockling activity in Morecambe Bay. As a result, the Service was successful in securing an £11,850 grant from the Food Standards Agency for future shellfish enforcement activity.
 - The Environmental Protection service has taken enforcement action to abate neighbour noise nuisance in Middleton and successfully defended an appeal against the action taken. Costs of £12,000 were awarded to the council. This case consumed a great deal of officer time, including numerous out-of-hours visits by the Emergency Call-Out Service (ECOS) to gather evidence. When delivering its judgement, the magistrates' court complimented the council on its work and officers' professionalism.
 - 5 Fixed Penalty Notices for fouling have been issued and paid. A number of Formal Cautions have been issued, for Dogs Off Leads and 2 successful prosecutions. The most significant development in the work undertaken by the Dog Warden Service relates to Dangerous Dogs. There are now a number of very large breeds within the district, such as Mastiffs and American Bulldogs. These are complex, difficult cases to deal with and it is anticipated that this will cause increasing demands on the service in future. The Dog Warden Service has also carried out a joint campaign with the RSPCA involving free microchipping and subsidised neutering.
- **Future developments:**
 - Strengthen local air quality management, developing a multi-agency specialist working group and producing a full Air Quality Action Plan for Lancaster city centre
 - Drawing on work from the previous year, the Environmental Protection service will carry out risk assessments of all particularly vulnerable land uses (such as drinking water supplies and land used for growing food) where there is a possibility of previous land contamination.
 - Complete the full quality assurance of Environmental Protection services including Pest Control.
 - Implement a set of new Dog Control Orders and out-of-hours stray dog kennelling as required by new legislation.
 - Integration into Customer Services to begin.

STRATEGIC HOUSING

- **Housing Standards**

The introduction of Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) in April 2006 was a huge undertaking. The last year has been spent consolidating upon all the preparatory work involved in setting up the process and systematically inspecting and licensing relevant properties. To date 190 properties have been formally licensed.

The complexities of the 'Housing Health and Safety Rating System' (HHSRS) and the emerging case law have meant frequent policy and training reviews alongside the increased level of work required in simply implementing the system.

The new legislation has prompted a vastly increased level of activity with Student Landlords as all shared student properties are now officially classified as HMO's and, therefore, all require significant up-grading of standards and formal licensing. The Accreditation Scheme continues to effectively support this area of work.

One member of the technical team has been seconded to the Neighbourhood Task Force in order to concentrate their efforts upon improving the standards of the poorest HMO's located in the West End of Morecambe. This has been very effective so far and there has already been a reduction in the level of recorded levels of anti-social behaviour associated with HMO's.

Preparatory work has begun upon establishing a Selective Licensing scheme in the West End of Morecambe. Prior to formal implementation this scheme will require public consultation, cabinet approval and the consent of the Secretary of State.

- **Poulton Renewal Area**

As with previous years various types of funding have been available in the Poulton renewal area albeit within the "target areas" centred around the Morecambe Town Centre. The funding streams comprise of renovation grants, group repair, and face lift schemes. The majority of the renovation grants have been awarded to individual properties e.g. reduce Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO'S) down to single family houses, or to remove redundant commercial properties i.e. ground floor shops with accommodation above back to single family homes.

The group repair and facelift schemes continue to be a success in transforming a "tired street" into looking a more vibrant area to live in. This renovation activity helps to bolster confidence within the area and also the surrounding streets. Two schemes have recently been completed. Since the completion of the Townscape Initiative Scheme a number of properties have also been nominated for various awards and these particular properties have been used as "pump primers" for private owners to emulate or copy, whilst renovating their own properties.

In general the Poulton renewal area continues to be a success and continues to reverse what was considered to be a declining housing area. The residents feel more confident and are showing pride in their area.

- **West End Regeneration**

Working with English Partnerships funds have now been secured for the Housing Exemplar Project - Chatsworth Gardens. An Outline Planning Application has recently been submitted and a Building Agreement with the developers in the final stages of negotiation to create 101 new homes for outright sale. These homes will be built to high environmental and urban

design standards. 50 of the required 72 properties have been acquired through voluntary agreements with the owners and Cabinet will soon be considering the Building Agreement and updated Funding Agreement to enable the final stage of acquisitions to be completed.

In partnership with the Housing Corporation and Adactus Housing Group we have completed the remodelling of HMO's on Clarendon Road and West End Road and created 22 high quality homes for shared ownership with a further 26 now on site and planned for completion over the next 6 months. This programme is transforming which was once plagued by anti social behaviour and multiple deprivation into a desirable and sustainable community.

- **Enabling (Home Improvement Team)**

2007/08 has been an incredibly difficult year for the Enabling Team. Both technical officer posts have been temporarily vacant for about half of the year and the team manager was also absent due to sickness for a prolonged period. Notwithstanding this, the priority team targets for the year will be met. . The Housing Options Service and the District Wide Handyperson Scheme were, however, able to maintain normal operation and continue the delivery of Home Improvement Agency type services designed to help make homes decent and to promote independence.

At the core of the Home Improvement type services is the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant programme. The staff absences created a major problem with regard to both committing and spending this capital budget. However, sheer hard work during the last quarter of the year will ensure that spend against the capital budget maximises the Governments 60% contribution towards this fund. The DFG programme continues to face challenging times ahead both from the increased demand on the budget and the imminent changes to legislation expected from the Government.

Although not yet finalised, the most recent HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act) return is estimated to report an annual improvement in district wide energy efficiency of 1.1%. This will be in line with the set target for the year.

GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

An Overview & Scrutiny report was produced in July 2007 following a full review of how grants to voluntary organisations were being managed. This resulted in a large number of proposed improvements to the present arrangements which the Service is looking to implement.

With the Service Level Agreements for non-Housing voluntary organisations being due to expire on 31st March 2008, efforts have been concentrated this year on improving the monitoring of these grants and carrying out a full review of those agreements currently in place and a small number of new applications. This has resulted in a schedule of new grants which were agreed as part of the budget process. Service Level Agreements for these are now being negotiated and should be in place by the time this report is published.

CONCLUSION:

Although some difficulties have been met during the year, all the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators for 2007/08 have been met. The Quarterly Performance Review Team meetings have been particularly useful in helping to keep work programmes on target.

* * * * *