

South Lakeland District Council
Council
Tuesday, 15 December 2020
Housing and Innovation Portfolio

Portfolio: Cllr Jonathan Brook

The development and implementation of the Council Plan.

The Council Plan objectives in relation to improved customer engagement and communication implementing of the Local Plan housing objectives.

Working in partnership to improve the standard, availability and affordability of housing in the District to meet local needs, championing these issues at national, regional and sub-regional level.

Looking at innovative ways of working.

To support the Leader of the Council and to deputise in his/her absence.

Policies, Plans and Strategies

- Council Plan
- Local Plan (including Development Management Policies)
- Housing Strategy and Policy (including Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy)
- IT/Information/E Government Strategy

Key Areas

- Council Planning
- Customer Connect Programme (Strategy)
- Development Management and Building Control
- Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention
- IT Services
- Strategic Housing and delivery (including Housing Enabling and Housing Grants)

Council Planning

In 2020 a virtual review of the 2021 Council Plan was undertaken which provided steer on the priorities and impact measures to be emphasized within the Council Plan whilst aligning the medium term financial plan against the priorities.

The Council Plan 2021 will be considered at Council in February 2021 alongside the budget. The plan will set out the Council's long term vision and direction. It provides a consistent basis for the council's plans, strategies, projects and decisions such as how the transformational Customer Connect Programme is implemented.

The plan will enable council activity to be focused on strategic objectives and provide a consistent basis for the Prioritisation of resources, commissioning and performance management frameworks and the roll-out of the new ways of working under Customer Connect.

The plan strengthens the Council's commitment to responding to climate change and biodiversity whilst maintaining a strong recognition that the Council will work with partners to secure investment, growth and transport infrastructure that will deliver jobs and empower communities.

Customer Connect Programme (Strategy)

The delivery of the Customer Connect Programme has been ongoing since September 2016. The programme is divided into three main elements; Digital, People and Place. The people element is now being led by the Customer, Commercial Services and People Portfolio Holder and the Places element is being led by the Finance and Assets Portfolio Holder.

In July 2020 the Customer Connect Steering Group agreed new governance arrangements following the implementation of the new operating model and the realisation of the salary savings outlined in the Customer Connect business case. Whilst it is recognised that there is outstanding programme activity, which was paused due to the COVID_19 pandemic and future innovation activity to be delivered, the mechanisms of a full transformation programme are no longer required by the organisation. The move to the new governance arrangements ensure that continuous improvement is a focus for the organisation.

The Innovation and Improvement Group has been established and has oversight of the remaining programme activity and future innovation activity. Work streams for change and transition, communications and digital will operate under this group to deliver the remaining programme activity. The group will be responsible for providing assurance to work stream leads and will be a forum for resolving risks and overseeing the spend on the remaining Customer Connect Programme budget. The Group will remain subject to Cabinet member oversight.

In relation to digital development the customer account functionality is now live with twenty one high volume, low complexity forms available for customers and customer service advisors to use. This group of forms includes the minimum viable product and additional environmental, locality and street scene forms as well as the online grant applications for business affected by COVID-19. They allow the customer to access the service online 24/7. The account functionality will be integrated with the Capita Revenues and Benefit product early next year and the ability to make online payments will be introduced. The digital development of forms will continue as we redesign processes that require the customer to report an issue or apply for a service.

IT Services

The IT service has been focused on the delivery of Customer Connect through the preparation of the Enterprise Digital Platform to support single customer records and online accounts. Internal testing of the platform has been undertaken.

The Council is continuing to move forward in preparing the systems to support a launch and we are working to configure the platform to support new processes. Consultants from Ignite, Internal Business Analysts and staff from the shared ICT Service are working closely on achieving this.

Other work that has been completed to develop the technology and data to support the requirements of Customer Connect includes:

- Data Cleansing of Geographical Information to support more efficient ways of working across the council where Geographic Information System (GIS) data is used
- A new data management system has been produced to support a much improved operation specifically for Waste Collection and Street Scene. This will also facilitate enhanced information being presented to customers in relation to bin and recycling collection dates
- Procurement has started to procure a new Planning, Building Control and Land Charges System. It will also cover other areas such as Street Naming and numbering, Planning Policy and Community Infrastructure Levy
- We have installed a new telephone call handling system to support new ways of dealing with phone calls from customers
- We are continuing to make progress with the implementation of the Revenues and Benefits system, Capita have made enhancements to the way their system operates to help this.

All of the above is being done for both Eden and SLDC as part for the shared ICT service.

Outside of the Customer Connect programme, the Shared ICT Service has maintained a full Business as Usual operation, some examples of this work includes:

- Upgrading of the SLDC Cash receipting/Payment system has been completed
- We are in the process of replacing the technology in the Data Centers of both Eden and SLDC, this will improve performance by replacing aging equipment. This is part of the rolling IT replacement programme.

Following the outbreak of Coronavirus the Council has had to quickly introduce new innovative ways to support those working from home and the ability to host virtual formal and informal meetings. The IT Team have worked quickly and highly effectively to install the Microsoft Teams Platform for all employees and Councillors across SLDC to allow the organisation to continue conducting business as usual and keep in regular contact whilst adhering to Government Guidelines.

Development Management and Building Control

Significant progress had been made moving through our enforcement enquiries, demonstrating increased efficiency for dealing with enforcement issues that arise. The number of cases closed in February 2020 was 21 and the number of cases on hand at 1 February 2020 was 167 which had reduced from 181 in January 2020. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown Enforcement Officers in accordance with government guidelines, enforcement officers were not permitted to enter any premises. Therefore the Council was able to utilize mapping platforms which provide sufficient evidence through dated satellite imagery allowing Officers to look back on how developments have progressed.

During the Covid-10 pandemic the Council was able to continue to determine planning applications through the virtual planning committee process.

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

In 2017 the Council introduced a target measure of the number of homelessness households living in temporary accommodation will be no more than 20 at a time. The highest number of households in Temporary Accommodation at any one time was 39 which was in quarter in 2020/21 the figure had reduced to 31 in Quarter 2 2020/21.

In order to support the reduction of the homelessness households living in temporary accommodation, the Council introduced the Homelessness Strategy 2019/2024 which identifies four key priorities:

- Homeless prevention
- Increasing the supply of settled accommodation
- Ensuring appropriate support is available
- Tackling complex needs

The council is continuing to work towards achieving the strategy's actions:

- Working with private rented sector to secure accommodation for people in housing need/at risk of homelessness;
- Bringing empty homes back into use by implementing the Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan;
- Working with public sector bodies and churches to identify any potential sites that could be used for affordable or supported housing;
- Using housing renovation grants to enable potential new schemes suitable for tenants with specific needs;
- Working with providers to enable a shared housing scheme in South Lakeland for young people;
- Working with housing associations to develop new affordable homes with the help of low-cost loans.

Following a successful County wide bid for funding from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to tackle rough sleeping, South Lakeland receiving funding for:

- A part time Private Rented Sector Officer who is identifying landlords and properties that could offer sustainable move on accommodation for rough sleepers, those at risk of rough sleeper or as move on from the Hostel.
- A part time Rough Sleeping coordinator who will be looking at levels and causes of rough sleeping and developing positive pathways for referrals into other services as well as developing a strategic approach through the development of a County wide Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- A part time Support Work who will support residents in maintaining their tenancies.
- All of these posts show a commitment to working in partnership with others across the County. The Private Rented Sector Officer also works part time in Eden DC in the same role, the Rough Sleeping coordinator whilst a County wide post will primarily be looking at the distinct issues faced in South Lakeland and Barrow, and the hours for the Support Worker post have been increased by Impact Housing who is employing on behalf of the Authority.

Throughout 2019/20 the Council has been continuing to enable the reduction of empty homes by 20% by 2025 through targeted interventions. In order to support this target the Council is working on track to bring a minimum of 70 empty home back into use each year. Since 2015 to 2020 the Council has brought 435 empty homes back into use throughout the district.

During Coronavirus the Council has been supporting an increased number of households presenting as homeless. In addition to the 18 rooms at Town View Hostel the Council successfully secured additional accommodation:-

- 14 places at a Bed and Breakfast in Windermere
- 12 South Lake Housing tenancies
- 6 HOME Group Properties
- 3 Holiday let
- 1 rent free 3 bed property
- 1 IMPACT property as a tenancy
- 12 spaces at a Bed and Breakfast in Kendal and Barrow

The Homelessness Team are continuing to work to identify suitable holiday let's to enable families to move out of Bed and Breakfasts accommodation.

SLDC were recently successful in securing a grant from MHCLG which will support our work with the homeless during Covid-19. Cumbria County Council have also been awarded an additional £30k for this work which will be split between the six districts.

The team have also be working to ensure appropriate health support is available for those in temporary accommodation and to develop a more effective hospital discharge pathway.

Strategic Housing and delivery (including Housing Enabling and Housing Grants)

At Q2 2020/21 the Council had supported 523 affordable homes to rent since 2014. These figures show that the Council is on target to deliver 1000 affordable homes to rent by 2025.

The Council supports the delivery of extra care housing and a new 104 unit scheme is underway at a site in Oxenholme by Housing 21. This includes provision of 29 affordable rented units and 43 shared ownership units.

We have been continuing to work with partners such as Highways England, Cumbria LEP and Housing Developers to enable the development of the Cross-a-moor roundabout. Highways England are continuing to work up a design and land assembly.

Barrow Borough Council is continuing to lead on the Private Sector Stock Condition survey which is being carried out using a new methodology by the Building Research Establishment. Eden District Council and Cumbria County Council, SLDC jointly commissioned this survey.

The £2.36 million Community Housing Fund was designed to help tackle the problem of high levels of second home ownership. The funding was broken down into two available grants.

- CLH Capacity Building Grant
- CLH Scheme Grant

The fund is being used to enable the delivery of new community-led housing schemes. Schemes supported by this funding are moving towards completion in Levens and Windermere.

The Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Local Plan which was adopted in March 2019 has received the Royal Town Planning Institute Award for Planning Excellence, ahead of the Manchester Northern Gateway, Windermere Jetty, Preston Bus Station and the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan.

A project plan has been completed for delivery of the new local plan. The plan will now cover the period up to 2040 and will be adopted in 2023. Consultant events were postponed due to Coronavirus however will be rescheduled when safe to do so allowing for residents to provide input in the major plan which will shape South Lakeland for the next 10 years and beyond. The future plan will consider employment and housing needs for the district and how its historic character and landscapes can be protected. The Coronavirus pandemic has pushed the Local Plans back by 3-4 months however the current proposal is for the draft plan to be published in 2021.

The governance arrangements for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are well advanced. In total 765 applications have been submitted the Council continues to be the only District Council within the County operating CIL. A total of £1.1m is now available to support strategic projects and £200k has been paid to Parish and Town Council to support local projects.

Cumbria County Council (CCC) has completed the Kendal major infrastructure study. The Kendal Northern Relief Road has been identified as a potential improvement in the Transport for the North – Strategic Transport Plan. Cumbria County Council are continuing to seek funding opportunities and preparing an outline business case.