



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2021
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Bruce
Councillor J Findlay (Convener)
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor C Hoy
Councillor G Mackett
Councillor C McGinn
Councillor P McLennan

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor J McMillan

Council Officials Present:

Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Ms S Fortune, Head of Finance
Ms L Gillingwater, Team Manager – Democratic and Licensing
Mr J Lamond, Executive Director for Council Resources
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)
Ms M Patterson, Chief Executive
Mr D Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms C Rodgers, Team Manager - Improvement
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Ms J Tait, Chief Operating Officer, Children's Services and CSWO
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Improvement, Policy and Communications

Clerk:

Ms B Crichton

Apologies:

Councillor T Trotter

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 7 OCTOBER 2020

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 7 October 2020 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. 2020/21 Q3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report was submitted by the Head of Communities and Partnerships providing information regarding the performance of Council services during Q3 2020/21 (October – December 2020). The report also included information on indicators which had been most significantly impacted by Covid-19.

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Improvement, Policy and Communications, presented the report. He took Members through the report and drew attention to information in the appendix, and noted that the Q2 report had recently been submitted to the Members' Library Service. He advised that there had been a delayed impact of Covid-19 on homelessness across the country and there may be further pressure on community housing in time. He noted the increase in fly tipping from Q2-Q3, but advised that there had been a decrease in incidents from the previous reporting year. He described the decrease in visits to recycling centres as unsurprising given the significant increase seen in Q2, but figures were nevertheless well above target. He advised that East Lothian had consistently been one of the top performing Scottish councils in terms of delayed discharge patients. He noted that there would be almost no attendance in sports facilities in the next quarter due to closures relating to Covid-19 restrictions. He advised that staff had been working to administer Covid-19-related business grants, which explained the reduction in performance in housing benefit claims. He also advised that enforcement action had reduced in terms of rent and council tax arrears, which may explain the reported reduction in rent arrears.

Councillor Gilbert questioned whether working from home had had affected council income. Mr Vestri advised that there had been a marginal decrease in council tax collected and a reduction in rent arrears due to the rent free fortnight in December; it would take some time for the full impact of Covid-19 to come through in the figures. Ms Fortune advised that home working had not necessarily had an impact on the council's revenue streams, as many activities had been able to continue through the period of home working, but noted the effect on revenue streams of the wider impact of the pandemic.

Responding to a question from Councillor Mackett, Douglas Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place, advised that rental income and income from temporary accommodation were reported separately; temporary accommodation sat within general services in the homelessness area. Therefore, this income was not included within the housing revenue account.

Councillor McGinn asked whether the council held a current list of reputable businesses licensed to collect waste from households in East Lothian, and suggested that this could be considered to take a more local approach to the issue of fly tipping. He also asked whether figures were held on the number of individuals or firms prosecuted for fly tipping. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, advised that waste carriers' licences sat entirely with SEPA and that SEPA held this information on their website as it was constantly changing. He thought the ability to renew licences and carry out checks was greatly disrupted by the cyber attacks on SEPA, which may have led to an increase in fly tipping as inappropriate contractors were used. He referenced the reduced operating hours and tighter controls on the City of Edinburgh's waste practices, which often resulted in a spike in fly tipping; it was thought that most fly tipping in East Lothian originated from outwith the county. He advised that a multiagency approach had led to a number of prosecutions for fly tipping on the Whitehill Farm land. He advised that working through the waste chain was used to try to identify

offenders, and sometimes an educational approach was taken. Ms Saunders, Head of Communities and Partnerships, added that she would share data with Councillor McGinn to give an idea of the scale of the problem and enforcement in the county. She described some of the challenges around enforcement, as it is not always possible to identify who has dumped the waste. The East Lothian Partnership Against Rural Crime (ELPARC) were working through a programme of initiatives to discourage fly tipping in the country and to develop engagement with community rural volunteers. Ms Saunders would keep Councillor McGinn and Members up to date as work progressed with ELPARC.

Councillor Hoy asked about the decrease in the number of children in foster care. He recognised the challenge to recruit and retain foster carers and questioned whether this should be a cause for concern moving forward. Judith Tait, Chief Social Work Officer and Head of Children's Services, advised that there was a service-wide drive to try to increase the number of children in kin-care placements, which was a positive development. The decrease in children in foster care also signalled that support to families to provide care for children was showing results. Recruitment was a priority and was going well, but was not currently keeping up with the rate at which foster carers were retiring from service. She advised that Covid-19 restrictions had put families under increased stress and had led to additional pressure on placements and some placement breakdowns.

Councillor McGinn asked whether there had been any presentations by unaccompanied young people seeking asylum or young people who had been trafficked into the country. Ms Tait advised that no increase had been seen in the last year; East Lothian was still responsible for five young people. The Home Office were pushing to take forward the National Transfer Scheme, currently under negotiation, which may lead to unavoidable increases. Ms Tait advised that while the service would want to play a part in helping affected young people resettle, there was a lack of appropriate accommodation to facilitate such placements, and she described some of the challenges associated with supporting young people in these circumstances.

The Convener referenced businesses who had requested business rates payments to be deferred to the following year and enquired about the policy surrounding this. Sarah Fortune, Head of Finance, advised that any revenue stream from the non-domestic rates went back into the national pool, so this would not directly impact on East Lothian's revenue stream coming from non-domestic rates. Ms Fortune would take Councillor Findlay's question regarding policy around deferral of outstanding balances offline.

The Convener also enquired about the reasons behind the increase in time taken for traffic light repairs. Mr Reid advised there had been issues getting contractors out to make repairs due to Covid-19, but advised that this was now back on track.

The Convener extended thanks to all staff for their efforts, and hoped that as we came out of the pandemic, improvements would continue to be seen to performance indicators. Councillor Mackett also echoed these sentiments and thought that assistance from staff to the public and Elected Members alike had not changed despite difficult circumstances.

Decision

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

6. WORK PROGRAMME

An updated work programme detailed the reports scheduled for the PPRC for the remaining meeting in session 2020/21. Due to the Covid-19 response, all council committees were currently working in Business Critical Mode, and as such, a list of reports which would be lodged in the Member's Library or presented to a subsequent PPRC meeting was also provided in the papers.

The Convener enquired when COSLA guidance would be made available and asked for an update as to when the review of social care charging report could be made to PPRC. Monica Patterson, Chief Executive, advised that the COSLA guidance had just been received, but it was not yet clear whether this could be reported to the June PPRC; the guidance would need to be reflected upon in the context of the wider review of social care. It was expected that the report would be made either to the June 2021 or the following PPRC meeting.

The Convener also referenced the closure of the coastal car parks and the effect on the planned budget report. He requested that a report be made on the Coast and Countryside Management Plan to the first PPRC after the close of the summer season. Mr Reid welcomed the opportunity to widen the report beyond only the coastal car parking budget to look at investment made and the entire Coast and Countryside Management Plan.

Councillor McLennan raised the following topics:

- the reprovisioning of care facilities, such as Belhaven and Edington;
- a review of the Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy; and
- the drugs strategy in East Lothian.

Ms Tait advised that officers within health and social care were planning a Members' Briefing on the approach in East Lothian to prevention of drug-related deaths. Councillor McLennan agreed that the issue could be revisited after the Members' Briefing if PPRC Members felt the issue required further scrutiny.

Mr Proudfoot commented that the areas of economic development and tourism had been materially affected by the pandemic, and there was much going on in these spaces. He suggested that conversations could be held with the Convener and Councillor McLennan through the Connected Economy Group (CEG) to discuss how and when this could be brought together. Councillor McLennan and the Convener confirmed they were happy for these areas to be discussed firstly through the CEG and then brought back to PPRC if necessary.

The Convener agreed to discuss the reprovisioning of care facilities with Alison Macdonald, Chief Officer – East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership, and would come back to Councillor McLennan offline.

Councillor Hoy enquired as to the best forum to discuss the pilot scheme for continued nursery funding in response to the 'Give Them Time' campaign. Pilot areas had been announced for 2021/22, and he questioned when East Lothian's policy deferrals should be reviewed and whether presenting East Lothian as a pilot authority for 2022/23 should be explored. Lesley Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services, advised that this was an area of active consideration within the department. The Scottish Government had written to the Education Authority to say that there should be no update to policy or guidance at this stage, as the focus should be on planning for when the legislation comes into force in 2023. She advised that the Education Authority were very conscious of the impact of the pandemic and were looking carefully at deferral applications. She advised that implications the legislation would be considered as part of a report on 1140 Hours to Education Committee and/or as part of a Members' Briefing.

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Councillor Jeremy Findlay
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee