



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

**TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor D Berry (Convener)
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor J Goodfellow (from Item 2)
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor J Williamson
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor F McAllister

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Community Services
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive - Resources and People Services
Mr R Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure
Mr T Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr A Stubbs, Service Manager - Roads
Mr J Cunningham, Service Manager - Benefits
Mr K Christie, Service manager - Revenues
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager - Corporate Policy and Improvement
Mr A Strickland, Policy Officer
Mr K Black, Safer Communities Team Leader
Ms M Smith, Community Warden Co-ordinator

Clerk:

Mrs F Stewart

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTE OF PPRC MEETING ON 25 MARCH 2014

The Minute of the PPRC meeting on 25 March 2014 was agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

2. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL INVESTMENT IN POLICE AND COMMUNITY WARDENS

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services, had submitted a report on the effectiveness of Council investment in Police and Community Wardens.

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager - Corporate Policy and Improvement, presented the report. He stated that reducing anti-social behaviour was a key priority for the Council and that '*Communities experience less anti-social behaviour*' was one of the contributory outcomes to the strategic outcome in the Single Outcome Agreement: 'East Lothian is an Even Safer Place'. The report provided information on the Council's Community Wardens service, the Council Funded Police and the CCTV service provided by the Council, which was extensively used by the Police.

Mr Vestri stated that the Council had seven community wardens and a Community Warden Co-ordinator, and last year this team became part of the Safer Communities Team (which includes the Antisocial Behaviour Team). He advised that it was too soon to evaluate the impact of bringing the Community Wardens and the Antisocial Behaviour Team under the same operational management, but he summarised the expected benefits. Appendix 1 of the report provided a summary of the wardens' activity in 2013/14. The East Lothian Community Policing Team had been set up in 2008 with a role to reduce anti-social behaviour and to focus on the outcomes of the Single Outcome Agreement. Funding from the Council to Police Scotland had increased since the original agreement and currently provided funding for 12 police officers, 1 Antisocial Behaviour Police Liaison Officer, 1 Information and Statistics Officer, 1 Administrative Assistant and the provision of 2 vehicles. Discussions were ongoing between the Council and Police Scotland about the Service Level Agreement and funding for the local police teams. Mr Vestri advised that East Lothian Council's Town Centre CCTV scheme was managed through the Council's Contact Centre at Penston House in Macmerry. Police Officers visited the Contact Centre on an almost daily basis viewing and/or collecting images and were supported by Contact Centre staff during each visit. Funding for the CCTV scheme was provided solely by the Council. Police Scotland had never provided any financial assistance towards the operation of the scheme although they were essentially the sole user of the service.

Councillor Williamson asked if community wardens were attending the local Community and Police Partnership (CAPP) meetings which were held in each of the seven East Lothian wards. Mandy Smith, Community Warden Co-ordinator, replied that the wardens were notified of the meeting dates and tried to attend whenever possible. The Chair stated that, as local issues were brought to those meetings, it was important for wardens to be in attendance. Councillor Williamson also asked if Police Scotland ought to be contributing to the cost of the CCTV. Tom Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships, replied that there were ongoing discussions between the Council and Police Scotland about the Service Level Agreement and this included funding for the local police teams and CCTV.

Councillor McLennan noted that the number of antisocial complaints had fallen and requested a breakdown of complaints by ward, together with details of the nature of the complaints. He also asked what the role of a community warden was. Kenny Black, Safer Communities Team Leader, advised that he could provide the Committee with information on each ward and also the type of behaviour. On the role of the wardens, he advised that they fed intelligence to the Police, especially in relation to drug misuse. Councillor McLennan asked if there was a role for wardens in road safety and parking, and Mr Black replied that the wardens lacked any enforcement powers to issue notices for illegal parking, but they assisted in general traffic control and could offer advice.

Councillor McKenzie enquired about the wardens' participation in antisocial behaviour related Problem Solving Partnerships (PSPs). Mr Black advised that there were currently two live PSPs, one in Haddington and one in Wallyford, and the model of the PSPs was one of co-ordinating resources from different agencies to deal with more serious problems. In his experience, they had proved to be highly effective. Councillor MacKenzie noted that the number of antisocial complaints had fallen significantly over the past 4 years and that youth disorder was down by over half. He described this as remarkable and greatly to be welcomed. Councillor MacKenzie also asked if certain antisocial behaviour incidents could, in fact, be associated with mental health issues. Mr Black replied that, in a number of cases, offenders do suffer from some form of mental illness, causing alarm and distress to others. These cases were dealt with differently, using a multi-agency approach.

Councillor Caldwell enquired about the night-time antisocial behaviour noise calls and Mr Black advised that the community wardens formed part of the Night Time Noise Team from Fridays to Mondays, when one warden attended every noise call. As noise was a very subjective matter, noise could now be measured scientifically with a hand held device.

Councillor McAllister enquired if it was the case that often there was more than one element to antisocial behaviour and Mr Black replied that in many cases there was, for example, drugs, noise and aggressive dogs.

Sederunt: Councillor Goodfellow arrived at the meeting

Councillor Goodfellow pointed out that the Scottish Government had reduced its funding to Police Scotland over recent years while the Council's budget for policing had risen. In his view, this was a transfer of cost from central government to local government. The Chair suggested that the Council had a meeting with the Chief Constable to raise this matter. It was also the case that the Police had funded the traffic wardens, a service it no longer provided. Mr Shearer advised that the Council had had a difficult choice to make, but had chosen to buy additional police provision.

Councillor McLennan stated that it was clear from the report that the Community Police Officers and wardens were doing an excellent job. As a result people would be feeling safer in their communities and it was not possible to put a price on that. The Chair endorsed this view and asked that his thanks were taken back to the police officers and wardens.

Action Point: Mr Vestri to circulate to Members details of anti social behaviour complaints and a breakdown of those complaints by ward.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report and provided guidance on whether additional information was required.

3. WINTER SERVICE 2013-14

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services, had submitted a report to advise on the Winter Service carried out by Road Services on behalf of East Lothian Council for the season 2013 – 2014.

Alan Stubbs, Service Manager for Roads, presented the report. He advised that it was the Council's aim to provide an effective and efficient winter maintenance service that will allow the safe movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. East Lothian had 11 main gritting routes covered by large goods vehicles (LGVs) and 4 town/village routes covered by 7.5 tonne lorries. Road Services also had access to advanced meteorological forecasts and had 6 strategically placed road warning sensors. Mr Stubbs stated that winter 2013-14 had been mild compared to previous years and the winter service had therefore been a typical operation.

Councillor Williamson recalled that, following the extreme winter conditions in previous years, there was talk of organising volunteer groups to clear paths in the event of more severe weather. Mr Montgomery advised that work had been done on this and the Council had been assisting Community Councils to put together their resilience plans to cover emergencies such as snow and flooding.

Councillor Caldwell enquired if the Council had sufficient grit bins in the right places and was advised by Mr Stubbs that East Lothian was well served by grit bins.

Councillor MacKenzie commented that it was good to see the capacity of the salt barn in the report and Mr Montgomery advised that after the two severe winters, the Council decided to increase its salt capacity. Supplies of salt were bought in the summer at a reduced rate and the aim was to keep the supply high enough to last through a severe winter.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of this report.

4. AUDIT SCOTLAND HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT RISK ASSESSMENT

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to advise on the progress being made in respect of the Benefits Service's action plans submitted in response to Audit Scotland Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit Risk Assessment Report.

John Cunningham, Service Manager for Benefits, presented the report. He advised that this report provided an update on the report which came before the Committee in September 2013. An initial risk assessment report had been carried out on East Lothian Council's Benefit Service in April 2009 and the Council had submitted an Action Plan to address identified risks. Following a second risk assessment carried out in December 2012, Audit Scotland had produced its latest report which outlined risks carried forward from the previous report and a number of further potential risks to continuous improvement. Updated copies of the Benefit Service's action plans showed that the Service had completed 14 out of 16 actions which were outstanding in September 2013, leaving only two actions to be completed.

The Chair stated that the report outlined progress from the Department's perspective but he requested if he could have a verbal report on performance as clients might view it. Mr Cunningham replied that this information was contained in the Welfare Reform report (next agenda item). He explained that, since Audit Scotland completed their report in December 2012, the service had changed quite dramatically. For example, Council Tax benefit had ended and the Department was delivering new services. Mr Cunningham advised that the Audit had examined how the Service was performing and how continuous improvement could be achieved, highlighting areas where improvements could be made, and work had begun on the report's recommendations. However, there was also a need to respond to legislative changes and the needs of customers.

Councillor MacKenzie noted the staff changes in the report and requested an update on staffing levels in the Revenues and Benefits Unit. Mr Cunningham replied that core staffing levels had stayed flat. Of the three experienced benefits processors lost to the Council during 2012, two had been replaced although it takes approximately 18 months to train new staff up to the required standard.

Alex McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive for Resources and People Services, stated that implementing the changes introduced by the new Welfare Reform legislation had had a detrimental impact on the Benefit Service's performance with regard to processing claims. The Chair commented that, in view of this, the Service had made good progress with their Risk Assessment Action Plans.

Decision

The PPRC agreed to note the progress made by the Benefit Service in respect of the action plans.

5. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to provide an update on the changes introduced as a consequence of the Welfare Reform Act (2012). The report was designed to assist Members to develop an understanding of what these changes have meant for East Lothian households sustaining affordable tenancies or contending with other hardship. It would also help to develop an understanding of what these changes have meant for a number of Council services and to highlight the measures the Council is continuing to take to try to minimise potentially negative impacts of welfare reform in the community.

John Cunningham, Benefits Manager, presented the report. He advised that, over the past 21 months, the Welfare Reform Task Group had considered the service implications of the various welfare reforms and, in response, had produced a Welfare Reform action plan which had been continually reviewed and updated. A Welfare Reform Reference Group had also facilitated liaison between Council Services, partners and stakeholders who shared an interest in welfare reform. Mr Cunningham stated that, with the implementation of a number of significant welfare changes on 1 April 2013, Council Services had had to adapt the way they delivered services to ensure they remain effective in keeping the detrimental effects on East Lothian residents to a minimum. He also reported that the introduction of Universal Credit had been delayed, possibly until 2016, causing the Council to continue to deliver a Housing Benefit Service for longer than had been initially envisaged. The Benefits Service had been administering the Scottish Government's Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme since 1 April 2013. However, as claimants had experienced little or no

change financially in the CTR awards throughout 2013/14, the overall change has had a low impact on East Lothian tax payers. The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF), introduced as an interim measure on 1 April 2013, had replaced elements of the Social Fund (loans) administered by the Department of Work and Pensions and would become a permanent scheme from April 2015. East Lothian had exceeded its profiled SWF expenditure during the second half of 2013/14 ensuring that 100% disbursement of the SWF budget was achieved by 31 March 2014. One of the major changes had been the introduction of the Housing Benefit Under Occupancy Supplement (also known as the 'Bedroom Tax') which was introduced on 1 April 2013. The Council had identified those tenants who would be affected by the new legislation, informed them of the change and advised them of the options open to them. Mr Cunningham also outlined details of wider welfare reforms and highlighted the risk to young people of failing to comply with the new Job Seekers Agreement, resulting in sanctions being applied to claimants' benefit entitlement.

The Chair thanked Mr Cunningham for his comprehensive report.

Councillor McLennan enquired how many referrals there had been to foodbanks. Mr Cunningham replied that he did not have information on numbers but referred Councillor McLennan to the Trussell Trust. However, he reported that as the Council's spend rate had increased there was less need on the part of the Council to refer people to foodbanks. Councillor McLennan observed that more investment by the Council had delivered a good result and he was encouraged by that.

The Chair suggested that a profile (by area) of those tenants who had been affected by the Housing Benefit Under Occupancy Supplement would be useful. Rent arrears by those tenants affected by this supplement had increased by £132,000, but Mr Cunningham stated that it was difficult to be certain of the reasons for non-payment.

Paolo Vestri advised that 'digital inclusion' was likely to be a key feature of Universal Credit when it is introduced. The Welfare Reform Task Group had therefore submitted a bid to the Scottish Government seeking funding to provide wifi access and training for applicants. Mr Vestri also advised that the Council had newly signed a Service Level Agreement (until 31 March 2015) with the Citizens Advice Bureau which would continue to offer advice on benefits and the support available to clients. Mr Shearer added that the Council would be re-aligning its Customer Services and Library Services to provide face to face services for people. They would act as the first point of contact and signpost people to services which would provide the specific assistance required.

Kenny Christie, Service Manager for Revenues, advised that a report on rent arrears would be brought before the Committee later in the year. Councillor MacKenzie stated that debt is of great concern to an individual and could be corrosive to mental health. It was therefore important to find effective ways to help people who were experiencing difficulties in paying their rent and/or Council Tax. Mr Christie replied that the Council had set ambitious targets for reducing arrears over the next few years.

Councillor Goodfellow was pleased to note that the Scottish Welfare Fund was disbursing grants rather than arranging loans as was the previous practice with the Social Fund.

Paolo Vestri advised that a Welfare reform video publicising how a Crisis Grant can support people was now available to view on the Council's website. The Council was also working on a handbook on Welfare Reform.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. note the potential impact of welfare reform on individuals and families.
- ii. note the potential impact of welfare reform on the delivery of associated Council services.
- iii. note the potential impact on the Council's revenues and council house rental Income.

Sederunt: Councillor Gillies left the meeting

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK 2012/13

The Depute Chief Executive had submitted a report on the results of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (SOLACE benchmarking indicators).

Andrew Strickland, Policy Officer, presented the report. He advised that the Framework had been developed to help Councils compare their performance using a standard set of indicators. These indicators had replaced the Accounts Commission's Statutory Performance Indicators. Mr Strickland advised that each indicator showed performance over time but pointed out that the cost data was derived from the local financial return which was not created for benchmarking purposes. Also, a degree of interpretation was required as Councils interpreted categories differently, which affected costs.

Mr Strickland summarised the 2012/13 results and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework pilot exercises on roads maintenance and school leaver destinations.

Councillor MacKenzie referred to the results for the percentage of pupils from deprived areas of East Lothian gaining 5+ awards at level 5 and level 6. He stated that these exams would cease this year and he hoped to see a year on year improvement under the new exam system. Mr Vestri pointed out that the results for this indicator would fluctuate due the small number of children in this category who will take exams. The Chair advised that the Place2Be initiative, which delivered a range of services within schools, was still in its early stages and could take up to 10 years to show results.

Councillor McAllister noted that East Lothian had the highest satisfaction rating for any Council in respect of Parks and Open Spaces. The Chair replied that the Council had prioritised spending on this service for the benefit of residents and tourists and, as a result, spent more on this service than other Councils.

Andrew Strickland stated that it was sometimes necessary to analyse whether a higher cost was a good thing or a bad thing, hence the emphasis on benchmarking within a family group of Local Authorities.

Alex McCrorie remitted to the Chair the task of analysing the Council's results in the Framework to determine how well the Council is performing in comparison to similar Local Authorities. The Chair proposed that a Working Group could be set up to take this forward.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the results of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2012/13 and the update on various benchmarking exercises that are being undertaken by the Council.

7. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014 UPDATE

A copy of the updated annual work programme was provided.

Councillor McLennan stated that an Investigation into the Domiciliary Care Service in East Lothian was due to be carried out. He proposed that the findings of this report could come before the Committee in November and that the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care could be invited to attend.

Signed

Councillor David Berry
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee