



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2013
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor D Berry (Convener)
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor J Williamson
Councillor P McLennan

Other Councillors Present

Councillor T Day
Councillor S Currie
Councillor J McMillan

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 D Small, Director of Health and Social Care Partnership
Mr T Shearer, Head of Policy and Partnerships
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Mr M Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing
Mr J Cunningham, Benefits Manager
Ms A Cairns, Audit Scotland
Mr C Forbes, Manager of East Lothian Works
Mr R Baty, Depute Economic Development Manager
Ms J Mackay, Media Manager
Ms S. Bogunovic, Customer Feedback Manager
Mr P Vestri, Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager
Mr A Strickland, Policy Officer

Clerk:

Mrs F Stewart (Items 1-3)
Ms A Smith (Items 4-9)

Apologies:

Councillor J Gillies

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. AUDIT SCOTLAND BENEFITS PERFORMANCE AUDIT

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to advise PPRC Members about the Audit Scotland Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit Risk Assessment Report and the action plans produced by the East Lothian Benefits Service as a response.

John Cunningham, Benefits Manager, was in attendance to present the report and was accompanied by Anne Cairns from Audit Scotland. He advised that Audit Scotland had a responsibility for conducting a Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit risk assessment programme. This programme operated across all Scottish Local Authorities and identified risks to achieving continuous improvement within the service. Following an on-site phase of the Risk Assessment, Audit Scotland had produced its latest report in March 2013 and Action Plans were agreed in May.

Overall, Mr Cunningham was satisfied with Audit Scotland's report which concluded that the Council was continuing to deliver a good level of performance in 2012/13; new claims were processed in an average of 23 days and changes of circumstances in an average of 6 days, the latter figure being the best performance of all Scottish Local Authorities. The Audit Scotland report also outlined areas for improvement and these were addressed in the updated Action Plan appended to the report.

The Chair commented that he had had difficulty reading two of the appendices to the report, ELC progress against previous Risk Assessment Action Plan and ELC Risk Assessment Action Plan at 24 September 2013. As a result, he was concerned that Members would be unable to scrutinise the report satisfactorily.

Angela Leitch, Chief Executive, proposed that these appendices could be circulated to Members in a revised format and Members agreed to proceed with the report after conferring on the matter.

Ms Cairns, Audit Scotland, summarised the findings of the report and advised that the aim of the assessment was to improve efficiency and service to the customer. The Chair thanked Ms Cairns for guiding Members through the Audit Scotland report and invited questions.

Councillor MacKenzie began by quoting a passage from an Audit Scotland letter dated 3 April 2013. It stated that '*The service had been successful in having all cases submitted to the Procurator Fiscal for consideration of a prosecution accepted. This is highly commendable.*' The letter also stated that East Lothian '*was the leading benefits service in Scotland in respect of joint sanctions carried out with the Fraud Investigation Service*'. He described this as marvellous news and congratulated the Benefits team on these achievements. However, he did have concerns; in particular, the impact of the staff changes documented in the Audit Scotland report, and he sought an assurance that vulnerable people would not suffer as a result of an inadequate staffing resource. Mr Cunningham explained the circumstances surrounding the staff changes, stating that the shape of the service had changed due to a number of factors. He added that staff who had left the service had now been replaced, although he acknowledged that it would take 18 months before new staff members were fully conversant with procedures.

Mr Cunningham clarified, for Members, the overpayment figure provided by the Council as part of the Council's Self assessment submission and advised that a new overpayment target had been set in the 2013/14 Service Plan. Mr Cunningham also stated that Housing Benefit would be recovered by billing or recovering from future payments in cases where claimants failed to notify the Council of changes to circumstances which would reduce their entitlement.

Councillor Goodfellow highlighted the very positive responses to a customer survey conducted by the benefits unit in 2012 and summarised in the Audit Scotland report. It showed that 84-88% of respondees rated highly the benefits administration, claims handling and staff knowledge.

Councillor Caldwell noted that new overpayment targets had been set in the Benefits Service Plan 2013/14 and enquired who had set the targets. Mr Cunningham advised that the 2013/14 overpayments recovery targets had been set by the Benefits Management Team in response to Audit Scotland's comments on previous target levels. He also explained the complexities surrounding debt recovery and the setting of challenging, but realistic targets in the present economic climate. Jim Lamond, Head of Council Resources added that, irrespective of targets, no debt was written off until all courses of action had been exhausted.

The Chair referred to Appendix 7.3, Progress against Previous Risk Assessment Programme, and enquired if the imminent target dates shown were expected to be met. Mr Cunningham replied, stating that the targets were realistic; the draft 2013 Policy review had been completed, other actions were at the stage of undergoing accuracy checks and progress was being made on the remainder.

Councillor Currie noted the problems the service had encountered with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and enquired if representations had been made to the DWP. He also raised the issue of staff safety and enquired if measures had been reviewed in the light of the additional pressures placed on staff as a result of the welfare changes. Mr Cunningham advised that a new relationship manager was now in place at the DWP and reported that, in general, the public treated his staff with respect.

Jim Lamond, Head of Council Resources, stated that the Audit Scotland report had proved to be very helpful. The report had highlighted the priority areas for Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission and it was clear that, in those areas, the service was maintaining a high level of performance. He acknowledged that the service faced many challenges, but he stressed that services would be prioritised and monitored.

Mrs Leitch described the discussion as very useful and urged Members to focus on the partnership working, the introduction of new technology and the continuous improvement rather than individual statistics.

The Chair requested an updated report in March or April 2014.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the content of the Audit Scotland Risk Assessment Report and the Benefit Unit's Action Plans.

2. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – BASELINE POSITION AT THE BEGINNING OF 2013/14

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to provide the Committee with information regarding the baseline position of the revised set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at the beginning of 2013/14.

Andrew Strickland, Policy Officer, presented the report, stating that feedback from two previous reports to the Committee had helped to define a new set of KPIs for 2013/14 onwards. The Indicators were divided into four objectives of the Council Plan 2012-17; Growing the Capacity of the Council, Growing our Communities, Growing our Economy and Growing our People. The latest data available was for 2011/12 and targets shown were for 2012/13. Background information was also provided to help Members to determine whether the targets had been set at an appropriate level and to identify areas for scrutiny.

The Chair invited comments from Members on the new framework of revised KPIs.

Councillor Currie referred to the number of attendances per 1000 population for pools (Growing our People). He stated that the challenge would be maintaining attendances to pools in difficult economic times and suggested that discussions could be held with *Enjoyleisure*. Mrs Leitch stated that there were Members present on the Board of *Enjoyleisure* who would be reviewing the sport and leisure targets. However, she believed it was also useful for this Committee to have an overview. Councillor Goodfellow suggested that figures for other pools in East Lothian not operated by *Enjoyleisure*, if available, could also be taken into consideration to help provide a more accurate measure of the numbers of people visiting swimming pools.

Councillor MacKenzie requested further information on the data relating to the percentage of A, B and C Class roads which should be considered for maintenance treatment (Growing our Communities) and Councillor Williamson suggested that the actual number of abandoned cars uplifted could be included in the measure relating to abandoned vehicles.

Members also discussed the measures for new businesses and jobs created, and the Chair asked Members to contact Mr Strickland if they wished to propose any changes to the KPIs.

Decision

The Committee, having reviewed and commented on the baseline data presented in Appendix A, noted the report.

3. DRAFT EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2012/13

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to provide the Committee with the draft Annual Performance Report for April 2012 to March 2013.

Mr Strickland, Policy Officer, presented the report, stating that the Annual Performance report was a summary of the Council's performance in relation to its commitments in the Council Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement. He invited Members to comment on the content of the report.

Councillor Currie referred to one of the Key Actions and enquired if schools would control the £100,000 budget to be devolved to school clusters. Mrs Leitch replied that details of how budgets are to be devolved were still under development, however, schools, in the context of the established clusters, would consider the needs and trends in their own communities.

The Chair considered that important measures were absent from the Local Transport Strategy and was advised by Paolo Vestri, Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager, that many of the statistics were national indicators and part of developing the Strategy was identifying local indicators. In response to questions relating to road resurfacing indicators, Monica Patterson, Depute Chief Executive, Partnership and Services for Communities, stated that the annual Transport report would put all the indicators into context and show how the Council had invested in the road infrastructure.

The Chair stated that he would like to see indicators for the number of apprentice and vocational positions available to young people and Councillor MacKenzie indicated that he would like to see Police Multi Member Ward Plans. He had been very disappointed with earlier plans and hoped that the Community Police Partnerships and local groups could share good practice.

Decision

The Committee, having considered and commented on the draft Annual Performance Report, noted the report.

4. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

The Head of Adult Wellbeing/Chief Social Work Officer had submitted a report providing an overview of the statistical information for Child and Adult Protection for Quarter 1 (2013/2014).

Murray Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing and Chief Social Work Officer presented the report. He advised that in relation to Child Protection the average number of children in foster care in East Lothian was below the national average. The number of children on the Child Protection Register continued to reduce. There was also a reduction in referrals in relation to Adult Protection for Quarter 1. He attributed these figures to improved practice and management of risks.

Councillor MacKenzie commented on the improving picture in relation to cause for concern families. Mr Leys advised that these were especially vulnerable families; extra support, including more frequent health checks, was now provided.

In response to a question from the Convener regarding the cause for concern figures in the different geographical areas of the county, Mr Leys indicated there was close correlation to areas of multiple deprivation. Part of the Council's approach involved looking at community capacity, in association with health professionals and GPs, to identify those families in need and how they could best be supported. He reported

that areas of good practice were being looked at, with the intention of rolling out the key aspects to other areas.

Councillor MacKenzie referred to the figures for case conferences, commenting on the benefit of GPs now being involved more; it was good to be able to use this conduit.

David Small, Director of Health and Social Care Partnership, stated it was an improving picture in relation to both health and social care.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the contents of the report.

5. SOCIAL WORK COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Services for Communities, had submitted a report on the use of the Council's Social Work complaints procedure for 2012/13.

The Customer Feedback Manager, Sarah Bogunovic, presented the report, advising that the Council operated a 3 stage social work complaints procedure, in line with statutory requirements. She gave details of the breakdown of feedback. She outlined examples of stage 2 complaints, acknowledgement and response times and proportion upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. She reported that 1 complaint had progressed to the Complaints Review Committee, but was not upheld. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman had received 7 complaints about the Council's social work services; 1 went to full investigation, but was not upheld. She drew attention to the positive feedback received, detailed in Appendix 2. She advised that the Scottish Government was currently reviewing the statutory social work complaints procedure.

Councillor Goodfellow welcomed the report. He made favourable comment in relation to Appendix 2, extracts from compliments received.

The Convener asked about information and guidance available and the approach adopted. Ms Bogunovic advised that the complaints team tried to be as approachable as possible. Information/guidance was readily available to clients and also on the Council's website. Specialised literature for children was currently being developed. Visits to day centres and home visits were also carried out. She added that in this Council the complaints team was centralised and not part of the social work service.

In response to a question from Councillor McAllister about the proactive/reactive nature of her team's role, Ms Bogunovic advised that it was mainly reactive, responding to complaints. They did however work closely with services and would raise issues with service managers as and when required.

Mr Leys informed Members that active and ongoing discussions took place with all service users regarding individual services. He added that one of the challenges was reaching people not part of a statutory service.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the report.

6. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Services for Communities, had submitted a report on the use of the Council's complaints handling procedure for Quarter 4: 1 January to 31 March 2013, and providing an overview of all customer feedback received for the year 2012/2013.

Ms Bogunovic presented the report, advising that the Council complied with the model complaints handling procedure for local authorities introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. She made reference to the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) which recorded complaints, comments and compliments. She gave details of the total number of complaints received for Quarter 4, the number at stages 1 and 2 and performance against agreed targets. She outlined the number of complaints received for the year, performance figures and outcomes. She advised that a more robust approach was being adopted in relation to advising people of their right to an independent review of their complaint through the Ombudsman.

Councillor Goodfellow referred to the Planning and Building Control figures in Appendix 1, querying the 5 stage 2 complaints but no stage 1 complaints. Ms Bogunovic advised that service areas were encouraged to report complaints through the correct channels but often, in relation to a statutory service, there was confusion regarding the difference between stage 1 and stage 2. She advised that those referred to may have been dealt with as service requests rather than stage 1 requests.

The Convener asked if information was available regarding people accessing the Council in general, rather than any particular service, and their view of the service provided. Ms Bogunovic advised that raising awareness was key, all contact centre staff and area office staff were trained on CRM. All data was logged and this type of call would appear as a stage 1 complaint.

Councillor Williamson asked if there was a system in place to deal with persistent complainers. Ms Bogunovic advised there was an Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, adding that it was up to individual service areas to implement this as appropriate.

In response to comments from Councillor MacKenzie, Ms Bogunovic advised that research on complaint handling showed that if an apology was made in an appropriate manner and at the appropriate time then this could be positive.

Councillor McMillan, referring to the issue of persistent complainers, remarked that a CRM system for Members could be beneficial. Ms Bogunovic indicated she would take this back to the systems team.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the report.

7. EAST LOTHIAN COMMUNITY PLANNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Services for Communities, had submitted a report outlining progress towards meeting the outcomes of the East Lothian Community Planning Economic Development Strategy.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships, Tom Shearer, introduced the report, informing Members that the report set out a range of measures in relation to the Strategy. He indicated that Richard Baty, Depute Manager Economic Development, and Colin Forbes, Manager of East Lothian Works, would provide more detail, focussing on 2 areas of initiative, East Lothian Food and Drink and East Lothian Works.

Mr Baty drew attention to the background to the revised Strategy, to the vision, the 2 strategic goals and 5 strategic objectives. He advised Members that the recently formed Sustainable Economy Partnership was leading/driving implementation of the Strategy. He outlined the measures proposed to map overall progress – jobs, businesses and employment rate.

East Lothian Food and Drink Initiative (Appendix 3)

Mr Baty outlined the aim of the Initiative – to develop East Lothian Food and Drink into the leading county for food and drink in Scotland and to be recognised by visitors and residents alike for the high quality food and drink produce available in hospitality and tourism outlets, shops and farmers' markets. He detailed the objectives of this Initiative, how it linked into Objective 2 of the Economic Development Strategy, and reported on some of the highlights. He informed Members that the Scottish Government regarded this Initiative as an exemplar for others to adopt.

East Lothian Works (Appendix 2)

Mr Forbes reported that East Lothian Works had opened in April 2013; it brought together all employability-related services within East Lothian Council. External partners were also delivering services from the Lodge Street base. He advised that this co-location meant a greater intensity of approach and allowed delivery of a more joined up service. He drew particular attention to the Employer Recruitment Incentive, a Scottish Government initiative, which provided a 50% wage subsidy for 6 months to local small and medium-sized enterprises if they took on a 16-24 year old, unemployed for less than 6 months. East Lothian Council had provided additional support to increase this subsidy to 67% and potentially 74 young people would benefit from this scheme. He reported that unemployment rates remained below the national average and the number of school leavers in positive destinations showed an increase on the corresponding period for the previous year.

In response to a query from Councillor Williamson about the recruitment initiative, Mr Forbes advised there was a clause in the criteria that these jobs must be for a period in excess of 6 months.

Councillor McMillan referred to work done by the Chief Executive/Depute Chief Executives in building links with the business sector. He indicated that 3 major energy employers had been impressed by our approach and the work carried out by the Council/East Lothian Works and were looking at how they could develop formal apprenticeships. He added that it was not just young people that could benefit from these schemes; the Council needed to continue to build up its partnerships.

Councillor MacKenzie requested further detail regarding the reduced number of tourist beds and the available amount of employment land. Mr Baty advised that a number of hotels had closed in the past year however Whitekirk, with over 100 beds, would be opening next year. In relation to the second point he advised that an available land supply of 3 hectares was actually quite ambitious; currently there was only 1 hectare, owned by the Council, the rest was owned by housing developers.

The Convener questioned the partnership with Visit Scotland; he stated there seemed to be no central co-ordination of events, the visitor centre in North Berwick was closed on a Sunday. He had a number of other concerns.

Councillor McMillan indicated there was a Visit East Lothian leaflet, which contained all the key information to all events in East Lothian. In relation to the Convener's point about Sunday closure he referred to a recent meeting of the tourism network, stating that the key organisations realised their strategies needed improved. He made reference to the emerging culture regarding East Lothian festivals and cultural tourism. Improved marketing strategy and branding were currently being looked at.

The Convener stressed the need to be pro-active. He had other issues he wished to discuss but would take these off line.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the report.

8. 2013/14 COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Chief Executive had submitted a report presenting the 2013/14 Council Improvement Plan for comment and noting.

Mr Vestri presented the report, advising Members it was submitted primarily for information. Appendix 1 detailed the sources used to determine the 2013/14 Council Improvement Plan; the Plan was attached as Appendix 2. The Plan outlined the actions that the Council as a whole would undertake at a council-wide level. This year's Plan included 21 action points. He drew attention to action point 7 of the Plan, advising that work on more effective use of benchmarking had commenced. He informed Members that the Audit and Governance Committee had responsibility for this Plan and that a monitoring report would be going to that Committee in November.

Councillor McMillan commented favourably on the presentation style of this report and appendices. He remarked that the plan (Appendix 2) was a good example of how to present information about actions.

Mrs Leitch stated that in relation to item 1, this had come from an Audit Scotland inspection; these externally submitted reports had templates that had to be adhered to. She indicated that feedback would be taken on board.

The Convener indicated that Councillor McMillan's comment was helpful. He noted the point made regarding item 1; however information produced for Members of the Committee had to be presented in a coherent format.

Decision

The PPRC noted the 2013/14 Council Improvement Plan, approved by Council on 25 June 2013.

9. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2013 UPDATE

Mr Vestri outlined the potential business for the November meeting. He made reference to other items suggested by Members for future agendas, advising that these would be allocated to the most appropriate PPRC.

The Convener thanked Members for their agenda item suggestions.

Signed

Councillor David Berry
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee