



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

**TUESDAY 10 MAY 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

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

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships & Communication Services
Mr T Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr D Proudfoot, Head of Development
Ms F Robertson, Head of Education
Mr C Forbes, Principal Officer, Economic Development & Strategic Investment
Ms A Hood, Team Leader, Employability
Ms S Mackie, Team Manager, Housing Assets
Ms C McCorry, Service Manager, Community Housing
Ms E Wilson, Service Manager, Economic Development and Strategic Investment
Mr J Cunningham, Service Manager, Benefits
Mr S Barclay, Development Officer, Community Housing
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager - Corporate Policy and Improvement
Ms P Bristow, Communications Officer
Ms C Watson, Project Officer, Community Housing

Clerk:

Mrs F Stewart

Apologies:

Councillor J Caldwell

Declarations of Interest:

There were no Declarations of Interest.

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 15 MARCH 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 15 March 2016 were approved.

Matters Arising

Councillor McLennan enquired if there was any update on the City Region Deal and Douglas Proudfoot, Head of Development, replied that there had been a statement at the last meeting of the bid partners signalling an early intent for engagement. More meetings were scheduled and he would keep the Committee apprised of developments. The Chair enquired if there was a timescale for the project and Mr Proudfoot replied that partners were working towards issuing a statement in November.

In response to a question by Councillor McLennan on the number of young people starting up new businesses, Esther Wilson, Service Manager for Economic Development, advised that current data only provided dates of birth for 50% of start up applicants. The Chair asked if this information could be brought to the Committee in due course.

2. AUDIT SCOTLAND HOUSING BENEFIT RISK ASSESSMENT REPORT

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

John Cunningham, Benefits Manager, presented the report on Housing Benefit performance and assured Members that his team would continue to strive for further improvements in performance. An Action Plan was attached to the report which outlined new risks and outstanding risks in response to the Audit Report. He considered that overall the Audit report was a good one and quoted from Audit Scotland's letter of 12 November 2015 which stated that, *'in view of the significant changes to the service, this level of improvement was commendable'*.

The Chair invited questions from Members.

In response to a question from Councillor Goodfellow, Mr Cunningham confirmed that there would be no further scrutiny at this stage, as advised by the Assistant Auditor General.

Councillor MacKenzie noted the absence of two benefits processors since May 2015 and August 2015 respectively, and enquired what impact this had had on the performance of the Team. Mr Cunningham explained the changes to his complement of staff and stated that his Team had performed as well as possible under the circumstances. He also advised that, as at 31 March 2016, his Team was exceeding its targets. However, the Service was in the midst of ongoing changes and Universal Credit was about to be rolled out at Musselburgh Job Centre. This would result in an increased workload for his staff but would reduce the Housing Benefit work in time, as each case progressed to Universal Credit. Councillor McLennan enquired if there was a risk to the Council if, due to the introduction of Universal Credit, rents could not be paid. Mr Cunningham replied that it was inevitable that there would be a negative impact at the point when claimants transferred from the current system to Universal Credit. Rent Arrears was a key item on the Risk Register and would be monitored by the Rent Arrears Scrutiny Group. The Service would also work with the Job Centre to mitigate risks and to ensure that job seekers do not slip through the net as they migrate to the Universal Credit system.

Councillor Williamson enquired how rent arrears could be recovered and Mr Cunningham advised that arrears would be recovered at source by reducing the sum that was paid to tenants claiming benefits. His team would, however, work with tenants who were in arrears.

Councillor McAllister enquired how the Council would recover overpayments or sums received fraudulently and Mr Cunningham replied that all options were open to the Council but people concerned would receive support from the Income Team.

The Chair noted from the Action Plan that there were three outstanding matters. Mr Cunningham advised that he now had the information on overpayments for Quarter 4, but the other actions were incomplete as there had been higher priorities over that period. The Chair also noted that there was a risk highlighted by Audit Scotland in the Council not meeting targets for using the Department of Work and Pensions' Automated Transfer to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS) notifications. Mr Cunningham replied that his team were striving to maximise automation and accuracy.

The Chair noted that there had been a significant decrease in the sum of Housing Benefit debt recovered in 2015-16. Mr Cunningham advised that the amount of debt recovered had steadily declined since 2012-13, when new benefits legislation was introduced. The Council was now feeling the full effect of the changes. Performance had also been affected by long term sick leave.

Councillor MacKenzie suggested that Mr Cunningham's Team could recover more debt with more staff and the Chair proposed that it could be suggested to Council that Mr Cunningham received more resources for staff. Members endorsed this suggestion.

The Chair stated that he had probed a number of the performance indicators to clarify the Council's position in relation to the Audit report, but he praised Mr Cunningham's 'heroic' efforts and the work of his team.

Decision

The Committee considered the Audit Scotland Risk Assessment Report and the Benefit Unit's Action Plan and agreed to note the contents.

3. EAST LOTHIAN WORKS

The Depute Chief Executive, Communities and Partnerships, had submitted a report to provide an evaluative summary of East Lothian Works activity, reflecting particularly on the range of employability support, interventions, outcomes and progress achieved to date. The report also served to raise awareness of various proposals for improvement/areas for development to help reduce unemployment, particularly youth unemployment and help raise attainment in schools and particularly for those pupils more economically deprived.

Colin Forbes, Principal Officer, Economic Development & Strategic Investment, presented the report. He advised that East Lothian Works, East Lothian's employability hub, was established in 2013 to bring together all employability-related services under East Lothian's One Council Approach. East Lothian Works was the central point of contact for employment advice and training and worked in partnership with a number of external partners including Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh College, Skills Development Scotland, Job Centre Plus and a range of Third Sector Agencies. In October 2014, East Lothian Council agreed on the priorities for the remaining 3 years of the Council Plan, especially the priority to

reduce inequalities within communities, including reducing unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, and improving positive outcomes for school leavers. Mr Forbes reported that the number of businesses over 2013-14 had increased and unemployment amongst 16-24 year olds had significantly reduced. Workless households had also reduced in the period 2012-13 and modern apprentice starts had increased. Mr Forbes explained that the Strategic Skills Pipeline was used by all Local Authorities and was the framework within which the county's employability services were organised. The key strategic challenges and ongoing areas for development using the pipeline were the continued development of partnership working, improving monitoring systems and accessing external funding opportunities.

Councillor McLennan stated that it was difficult to ascertain value for money on the Council's investment in Economic Development and Employability. Esther Wilson, Service Manager, replied that the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development (SLAED) Indicators Framework would show East Lothian's performance compared to other Local Authorities. Councillor McLennan also asked Officers where they expected East Lothian Works to be in two years time. Mr Forbes replied that he expected this initiative to be in a good place, with youth unemployment statistics returning to pre-recession levels. However, he cautioned that challenges remained. Whilst some recent results were encouraging, more work still had to be done on self evaluation and strategy to take East Lothian Works to the next level. Fiona Robertson, Head of Education, stated that her team would be working closely with the East Lothian Works team over the next two years.

In response to a question from Councillor Williamson, Alison Hood, Team Leader in Employability, stated that Community Benefits in Procurement provided a vital contribution to Developing the Young Workforce. She outlined apprenticeship opportunities and other employment related opportunities offered by well known local companies.

Councillor MacKenzie enquired how the Strategic Skills Pipeline linked in with the 16+ Hub meetings in schools. Ms Hood explained the role it played and how the Hub helped to show where the Council should deploy its resources.

Councillor McAllister asked if the Council could be confident that the jobs being offered to young people in the county were not on minimum pay and zero hours and Douglas Proudfoot, Head of Development, advised that a very successful Construction Road Show had been held at the Brunton Hall in April where many respected employers in the area were offering a good standard of jobs.

Councillor Goodfellow highlighted the 49.4% reduction in unemployment amongst 16-24 years olds to 254 over the period 2014-15 and observed that figures would fall dramatically if this trend continued. Mr Forbes replied that the figures were encouraging but complex. They did, however, suggest that the Council's economic development strategy was making a difference. Councillor Goodfellow also raised the issue of public transport links from towns and villages in East Lothian to universities and colleges in Edinburgh. Mr Forbes agreed that transport was an issue and the Council was trying to bring some resources closer to East Lothian. The Council was also in discussion with partner colleges on this matter.

The Chair stated that action should be taken, if necessary, to ensure that access to further education and jobs was uniform over all ethnic and class groups. He also asked if vocational training opportunities had been considered and asked how this linked in with education. Ms Robertson advised that there was a key performance indicator on a range of vocational subjects. She would also be working with Edinburgh College in relation to a curriculum review which would explore further opportunities to expand what is currently on offer. Councillor Berry commended the 'joined up' working.

Councillor McLennan thanked Mr Forbes for his detailed report outlining a clear strategy. He considered that East Lothian Works had made good progress over the past 3 years and was going in the right direction.

The Chair added his thanks to Mr Forbes and his staff and stated that he appreciated the work they do.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

- i) to note the contents of this report and acknowledge the wide range of interventions generally available to improve employability outcomes for individuals and communities across East Lothian; and
- ii) to encourage ongoing joint evaluation across employability services, schools and education providers building on benchmarking and learning from best practice across the partnership and beyond to help support and guide improvements and lead to a reduction in inequalities across and within our communities.

4. PRESENTATION ON KEYSTONE HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Caitlin McCorry, Service Manager, Community Housing Manager introduced three members of her team; Sarah Mackie, Team Manager for Housing Assets, Carol Watson, Project Officer and Scott Barclay, Development Officer. Ms McCorry advised that surveys had been carried out on 83% of the Council's housing stock between 2005 and 2009 and Property Maintenance had completed 878 partial surveys in 2014. Prior to the introduction of the Keystone Asset Management System, all data on stock condition surveys was held on a database.

Mr Barclay gave a Power Point demonstration on Keystone and explained to Members the many advantages of using this system. He advised that ELC surveys would be updated on Keystone and ongoing improvements updated such as kitchen replacements, rewires and bathroom replacements. Keystone could also project future costs on timelines of 5, 10 and 20 years and Mr Barclay demonstrated how the system reacted to the input of new information. An energy tab was under construction and this would be essential for energy efficiency in the future. Mr Barclay advised that each property had a page on the system and had a unique reference number. Data on all work, completed and planned, is held on the system and a report can be generated for each property.

In response to a question from the Chair, Ms Watson advised that the next steps with the system would be to refresh stock surveys to provide additional information and they were already in the process of carrying out tests whereby surveyors can take tablets out to houses and input information on site. Ms Watson also outlined the benefits of Keystone to tenants. She advised that, if a tenant was vulnerable or in ill health, this information can be recorded and support provided through any maintenance or upgrades. Keystone can also identify and create new programmes of work and allow the Housing Team to target any properties not currently meeting Scottish Housing Quality Standards.

Councillor Williamson enquired if Keystone allowed flexibility in programming works and was advised that the system is flexible and programmes can be configured to the required criteria.

Councillor MacKenzie enquired if staff in the Contact Centre can access the Keystone system when tenants call the Council with housing related enquiries and was advised that staff there would access the system.

In response to a question by the Chair, Ms McCorry confirmed that her team worked very closely with the Council's Property Maintenance Department. The Chair stated that co-ordinating work on such a large scale was not easy and this had at times proved difficult to achieve in the past.

Action: Handouts on the Keystone Presentation to be circulated to Members

The Chair welcomed the introduction of the Keystone Housing Asset Management system which would provide a better service to tenants.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

There was no change to the reports on the Work Programme for the June meeting. The report on Core Paths and Cycleways was scheduled for the November meeting and two further reports, Developing the Young Workforce and the Transformation Board, would be added to the Work Programme for later in the year.

Signed

Councillor David Berry
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee