



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

**TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor D Berry (Convener)
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Williamson
Councillor P McLennan (Items 1-4)
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor J Goodfellow

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor McMillan (Item 4)

Council Officials Present:

Mrs A Leitch, Chief Executive
Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive – Partnerships and Community Services
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive – Resources and People Services
Mr D Nightingale, Head of Education
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Mr T Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr R Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure
Mr M Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing
Mr D Small, Director of Health and Social Care Partnership
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement
Mr D Proudfoot, Service Manager – Property Maintenance
Mr K Christie, Service Manager, Revenues
Mr I Dalgleish, Service Manager, Transport
Ms L Brookes, Principal Teacher Outdoor Education
Ms T Leddy, Area Manager, Adult Wellbeing
Ms A Stewart, Rent Income Team Leader
Ms A McIntyre, Revenues Performance and Business Development Officer
Ms P Bristow, Communications Officer
Mr A Strickland, Policy Officer

Clerk:

Mrs F Stewart, Committees Assistant

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTE OF PPRC MEETING ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Minute of the PPRC meeting on 23 September 2014 was agreed to be a true record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

2. RENT ARREARS

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to inform the Committee about the significant work which had been undertaken by the Revenues service since the last Policy and Performance Review Committee report was submitted on 19 March 2013. The report also informed the Committee about improvements in current year rent collection performance and how recent collection performance compares to other Scottish Councils.

Mr Kenny Christie, Revenues Manager, summarised the report. He stated that, managing rent arrears during a time of economic downturn and welfare cuts, presented a substantial challenge to the Council. After a period of concern over staff retention, increased funding had secured one additional permanent Rent Income Officer and 3 permanent Rent Income Advisers bringing stability to the staffing establishment. This additional staff resource, and a new restructured team, would provide a more proactive approach to rent collection. Mr Christie stated that the most significant welfare reform introduced so far had seen reductions in benefit payment due to under occupation, commonly referred to as the 'bedroom tax', and this reform had had a direct impact on rent arrears from April 2013. The Revenues Service had not achieved the target set for the end of Quarter 2 but there was clear evidence of an improved performance this financial year when compared to the previous year. A Rent Arrears Scrutiny Group comprising Chief Officials, Senior Management and staff from Revenues, had been formed in December 2013 and had made good progress exploring potential developments and initiatives. Recent developments included a Text Messaging Service, a Telephony Self Service and a Web Self Service for Tenants. The Revenues Team also worked jointly with internal and external stakeholders to achieve better outcomes.

Mr Christie advised that there were still challenges ahead, particularly the accelerated roll out of Universal Credit expected in March or April of next year. However, he considered that the Revenues Team was now well positioned to meet the future demands on the service.

Councillor Caldwell enquired what the main causes of rent arrears were and Mr Christie replied that, while the economic downturn and welfare reform were the main causes, unemployment and on-line gambling were also factors. Some tenants also chose not to pay their rent. Councillor Caldwell also asked what percentage of tenants paid their rent on time and was advised by Mr Christie that in-year collection was approximately 98%. Mr Christie also explained the current rent arrears targets, where a different target was set for each month.

Councillor MacKenzie asked what local circumstances might explain why East Lothian should be more affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy (RSRS) than other Local Authorities (Audit Scotland report, September 2014) and Mr Christie replied that there were two reasons; the type of housing stock in the county and the inadequate Discretionary Housing Benefit awarded to the Council to mitigate the effects of the RSRS. Despite this, the Council had still held arrears down to half the Scottish average.

The Chair compared the Revenue team's rent collection performance against the rent arrears targets and suggested that future reports could distil and highlight this information. Monica Patterson, Depute Chief Executive, underlined that the Council had set ambitious targets on rent arrears and that recent measures were having a positive impact.

Councillor Goodfellow enquired if the implementation of Universal Credit in March/April 2015 would be a wholesale transfer to the new system or if it would affect new claimants only. Mr Christie replied that it would be for new claimants only at that stage. He also pointed out that, following full implementation of Universal Credit, it was estimated that the Council's Rent Income Team would have to collect an additional £245,000 per fortnight directly from claimants whose rent is currently paid into their account by Housing Benefit.

Councillor Williamson asked if Rent Income Officers referred tenants who were found to be in genuine need to food banks and other support agencies. Mr Christie replied that such referrals were made as a matter of course. The Chair proposed that a proactive approach with other stakeholders, for example, holding seminars on how difficulties could be avoided, could prove valuable in helping to prevent arrears difficulties for tenants.

The Chair requested clarification on the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) illustrated in Appendices A and B, which compared East Lothian's figures to other Local Authorities in Scotland. Jim Lamond, Head of Council Resources explained that, despite an additional resource from the Scottish Government, the DHP awarded to the Council were not enough to mitigate the effects of the welfare reforms. Officers considered that the Scottish Government had either under-estimated or under-allocated the DHP. The Council was now in negotiations with the Scottish Government on this matter.

Councillor McAllister congratulated Mr Christie on his presentation and complimented the Revenues Team on their performance. He was supportive of the holistic approach taken by the Council on rent collection and was impressed by the new initiatives outlined in the report.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

- i. to note the change in approach to managing rent collection and to recognise that the service enhancements which had been introduced were producing improvements in current year performance compared to previous years;
- ii. to note that, although as a social landlord the Council's focus continued to be around sustaining tenancies and ensuring that tenants received the help and support they needed to stay in their home, the new service improvements ensured that tenants themselves were more accountable for paying their rent

and knew what was expected of them, as well as being clear about the consequences of non payment; and

- iii. to recognise the commitment and dedication shown by all staff involved in rent collection and to support the Revenues service during this transitional period.

3. USE OF COUNCIL BUS FLEET

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services, had submitted a report to provide the Committee with an opportunity to assess current and proposed use of the existing fleet of buses within Transport Services. Appendix A to the report showed a timetable for each of the fleet vehicles over 7 days.

Ian Dalgleish, Transport Services Manager, presented the report, highlighting new initiatives aimed at improving the utilisation of the bus fleet. He advised that the current fleet of Council buses carried out transport requirements for Adult Wellbeing, Education and all the externally run day centres and lunch clubs which were partially funded by the Council through Adult Wellbeing.

Mr Dalgleish also advised that Transport Services vehicles transferred pupils from all schools to South East Academies Partnership campuses at Queen Margaret University and Edinburgh College. Currently there were 94 pupils attending and the cost per head was 86 pence per person per journey.

Mr Dalgleish also stated that meetings had recently been held with the Association of Day Centres in East Lothian to explore possible collaboration options which would allow better use of both fleets of vehicles. An investigation into the possible use of the Council fleet to provide services during school and day centre holiday periods was also underway. Currently the fleet was used for the East Lothian Special Needs Playschemes over the school breaks.

Mr Dalgleish advised that Transport Services had recently reduced the fleet by three vehicles and the work carried out by these vehicles transferred to local taxi operators. Six new buses had been ordered and they would be able to undertake longer haul trips. A further report would be brought to the PPRC with information regarding the Supported Services routes within East Lothian. The current contract for these services was due to go out to tender in December to commence on 1 April 2015.

Councillor Caldwell acknowledged that it was very difficult to achieve 100% utilisation of the bus fleet but enquired what percentage of down time there was. Mr Dalgleish replied that it was approximately 70%, which was relatively high, but corresponded with the down time of other local companies. It was hoped that the percentage would improve by 5-10% with the arrival of the new vehicles.

Councillor MacKenzie enquired how much of the costs incurred by the Transportation Service were charged out to individuals and groups, and Mr Dalgleish replied that an internal re-charge system operated with Education and Social work to recover costs. He was not aware if they in turn charged the users.

Councillor McAllister enquired if the Council provided transport for other vulnerable groups and Murray Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing, replied that the Council had a duty of care to certain individuals in the community and assessments were carried out to identify need.

Councillor Goodfellow noted that no school buses were included in the Bus Time Graph (Appendix A) and Ray Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure, explained the operation of the school fleet. Councillor Goodfellow proposed that another report could be brought to the Committee on this operation.

The Chair enquired what use was made of the Council buses at weekends and in school holidays and Mr Dalglish advised that they were made available to the local community and charitable organisations on a non-profit making basis.

The Chief Executive stated that the report detailed the utilisation of the bus fleet and the Committee had an opportunity to consider if there were areas where efficiencies could be made. Mr Montgomery stated that the Council had to provide the more difficult transport provision and vehicles were bought for specific purposes. Transportation was therefore not in an attractive position to take on external work and legislation required that its services could not be for hire or reward. The Chair considered that the question of efficiency was still a valid one, particularly during weekends and holidays.

Mr Montgomery sounded a note of caution for the future. He stated that the Council's budget would not bear the cost of new replacement vehicles to maintain the current standard of operation. An element of charging for services could be a reasonable way forward but that posed the question of whether the bus operation was a service or a business. The Chair considered that this point was well made and suggested Members raised this matter in future budget discussions.

The Chair congratulated the Transport Services Department on their work and described the report as very useful.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the content of this report which forms a basis for discussion with regard to current and future utilisation of the Council passenger carrying fleet within Transport Services.

4. PROVISION OF OUTDOOR LEARNING TO SCHOOLS

The Depute Chief Executive, Resources and People Services, had submitted a report to give an overview of the Provision of Outdoor Learning to schools in East Lothian, both past and present. The background papers included a link to the Outdoor Learning Service website which contains information on teaching sessions and a copy of the HSE report.

Liz Brookes, Principal Teacher of Outdoor Education, presented the report. Giving an overview of the Service, she stated that Education Scotland directed that *'the journey through education for any child in Scotland **must** include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences'*. The Outdoor Learning Service was used as a vehicle for delivering the Curriculum for Excellence. Ms Brookes outlined the staffing complement in the Outdoor Learning Service and advised that all teaching

staff were fully qualified. As the Team had lost one member of staff, the Service was in a position to engage freelance staff who could contribute particular skills or expertise. A Service redesign had been carried out and had considered how the Service could be developed for the future. Ms Brookes advised that the Outdoor Specialist Service provided all schools in East Lothian with a set number of days allocated to them and was tailored to individual school/class/learner requirements. She outlined a number of ways in which the service was delivered; specialist outdoor learning days delivered by the Outdoor Learning Service which were free to pupils, Adventure Award Days delivered by Associate/Freelance staff where a nominal charge was made to participants and Extra Curricular Days delivered by Associate/Freelance staff offered at a subsidised rate to participants. There were also outdoor Learning events and Festivals as well as Outdoor Learning Projects. Volunteers and support workers provided valuable assistance but the key was to recruit volunteers who had the relevant qualifications. The Service was therefore supporting and encouraging people to gain such qualifications.

In response to a question from Councillor MacKenzie, Ms Brookes outlined the level of service provision in East Lothian in comparison to other Local Authorities in Scotland.

Councillor Williamson, who had requested the report, enquired if the Service had an adequate budget to hire the freelance staff required and Ms Brookes replied that the necessary funds were available as, previously, all activities were provided free of charge but now a cost was placed on some packages. Councillor Williamson also enquired what feedback the Council had received from Schools since the service delivery had changed. Ms Brookes replied that the changes had received a mixed reception but there had been considerable interest in the new packages. Ray Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure, stated that a lot of the services were still provided free of charge or were heavily subsidised. It was open to Members to decide whether they wanted the Outdoor Provision to remain a service going forward or be operated as a business. He also pointed out that the Outdoor Learning Service was no longer in the Education Department. It formed part of the Sport, Countryside and Leisure Group which was in the Partnerships and Services for Communities Department.

The Chair asked what the most popular outdoor activities were and Ms Brookes explained that her Team did not deliver stand alone activities; the teaching Team provided a service which used the outdoors as a classroom to deliver the Experiences and Outcomes required by the Curriculum for Excellence.

The Chief Executive noted from the report that the Outdoor Learning Service helped to deliver the Council's Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). As one of the overarching priorities of the SOA was to reduce inequalities in our communities, she enquired to what extent Outdoor Learning Provision was targeted at certain groups. Ms Brookes replied that normally all children could be involved in the activities; wheelchair users could be accommodated as adaptive equipment was available, and Children with additional support needs and Looked After Children also benefitted.

Councillor Williamson stated that he was satisfied that the level of service had been maintained despite the team losing one member of staff. He also noted that certain activities had increased and commended the team on the excellent job they do, particularly as he was aware that young people derive so much pleasure from taking part in these activities.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of this report and in particular the successful HSE Adventure Activity Licensing Authority (AALA) Inspection Report.

5. DOMICILIARY CARE REPORT – HOMECARE SERVICE

The Director of Health and Social Care had submitted an update report on the performance of the Homecare Service April 2014 – November 2014 following the Care Inspection visit and resulting Domiciliary Care Report dated 1 April 2014.

Trish Leddy, Area Manager for Adult Wellbeing, presented the report. She advised that the Home Care Service provided support for people in East Lothian to live at home. This service was registered with the Care Inspectorate which had made a second Short Notice Announced visit in April 2014 and awarded weak grades for standards assessed in specific aspects of Care and Support, Quality of Staffing and Management and Leadership. A further Announced Short Notice visit by the Care Inspectorate in July had acknowledged the considerable investment in the Service through a detailed action plan and improved grades were awarded. The Care Inspectorate also conducted a survey gathering feedback from service users who had praised the delivery of care and support from frontline staff. Also, results from 43 Quality Assurance Visits carried out by Managers of the Home Care Service showed that the majority of service users rated their experience as excellent. Areas for improvement included consistency of care and time provision. A revised Working Agreement and New Rota Pattern had been implemented within the Home Care Service on 13 October 2014.

Councillor MacKenzie enquired how many staff were employed in the Home Care Service and Murray Leys, Head of Adult Wellbeing, replied that there were approximately 105. Councillor MacKenzie also asked if the staff's workload was realistic and Mr Leys replied that they used a developmental Staff Plan to schedule work, but the key was for staff to be flexible to provide the support required.

The Chair stated that he had received feedback indicating that some clients received only 15 minutes of care and Mr Leys replied that the Council did not offer a 15 minute service. He added that the most significant change in recent times was the complexity of need as often two members of staff were required on home visits. Mr Leys acknowledged that there were still capacity issues and that the service still faced many challenges.

The Chair asked if there was any explanation for the very positive feedback from service users not being reflected in the gradings awarded by the Care Inspectorate and Mr Leys replied that there had been some transitional issues since changes to the rota had been implemented in 2012 and terms and conditions had been renegotiated with the trade unions. The service position was now being consolidated.

Councillor Gillies considered that the Council had lost many valuable members of care staff when the service had engaged an external company to manage the service in 2008. In his view, an opportunity was lost at that time to establish a social enterprise, on the Co-operative model. Mr Leys stated that, since taking up his post 3 years ago, the Council had been working closely with the private voluntary sector (STRiVE) and had moved to an outcome focussed approach. Mr Leys stated that Councillor Gillies's point was well made and he was pleased to report that the Council was now actively engaged with the social enterprise ethos.

Councillor Berry stated that the PPRC was not a policy setting environment but the report had prompted useful debate. He described the report as positive and was pleased to hear that the frontline service was good.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 2, 2014-15

The Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community Services had submitted a report to provide the Committee with information regarding the performance of Council services during Q2 (July – September) 2014/15

Andrew Strickland, Policy Officer, presented the report. He stated that Members of the Committee had attended the performance briefing for Quarter 2 on 6 November and Appendix A to the report showed the results of the quarterly Key Performance Indicators. Mr Strickland advised that graphs showing the long term trend for indicators that are below target had been incorporated into the report, together with further contextual information requested by Members.

Councillor Williamson noted from the report that only 50% of stage 2 complaints had been completed within 20 working days when the target was 80% and the Chair replied that the Committee could look for progress on this result in Quarter 3.

Councillor Goodfellow referred to the percentage of Council Tax collected and the Chair advised that this figure was correct at the end of September and would increase over the coming months. It was the end of year figure for this Indicator which was most important but it was helpful to track its performance over the whole year.

There were no requests for further investigation into any of the Indicators.

Decision

The Committee agreed to use the information provided in this report to consider whether any aspect of the Council's performance was in need of improvement or further investigation.

7. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014-15 UPDATE

The Chair stated that he was satisfied with the agendas of the next few meetings. Councillor Williamson stated that he had received a number of complaints from constituents following the replacement of street lighting in Musselburgh. Residents had pointed out that the new LED street lamps created a smaller pool of light which raised a number of safety issues. Ray Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure, stated that he could prepare a report for a future meeting on how the LED lighting operation was evolving. He was also happy to respond to any specific enquiries the Councillor may have. The Chair proposed that a report could be brought to the April 2015 meeting.

AOB

Councillor McAllister, mindful that Council Officers often spent hours in meetings when required to attend for only one report, proposed that Officers could be contacted by text shortly before their report was due to be heard. Monica Patterson advised that this system was already used to a degree, but it was not an exact science. She would, however, raise the matter with the Council Management Team.

Signed

Councillor David Berry
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee