



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

**TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 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 J Gillies

Other Councillors Present

Councillor N Hampshire

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services
Mr T Shearer, Head of Policy and Partnerships
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Mr R Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure
Dr R Jennings, Head of Development
Mr P Forsyth, Senior Area Officer East (Roads Network)
Mr I Glen, Policy and Project Manager
Mr I Dalgleish, Transport Services Manager
Mr I McFarlane, Service Manager, Development Management
Mr P Vestri, Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager
Mr A Strickland, Policy Officer

Clerk:

Mrs F Stewart

Apologies:

Councillor P McLennan

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTE OF PPRC MEETING ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2013

The Minute of the PPRC meeting on 24 September 2013 was agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

2. 2013/14 PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services, had submitted a report to provide the Committee with information on how East Lothian Council's Policy and Projects and Development Management services performed in 2012/13 and highlight areas for improvement in 2013/14.

Ian Glen, Policy and Projects Manager, presented a brief outline of the Development Planning performance. He advised that the Local Plan coverage of East Lothian remained just within five years of adoption, although this term would shortly be exceeded. The Scottish Government was expecting planning authorities to have a Local Development Plan that was no more than 5 years old. However, Mr Glen advised that further work on SESplan's housing requirement would have an impact on the timing of the Local Development Plan's programme. He reported that the requirement of Scottish Planning Policy for a 5-year land effective land supply had not been met despite the extensive amount of land allocated in the current local plan. This was due to the downturn in the housing market and the reduced borrowing facilities for developers which had significantly reduced the rate of house completions. The East Lothian Plan 2008 allocated over 70 hectares of land for business and industry but only 6 hectares of this was immediately available for development. This situation was being addressed and a main issues report would go before Cabinet in March 2014. Mr Glen also advised that the Council's performance had been measured against a previous Structure Plan target and that the housing market was now improving.

In response to a question from Councillor Goodfellow, Mr Glen explained how the target was set for the number of housing approvals as shown in the National Headline Indicators and advised that the critical measure was the number of completions and not the number of approvals.

Iain McFarlane, Service Manager, summarised the performance of Development Management services, stating that the National Headline Indicators for 2012/13 showed an improvement in average determination timescales from the previous period, particularly in relation to major developments. Mr McFarlane stated that 97% of planning applications were approved and, when necessary, his team worked with applicants to get their application into a form which could be supported. This service did, however, impact on determination times. Mr McFarlane also explained the reasons why the performance in processing business and industry applications had declined and what steps were being taken to address this, but he stressed that the focus was always to achieve quality developments.

Councillor MacKenzie was disappointed to learn that only 6 of the 70 hectares of land allocated by the Council for business and industry was immediately available for development and enquired if the Council's Economic Development unit could identify opportunities for this land. Councillor Hampshire replied that, due to the high cost of financing infrastructure, developers looked for sites where this was already in place. Mr McFarlane advised that there were very few business and industry applications for existing or allocated business/industry sites and the other business applications were more complex to determine than if they were on an allocated site. However, his

team would always endeavour to support business applications wherever possible, and would explore the issues and get appropriate assessments to enable Members to determine such applications. Richard Jennings, Head of Development, stated that this problem was not confined to East Lothian but existed throughout Scotland, nationally and internationally. He advised that the figures mentioned were not as a result of a lack of ambition for East Lothian. He had received positive feedback from businesses and would be working with Officers to attract investment to East Lothian. Members discussed a number of proposals for developing business opportunities and how to stimulate interest in East Lothian sites. The Chair proposed that the Council could work with partners to advance new developments but stated that such initiatives could not be driven by the Planning department, only supported by it.

Councillor Caldwell stated that the Council should not only be encouraging new businesses but also supporting existing businesses, as a substantial number had closed down.

The Chair observed that business space was not classified in any way in the Framework document and Mr McFarlane advised that this was the Scottish Government format, but work could be done to distinguish between Class 2, 4 and 5.

Councillor MacKenzie stated that he valued high quality design features in East Lothian housing developments and Dr Jennings advised that developers are given design guidance. He cited the Council's housing development at Lochbridge Road, North Berwick as an excellent example of built environment quality and stated that, in terms of design quality, the Council was leading by example.

Decision

The Committee considered the performance of and proposed improvements to these services.

3. ROAD ASSET MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL STATUS AND OPTIONS REPORT

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services, had submitted a report to present a summary of the Council's road assets at 1 April 2013. The report described the current condition of the asset, detailed the service that the asset and current budgets were able to provide and presented options available for the future.

Peter Forsyth, Senior Area Officer East, Roads Network, presented the report. He advised that the Council was developing a structured approach to Roads Asset Management Planning in line with Central Government's financial reporting requirements. The report considered two options; a continuance of current funding levels and the predicted cost of maintaining current standards. Twenty-year forecasts were included in the report to enable decisions to be taken with an understanding of their long term implications. Mr Forsyth summarised the report, outlining the condition of the road network assets, the resurfacing programme and customer complaints. He also stated that a key issue for the department was a 40% increase in commodity costs over last year and stated that some services may be delivered differently as a result.

The Chair invited comments on the performance of the roads asset management strategy.

Mr Forsyth responded to questions from Members on surface dressing treatments, the cost of settling insurance claims and the breakdown of complaints. He also confirmed that he was satisfied with the performance of the specialist contractors employed by the Council.

The Chair sought further information on the cost of road treatments and how the Council performed in relation to similarly benchmarked local authorities and Mr Forsyth agreed to provide this information for the Chair after the meeting.

Decision

The Committee noted the content of the report and recommended that the Council gives consideration to maintaining standards of road surfaces.

4. 2012/2013 STATUTORY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS COMPARISON REPORT

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to provide the Committee with information on how East Lothian Council performed in comparison with other Scottish Councils in regard to the Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) for 2012/13.

Andrew Strickland, Policy Officer, presented the report which showed the indicators in the top quartile (i.e. within the best performing 25% of results) and the bottom quartile, in comparison to other Councils. He reported that East Lothian had improved their performance over last year, with 13 indicators in the top quartile and advised that the SPIs would, in future, be replaced by the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Councillor MacKenzie noted that Council house rent arrears had increased in 2012/13 but considered that the rent arrears improvement plan outlined in the report was helping to manage the problem in a realistic way.

The Chair enquired if residents leaving Council houses were pursued to settle any outstanding arrears and Jim Lamond, Head of Council Resources, confirmed that this was the case and debt was only written off when all other avenues had been explored. Mr Lamond acknowledged that the Council's rent collection performance was below the Scottish average but pointed out that not all Councils reported rent arrears in the same way. He stated that improvement actions relating to debt management had been successful but advised that further improvements would be necessary. The arrears team now had an additional staff resource in place and a small management team had been established to work on a long term strategy to address rent arrears. Mr Lamond also advised that debt management and housing staff had recently attended a training course which had had a very positive impact.

The Chair pointed out that East Lothian had the second lowest rents in Scotland and offered a high quality of accommodation. He therefore expected that rent arrears should not be at such a high level.

Members received further information on the percentage of households assessed as homeless and clarification on the public buildings accessible to disabled people. Councillor Goodfellow also requested a breakdown of the number of attendances at swimming pools, indoor sports and leisure facilities according to area.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the contents of the report.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chair requested an update on a report which had been postponed to the January meeting. Ian Dalgleish, Transport Manager, expected that the information would be available to bring a Bus Service Review to the January meeting. The report would detail the operation of all the buses across the Council.

The Chair referred to the Annual Work Programme and advised that the other reports due to come to the January meeting were the SOLACE/Improvement Service Performance Indicators, a review of Voice Recognition Telephone System, the impact of Homelessness legislation and the impact of the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme.

Following earlier discussion on land allocated for business and industry, the Chair requested that Economic Development and Development Management work together to encourage and support new businesses in East Lothian.

Signed

Councillor David Berry
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee