



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE CABINET**

**TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2013
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar
Councillor D Grant
Councillor N Hampshire
Councillor W Innes (Convener)
Councillor J McMillan
Councillor M Veitch

Other Councillors Present:

Provost L Broun-Lindsay
Councillor S Brown
Councillor S Currie
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor K McLeod
Councillor J Williamson

Council Officials Present:

Mrs A Leitch, Chief Executive
Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive (Partnership and Services for Communities)
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Mr M Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing
Mr R Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure
Mr D Small, Director of East Lothian Health & Social Care Partnership
Mrs K MacNeill, Corporate Legal Adviser
Mr J Cunningham, Benefits Manager
Mr K Christie, Revenues Manager
Ms C McCorry, Community Housing Services Manager
Mr D Russell, Communications Manager
Ms J Ogden-Smith, Communications Officer

Clerk:

Ms A Smith

Apologies:

Councillor T Day

Declarations of Interest:

None

Visitors:

None

1. SUMMARY OF CONTRACTS AWARDED BY EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL, 30 MAY-28 AUGUST 2013

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) advising Members of all contracts awarded by the Council from 30 May to 28 August 2013, with a value of over £150,000.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to note the award of contracts with a value of over £150,000 from 30 May to 28 August 2013 as listed in Appendix 1 to the report.

2. FINANCIAL REVIEW, 2013/14, QUARTER 1

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) informing Cabinet of the financial position of the Council at the end of the first quarter of the financial year 2013/14.

The Head of Council Resources, Jim Lamond, presented the report, informing Members that the report included some background summary information in respect of both the 2013/14 budget setting decisions taken by the Council in February 2013 together with information reported to Council recently in respect of the closing position for 2012/13. Mr Lamond drew attention to the salient points of the report, in particular the performance relating to the General Services Revenue, Housing Revenue Account and General Services Capital. He advised that no budget adjustments had been made during the first 3 months of the year.

In response to question from Councillor Currie about the overspend in relation to community partnerships and the impact on the rest of the budget, Mr Lamond referred to additional grant awards made in 2012-13 as well as planned efficiency savings and advised that there would be no direct consequence to this financial year resulting from the grant awards. In response to a question about Mortgage to Rent applications and other registered social landlords the Depute Chief Executive, Monica Patterson, indicated she would investigate and respond directly to Councillor Currie.

Councillor McLennan referred to the previous and current budget position in relation to Adult and Children's Wellbeing services, requesting comment.

Councillor Innes stated that the report set out the factual financial position. There were challenges but as detailed in the report the budgets would be managed and necessary steps taken. He stressed that this Administration would adhere to the budget.

Councillor Currie referred to the General Services Revenue remarking that in previous years there had been a surplus at the end of quarter 1, an overspend at the end of this quarter for the first time in recent years was a cause for concern. He made particular reference to Adult and Children's Wellbeing services. In relation to Mortgage to Rent applications he reiterated his query about whether the other registered social landlords were able to deal with these applications. He referred to the supported bus contract overspend and asked what action was being taken. He stressed the need overall to protect front line services.

Councillor Hampshire responded that the Council was working hard to maintain services, despite the lack of resources and reduced number of staff.

Councillor Veitch referred to the budget summary, detailed at paragraph 3.2 of the report, stating that against this backdrop much of the report content was to be welcomed. He drew attention to Appendix 1, highlighting that a number of efficiency savings were likely to be achieved; the Council was back on track in relation to the Financial Strategy. He paid tribute to the Leader and Chief Executive. In relation to supported bus services he stated that this Administration was committed to maintaining these services; discussions were ongoing with operators regarding improvements to the services provided.

Councillor Akhtar made reference to the demographic challenges and demand on services facing East Lothian, highlighting that the county was one of only two areas in Scotland where the population would increase in relation to both young and old age groups.

Councillor Innes stated that this Administration had set accurate budgets to deal with the challenges facing the Council. This Administration was responsible and would protect front line services where possible. He thanked Mr Lamond and his team for the report.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to note the financial performance of services at the end of June 2013 and also the actions being taken by management to ensure that services were delivered within approved budgets; and
- ii. to approve the change in the charging approach for Janitorial Services outlined at Section 3.18 until full agreement was reached on the future shape of the service.

3. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) providing Cabinet with an update on the changes introduced as a consequence of the Welfare Reform Act (2012). The report also outlined the impact for East Lothian households sustaining affordable tenancies or contending with other hardship and the impact for a number of Council services and the measures the Council had taken to try to minimise potentially negative impacts of welfare reform in the community.

The Benefits Manager, John Cunningham, presented the report, informing Members this was the first report since April 2013, the annual date of implementation of the new Welfare Reform Act (2012). He reported that over the last year the Welfare Reform Task Group had considered the service implications of the various welfare reforms and had produced an action plan, attached as Appendix 1. He advised that a Welfare Reform Reference Group had recently been established with key partners. He drew attention to the key points in relation to Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Scottish Welfare Fund, Housing Benefit Under Occupancy, Benefit Cap, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit.

A video, part of a range of videos produced by the Council entitled “East Lothian Debt, Benefits and Housing Advice”, was shown.

Councillor Currie made disparaging reference to Universal Credit and the planned national roll-out. In relation to the ‘Bedroom Tax’ and the 840 Council tenants affected, he stated that the position of the SNP Group was that no evictions should be guaranteed. He expressed

concern that the figures would get worse as the impact of these welfare reform changes took effect. He stated this was a direct attack on the most vulnerable people in society.

Councillor Innes gave thanks to Mr Cunningham and his team, the report detailed concrete proposals to try to address welfare reform issues. The Council had provided a range of information to support and advise people of these changes. He was confident the Council would be able to support all its tenants and residents. This was new territory; the Council had to be able to address new challenges as they arose. It was good to see new approaches being implemented to try to engage with people not already reached. He asked the officers present to pass on thanks to their staff for their work on this issue.

Councillor Akhtar also commended officers for their approach; this was a good example of partnership working.

Councillor MacKenzie referred to the video on rent arrears which had highlighted the considerable effect of debt. He would like to see more of a holistic approach; for the Council to bridge the gap between the figures and health and wellbeing. He made reference to discussions at the recent Safe and Vibrant Communities Partnership and remarked on the lack of information on mental health and wellbeing. He advised that over the years the suicide rate in East Lothian had increased; in 2011 there had been the largest number for some years. He made a request - for the Council to consider not just the financial information but to be able to find some way to achieve a better mental health for the people of East Lothian.

Councillor Veitch thanked Mr Cunningham and team for their excellent work. He agreed with the comments expressed by Councillor MacKenzie. He welcomed the implementation of the Scottish Welfare Fund. He also welcomed the roll out of the Benefit Cap across the country. With regard to Discretionary Housing Payments he indicated that the UK Government had increased its contribution to local authorities.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to continue to promote awareness and understanding of the impact of the welfare reform changes on East Lothian communities;
- ii. to take action to try and minimise any potential negative impacts of welfare reform by ensuring that Council service areas were optimally configured to continue to deliver high quality services to East Lothian residents; and
- iii. to note the potential impact of welfare reform on individuals and families when taking decisions about service development and to consider as part of budget deliberations the potential impact of welfare reform on the Council's revenues and council house rental income.

4. PUBLIC MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 JUNE AND 15 AUGUST 2013

The public minutes of the meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 13 June and 15 August 2013 were approved.

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS – EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Cabinet unanimously agreed to exclude the public from the following business containing exempt information by virtue of Paragraphs 1, 3 and 6 (information relating to

particular employees of the Authority; information relating to any particular applicant for, recipient or former recipient of a service provided by the Authority; information concerning the financial or business affairs of any particular person other than the Authority) of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Sub-Committee Minutes

The private minute of the meeting of the Employee Appeals Sub-Committee held on 6 June 2013 was approved.

The private minute of the meeting of the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 13 June 2013 was approved.

The private minutes of the meetings of the Tenancy Sub-Committee held on 20 June, 25 July and 15 August 2013 were approved.

The private minute of the meeting of the Social Work Appeals Sub-Committee held on 26 June 2013 was approved.