



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET

**TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2020
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor N Hampshire
Councillor W Innes (Convener)
Councillor J McMillan
Councillor F O'Donnell

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor J Henderson

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Chief Executive
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive – Resources and People Services
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr D Proudfoot, Head of Development
Ms J Tait, Chief Operating Officer, Children's Services
Ms L Brown, Chief Operating Officer, Education
Mr J Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing and Homelessness
Ms K MacNeill, Service Manager – People and Governance
Ms E Clater, Service Manager – Children's Services
Ms Z McFadzean, HR Business Partner
Ms G Scott, HR Adviser
Ms P Gray, Communications Adviser

Clerk:

Ms A Smith

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – CABINET 21 JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 21 January 2020 were approved.

2. COUNCIL HOUSE ALLOCATIONS TARGETS FOR 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Head of Development seeking Cabinet approval for Council House Allocation Targets for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

James Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing and Homelessness, presented the report. He informed Members that there were 3,200 applications on the housing list. The Council had to give reasonable preference to certain statutory groups, most of which were in the General Needs group, which accounted for 82% of the housing list. He highlighted the significant efforts made to encourage transfer activity in order to make the best use of stock. He drew attention to the proposed targets for the General Needs, Transfers and Sustainable Communities groups. He reported that there had been a delay in bringing Local Lettings Plans forward but all would be live from April.

Responding to questions Mr Coutts clarified that the policy did enable the Council to help people with little or low assessed need to be offered a house.

Councillor Goodfellow welcomed that there would be Local Lettings Plans in all areas of the county, these would go a long way towards achieving sustainable communities. The Council, under this Administration, was now moving forward with a significant increase in new council housing, for 1,200 houses by 2025.

The Convener also welcomed the progress with Local Lettings Plans. All areas would soon have these, which would help to address imbalances in communities. Allocations targets were always contentious but the Council made the best use of its housing stock.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to approve the recommended targets detailed in Section 3.22 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 2020/21 and beyond; and
- iii. to note that ongoing regular monitoring of performance had been embedded within the Community Housing Performance Management Framework.

3. GLOBAL UK RESETTLEMENT SCHEME/ASYLUM SEEKERS

A report was submitted by the Head of Development seeking approval in principle to participate in the new global UK Resettlement Scheme that would commence in April 2020, which would subsume the current Syrian Resettlement Programme and to subsequently advise COSLA of this in principle commitment. The report also asked Cabinet to note the Council's position in respect of the National Transfer Scheme and asylum seekers generally.

Mr Coutts presented the report. He stated that both schemes were fully funded by the Home Office. He drew attention to the financial implications detailed in the report. The new global UK Resettlement Scheme would aim to resettle approximately 5,000 people in the UK in its

first year 2020/21; Scotland would be expected to resettle 500 people (10%), East Lothian's pro-rata would be 10 people. He highlighted aspects of the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), and the Asylum Seekers Dispersal Scheme (ASDS). He reported that not all asylum seekers arrived in a location through one of the above schemes; some arrived independently and often after harrowing international journeys. Since August 2017, 5 young people had presented here as "spontaneous arrivals". They had all been under-18 and as such were classified as looked after, with the Council obligated under legislation to its Corporate Parenting responsibilities, resulting in a high level of financial and practical support needs.

Officers, responded to questions. Councillor Hampshire queried whether the broad range of support needed could be provided on a regional basis, as this could be difficult for a small local authority to be able to provide. Mr Coutts advised that tenancy support was provided to each family. His team had not had discussions with other local authorities but Children's Services officers were in dialogue with their counterparts in other areas. Emma Clater, Service Manager – Children's Services, clarified that Children's Services were in contact with colleagues in the Scottish Borders Council, Midlothian Council and West Lothian Council. The focus at present was on sharing knowledge. Sharing resources was being looked at but was in the very early stages. Councillor Hampshire reiterated the desirability for a regional support facility; Mr Coutts indicated that this would be pursued.

Councillor O'Donnell, referring to Appendix 1, the COSLA report, asked about the response from the Home Office. Monica Patterson, Chief Executive, indicated this was an ongoing issue not fully resolved. Judith Tait, Chief Operating Officer for Children's Services, added that officers attended regular meetings at COSLA and received regular updates but there was no indication that the Home Office would change its position. Mr Coutts informed Members that Glasgow City Council and COSLA had sent a forceful letter to the Home Office regarding the lack of funding and support being provided to local authorities. The Convener remarked that if spontaneous arrivals were outwith a formal resettlement scheme, so no Home Office support was provided, then COSLA should have been arguing that this new umbrella framework should have included this group. Mr Coutts said that COSLA was lobbying vigorously; he clarified that spontaneous arrivals were not part of the new scheme.

Responding to further questions from Councillor O'Donnell, Ms Clater gave details of potential routes into East Lothian, advising that on arrival an interagency referral would be triggered which involved officers from social work, police and the health service. She outlined the process from that point. She also gave an example of a particular case. She stressed that this was a long complicated process. Since August 2017 the Council had spent £355,000 on these 5 young people, which excluded staff costs; the Home Office had provided £30,000. Regarding how long it took for an asylum application, she said this took 1/1½ years, adding that an age assessment could add further complications.

Opening the debate, Councillor O'Donnell stated that the response of communities across East Lothian had been very positive in welcoming people, she thanked all these communities. She also praised the efforts of staff in helping these traumatised young people.

Councillor McMillan echoed those comments. He indicated that this was a very serious challenge for such a small county however in providing the support required.

Councillor Akhtar stressed the importance of continued working with neighbouring local authorities. The Council needed to fully share its experience with COSLA and the Home Office and continue lobbying for full funding.

The Convener agreed with Councillor Akhtar. East Lothian had a proud history of stepping up when required. The people arriving here had clearly been affected by hugely traumatic

events and needed to be treated with respect. Funding was an issue and COSLA should use its powers to address this and continue to lobby the Home Office.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to participate in the new global resettlement scheme in principle; and
- ii. to note the Council’s position in respect of asylum seekers generally.

4. REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking approval from Cabinet on amendments to the Code of Conduct Policy which outlined arrangements for all council employees including teachers, craft workers and Chief Officials.

Kirstie MacNeill, Service Manager – People and Governance, presented the report. She informed Members that the revised Code of Conduct policy had been benchmarked against seven other Councils, and expanded to include the COSLA Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees, which outlined conflict of interests. This was a consolidating policy which subsumed the current Gifts and Hospitality Policy and incorporated Whistleblowing processes. It would be promoted and widely published throughout the staff base.

In response to questions about engagement with the Trade Unions, Zoe McFadzean, HR Business Partner, reported that there had been considerable engagement regarding this policy, adding that there had been more feedback than usual. Ms MacNeill reported that there had also been engagement at regional Trade Union level. She clarified that Unison and the teaching Trade Unions had been consulted.

Councillor McMillan welcomed the report; the Code of Conduct provided good guidance for staff and he noted that it would be rolled out across all staff sectors.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to approve the revised Policy, attached at Appendix A, which would be introduced from the date of approval by Cabinet, allowing time for communication of the revised Policy to be issued to all staff.

Signed

Councillor Willie Innes
Council Leader and Convener of the Cabinet