



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
THE CABINET**

**TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2015  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

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**Committee Members Present:**

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

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor D Berry  
Councillor J Caldwell  
Councillor S Currie  
Councillor J Gillies  
Councillor J Goodfellow  
Councillor P MacKenzie  
Councillor F McAllister  
Councillor K McLeod

**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 J Lamond, Head of Council Resources  
Mr R Montgomery, Head of Infrastructure  
Mr D Proudfoot, Head of Development  
Ms C McCorry, Service Manager – Community Housing  
Mrs M Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal and Procurement  
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement  
Mr I Patterson, Homelessness Manager  
Ms J Mackay, Media Manager

**Clerk:**

Ms A Smith

**Apologies:**

None

**Declarations of Interest:**

None

## **1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 8 September 2015 were approved.

The Convener, referring to his statement regarding refugees, informed Cabinet that the Home Office had now clarified the arrangements for resettling Syrian refugees. These arrangements however did not allow for the practice and model of support used previously, and successfully, by this Council. He had written to the Prime Minister asking him to intervene and grant local authorities more flexibility in relation to how refugees were integrated into their communities. He added that a full report on the Syrian refugee situation would be brought to Council on 27 October.

This approach was supported, cross party, by several Members.

## **2. ANNUAL PENSIONS REPORT 2014/15**

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) summarising the early retirement activity within the financial year 2014/15, in accordance with External Audit requirements and Council Policy.

The Head of Council Resources, Jim Lamond, presented the report. He made reference to the report background which provided information on types of pensionable retirement together with the related financial implications that might apply for each category. He drew attention to the summary of pension retirements for 2014/15, informing Members there had been 7 compulsory or voluntary retirements, 18 medical retirements, no Rule of 85 retirements and 3 flexible retirements. The report also provided further detail on the costs associated with strain costs incurred during the year, the assessment of future pension liabilities and ex gratia pension payments made in accordance with a 2009 Cabinet decision.

Councillor Berry referred to the assessed liability and requested further details regarding the financial implications. Mr Lamond advised that the key aspects were the performance of the overall fund, the number of people joining and leaving the fund, and contributions coming into the fund. The need for an increase in employer contributions had been assessed by the actuary but was not required at the moment, however, this could change. He reassured Members that at present the Lothian Pension Fund remained intact; no intervention action was required at this time. Councillor Berry also made reference to the position in 2009/10, when the impact of the recession had affected investment in the budget process and considerable finance had to be allocated to pension liability.

### **Decision**

The Cabinet agreed to note the content of the report with regard to the pension activity in the financial year 2014/15.

## **3. COUNCIL HOUSE ALLOCATIONS TARGETS FOR 2015/16**

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services) seeking approval to change council house allocation targets for the period 1 November 2015 to 31 March 2016 and explaining the context, legal position and rationale for the proposed change to targets.

The Service Manager for Community Housing, Caitlin McCorry, presented the report. She referred to the legal framework in respect of housing allocations. She drew attention to the 2014/15 and 2015/16 allocations against the reported groups of general needs, transfers and

sustainable communities. She gave details of the proposed change to the 2015/16 allocations targets. She informed Members that this should be seen in the context of a range of measures required by the Council and its partners to increase the supply of affordable housing, temporary accommodation and to help provide those in housing need explore a fuller range of housing options, the detail of which would be the subject of further reports.

Responding to Councillor Grant, Ms McCorry confirmed that housing managers would be asked to firm up local lettings plans at their next respective Local Housing Partnerships.

Councillor Berry queried why allocations to transfers did not equate to the same number of available houses; he also asked why the procedure did not seem to allow good tenants to be rewarded with a new house. Ms McCorry advised that transfers were a useful mechanism to make best use of stock but the priority was to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups. She advised that the target proposed was in excess of requirements.

Ms McCorry responded to questions from other Members. She advised that the Council awaited the outcome of final deliberations from the Scottish Government in respect of the 'bedroom tax'. Regarding local lettings plans, she indicated that these could be targeted to meet particular requirements in a specific area; it was for the Local Housing Partnership and Local Housing team to determine the criteria within that area.

In response to Councillor Currie's questions, Ms McCorry indicated that earlier new build developments did have local lettings plans which favoured local applicants; recently however demand had been met from transfer applications. The priority now was to meet general needs and transfer requirements.

Councillor Hampshire supported the change, which was required due to pressures facing the Council. The proposal was for a reduction in the transfer target and an increase in the general needs target where most of the reasonable preference groups' applicants were found. The aim was to free up properties for those most in need. He stated that the transfer scheme had been effective, providing examples. The allocations targets would be reviewed in March 2016, a progress report would be brought forward in February 2016.

Councillor Currie voiced the SNP's opposition; the Group did not support these changes. During their Administration a local lettings plan for new build developments had been in force, based on a reverse allocations policy. Good tenants should have the opportunity for a new build property in their local community. This change would mean fewer houses available for transfers; this would exacerbate the problem. The existing targets should be maintained.

Councillor Berry agreed with Councillor Currie. Referring to North Berwick, he stated that the only new Council development had worked well, because there was a reverse allocations plan. He did not want vulnerable people to be put at risk; however he did not think that the management of housing stock could solely be done by social need. There should be a reward system for good tenants. The principle was correct but the execution was wrong.

The Convener reiterated that the proposal was a short term measure to address current pressures. A permanent proposal for the future was required and, as indicated, a report would be brought forward early next year in this regard.

## **Decision**

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to approve the recommended targets detailed in section 3.23 of this report;

- ii. to note that performance against these targets was reviewed on a weekly basis and that such review formed part of the analysis in setting future targets in 2016/17 and beyond;
- iii. to note that ongoing regular monitoring of performance had been embedded within the Community Housing Performance Management Framework; and
- iv. to note that other complementary action was needed to address the housing pressures being faced by the Council and in the county generally. This included increasing the supply of temporary and permanent accommodation, increasing the supply of other alternative affordable housing tenures, the further development of the housing options and advice service etc., all of which would be the subject of further reports to Council.

#### **4. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EAST LOTHIAN POVERTY COMMISSION**

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services) seeking approval for the establishment of the East Lothian Poverty Commission.

Paolo Vestri, the Service Manager for Corporate Policy and Improvement, presented the report. He referred Members to the Council Plan review in 2014 which had assessed levels of inequality in the county and to the Council's agreement that the existing Council Plan commitment to tackling inequalities should be given a higher priority by adopting the East Lothian partnership's overarching priority. The review had concluded that in order to make significant progress in meeting this priority 4 areas of activity should be prioritised; progress across all 4 areas was being made. A suggestion had been received to establish a Poverty Commission; it was proposed that this be taken forward. The proposed remit, membership and reporting requirements of the Commission were detailed in the report.

Mr Vestri responded to questions from Councillor Currie. He stated that a considerable amount of work had already been carried out by the Council and the East Lothian Partnership. A working group had been in place for a number of years. Following on from the letter from Iain Gray MSP, the proposal was now to establish a Poverty Commission and build on the work already done. He added that a number of other local authorities had recently established a Poverty Commission.

He advised, in response to Councillor Berry's query about the disparity between income deprivation and children in poverty, that these were different measures, reported in different ways. Councillor Berry questioned whether any progress had been made, referring to the 2009-12 datazone figures and those from 10/15 years earlier. Mr Vestri stated that there had been a substantial increase in poverty figures due to the economic downturn but signs now showed an increase in employment; some of the figures would therefore improve. The Commission would look at how to tackle the cycle of deprivation, considering best practice.

In response to questions from Councillor McAllister, Mr Vestri advised that officers were currently doing some of the work required; any additional capacity needed would come from existing resources. Regarding the proposed time frame he stated that there was a need for the Commission to work quickly; 6 to 9 months was achievable.

Councillor MacKenzie, referring to the Commission's remit, hoped that reviewing what was working elsewhere would be informative and beneficial. He welcomed involvement in the Poverty Alliance's Challenge Poverty Week. Poverty was an intractable problem. He welcomed this initiative but added that the world was weighted against those in poverty.

Councillor Berry remarked that the initiative may be well founded but this should have been addressed many years ago. The figures regarding income deprivation and children in

poverty were disappointing. It was a concern that this Administration had scaled back on early years' intervention. Referring to table 1, he noted there was not the usual east/west split across the county. He added that there were very few good jobs in East Lothian, these tended to be in Edinburgh; more needed to be done to bring these jobs to the county.

Councillor Akhtar outlined some of the activities the Education service was undertaking to support early intervention but stressed that the key point was that the Council could not deliver all that was required on its own. She highlighted work carried out since 2012. Further engagement with communities was needed to see what practically could be done. She remarked that opportunities and chances were being taken away from the most vulnerable by Scottish Government policies. The Council was doing a huge amount to tackle poverty and inequality. The Commission would, hopefully, provide further assistance.

Councillor Currie stated that the biggest attack on the most vulnerable came from the UK Government, this was the main issue. He referred to measures introduced during their Administration and welcomed since by the Scottish Government. Any measures to look at tackling poverty would be welcomed but this proposal was only coming forward now due to the letter from the MSP; action should have been taken much earlier by this Administration.

Councillor Veitch commented that everyone would agree that poverty was a dreadful and longstanding blight on many communities. He welcomed the paper. He hoped all Members would work together in this regard. He hoped some of the recommendations from the Commission's findings would be about supporting local led initiatives. The key driver was employment; there was a need for proactive measures to help small businesses.

Councillor McMillan welcomed this excellent report. The Council and the East Lothian Partnership had already done a considerable amount of work in relation to reducing inequalities; he highlighted several examples. He stressed that it was about trying to do something more in addition to what was already being done, to make a difference and give people an opportunity to break out from the cycle of deprivation.

Councillor McAllister welcomed this, and any effort, to reduce poverty but did question the likely impact of actions at a local level in mitigating the effect of UK Government policies.

The Convener welcomed the paper. He endorsed Councillor McMillan's comments, stressing that the aim was to support people in poverty and to try and break the cycle.

## **Decision**

The Cabinet agreed to the establishment of the East Lothian Poverty Commission.

## **5. REFUGEE CRISIS – REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services) seeking approval to provide 'one-off' financial support to East Lothian Calaid.

Mr Patterson presented the report, providing Members with some background information and details of the request from Calaid.

Councillor Currie stated that the request for financial assistance was measured, appropriate and welcomed. He praised the response from the East Lothian community, both in terms of the number of volunteers and the amount of donations.

Councillor Veitch concurred. He also welcomed the response from the people of East Lothian. He expressed thanks and support to Calaid for their very important work.

Several other Members also expressed their support.

**Decision**

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to note the East Lothian community response in providing everyday essential items for individuals and families currently living in Calais refugee camps; and
- ii. to approve the provision of financial support to assist with the everyday operational costs associated with the voluntary effort that had been established, and in particular to contribute towards transport costs in moving goods to Calais.

**6. MINUTES FOR NOTING**

The minutes of the Safe and Vibrant Communities Partnership held on 15 June 2015, the Resilient People Partnership held on 17 June 2015 and the Sustainable Economy Partnership held on 24 June 2015 were noted.

Signed .....

Councillor Willie Innes  
Council Leader and Convener of the Cabinet