



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

**WEDNESDAY 9 JUNE 2021
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Bruce
Councillor J Findlay (Convener)
Councillor C Hoy
Councillor P McLennan
Councillor T Trotter

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor J McMillan

Council Officials Present:

Mr D Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place
Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities
Ms S Fortune, Head of Finance
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Ms S Sullivan, Head of Development
Ms K MacNeill, Service Manager – People and Governance
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Improvement, Policy and Communications
Ms L Kerr, Interim Business General Manager (H&SCP)
Ms L Gillingwater, Team Manager – Democratic Services
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer

Clerk:

Ms A Smith

Apologies:

Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor G Mackett
Councillor C McGinn

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 24 FEBRUARY 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 24 February 2021 were approved.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK 2019/20

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place providing the Committee with a summary of East Lothian Council's performance according to the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) 2019/20.

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Improvement, Policy and Communications, presented the report. He took Members through the report in considerable detail highlighting various aspects and drawing attention to the appendices. Appendix 1 contained the LGBF Summary Report, Appendix 2 the LGBF Performance Report in service categories/measure types.

Officers responded to questions. In relation to queries from Councillor Bruce regarding waste collection, Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, clarified that the income from trading and materials went into the offset position, an increase would be seen when the new model went live in August. He gave further details on future targets and levels of investment, stating that the overall investment could make East Lothian top or second top in the rankings. Responding to further points, Mr Reid outlined the benefits of the Council's holistic approach. He added that confirmation of the legislative changes was awaited and would affect all of Scotland's local authorities. On Councillor Bruce's query about absence rates, Mr Vestri said that the reduction in these rates was largely due to work done during this period by managers. In relation to queries about home working, he said that part of the lessons learned regarding working through the pandemic would be to look at both the benefits and dis-benefits of this. Answering Councillor Bruce's question about the climate change indicators Mr Vestri confirmed that this was the first year for these indicators so no comparison data was available; more data would be available in the 2020/21 LGBF report. Councillor Bruce requested clarification on the 3 cost per pupil indicators. Mr Vestri advised the figures were based on the financial return. Sarah Fortune, Head of Finance, added that these were driven through revenue; she would provide a full response offline.

In relation to Councillor McLennan's query about the ECON1 indicator, Mr Vestri said that this indicator had traditionally been below the Scottish average. Regarding ongoing work, he reported that the Draft Poverty Plan would be going to Council on 22 June. A substantial amount of work was ongoing by East Lothian Works and other agencies to try and tackle youth unemployment. Douglas Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place, said that this indicator had been a challenge regarding comparability. He referred to work carried out by the Connected Economy Group. He gave further details of specifically targeted business support, partner schemes and other ongoing work. Councillor McLennan expressed appreciation of the work of the Connected Economy Group. He then asked about sectors with skills gaps and engagement with these industries. Mr Proudfoot indicated that a number of work streams were ongoing; there were challenges but the Council was actively involved in engagement with the relevant sectors. Lesley Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services, provided further detail about individual engagements, adding that broader engagement was now being looked at and also discussion with comparable local authorities. The skills gap was a key component for East Lothian Works along with partnership with schools to provide support for young people.

Councillor Hoy also referred to the absence rates asking why the teachers' rates were lower than other employees. Mr Vestri state that the HR team had done a lot of work with both categories of staff; he was not aware of any work done specifically with teachers or why this figure was lower than the figure for other employees.

Responding to Councillor Goodfellow's question, Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing, clarified that 26 Scottish local authorities had council housing stock. Councillor Goodfellow indicated it would be helpful if this detail could be added to future reports.

Councillor Trotter, referring to Appendix 1, asked about timescales for getting those indicators that had slipped back up to an improving picture. Mr Vestri said there were almost 100 indicators covering a range of services; there was no generic timescale for improvements, each service area would have its own timescale for improvements. An update would be provided to the September Committee. Councillor Trotter asked Mr Reid if his team planned to attend Community Council meetings to explain the changes to waste collections. Mr Reid said this was not planned however a briefing paper had been issued to all Community Councils and Area Partnerships. He was in discussions about a presentation to the Association of Community Councils. There was a detailed communications strategy in place and there would be further press releases and the new recycling collection calendar would be issued shortly. An open day was planned at Kinwegar Recycling Centre and this would be opened up further if possible. He added that if any Members received approaches from community groups to get in touch and he would take these requests forward.

The Convener, referring to the benchmarking family groups, asked how often these were reviewed. Mr Vestri thought these groups were not reviewed, adding that the geographical ones certainly would not change. Mr Reid responded to the Convener's query about inherited kilometres of road. He advised that this was a number of years ago and related to changes in how roads were measured. There was now a fully digitalised system. In relation to asset management, all roads had always been maintained; it was the way they were recorded that had altered. The Convener queried the declining cost per attendance at sports facilities indicator, asking why this situation had arisen. Mr Reid said this was due to a number of issues, which he outlined. Contract meetings continued with enjoy leisure and very good plans were in place to try and increase membership and usage. A dramatic improvement was hoped for as recovery from the pandemic continued. The Convener also asked the same question about the cost of parks and open spaces indicator. Mr Reid said there was a slight anomaly with this indicator. Other local authorities operated service areas separately from each other, this Council provided a combined service with amenity staff covering gardening/landscaping/litter/fly tipping duties, etc., holistically rather than in isolation with distinctive posts. The current grouping therefore did not compare like for like.

The Convener thanked Mr Vestri for the report, acknowledging the amount of work involved. He appreciated that many new categories had been added and also appreciated how this would affect next year's LGBF report.

Decision

The Committee:

- i. Noted that services were reviewing all indicators that were shown to have declined or remained stable and used the Improvement Service benchmarking groups to assist in developing improvement plans to improve performance;
- ii. Noted the report and used the information provided to consider whether any aspect of the Council's performance was in need of further investigation.

3. 2020/21 Q4 AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place providing the Committee with information regarding the performance of council services during Q4 2020/21 (January – March 2021) and Annual Performance Indicators for 2020/21.

Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, presented the report. He provided Members with an overview of some of the indicators referenced in the covering report, summarising the reasons behind the performance. He drew attention to both appendices.

Officers responded to questions. Councillor Bruce, referring to invoices paid on time, queried the reason for the below target figure. Ms Fortune assured Members that officers were doing everything possible to process invoices on a timely basis, however the team had been impacted by Covid-19, as had many other teams across the Council. This was being monitored, and would be reviewed and resilience across the team prioritised. In response to Councillor Bruce's question about affordable housing completions, Ms McGuire said this was monitored continually; completion rates had been impacted on by the pandemic. The Council had an ambitious programme going forward however there was a shortage of materials and also issues in respect of the skills market. She added that engagement would continue with the private sector. Sharon Saunders, Head of Communities, responding to further queries from Councillor Bruce, clarified the role of the Food Safety Team within the Environmental Health Service. She outlined their significant role during this pandemic, highlighting a number of areas where guidance/support had been provided. She advised that the indicator referred to related solely to the programme of planned inspections that had been suspended due to Covid-19.

In relation to questions about delayed discharges from Councillor Hoy, Mr Vestri confirmed that the figure quoted was the actual number not a percentage. Laura Kerr, Interim Business General Manager (Health & Social Care Partnership), advised that East Lothian had maintained its status as one of the lowest health areas in relation to delayed discharges.

Councillor McMillan, referring to the homelessness indicators, asked if measuring these by the number of days was the best method of assessing effectiveness. Ms McGuire indicated that she would like to explore this question further offline; she would discuss with the Housing Options Team and respond in due course. She added that the quarterly indicators did not necessarily give a meaningful comparison, annual comparisons were better.

Responding to a question from the Convener, Ms McGuire clarified that the backlog as regards gas safety record checks had now been cleared. He also asked for further information on the gender pay gap; Mr Vestri indicated this would have to be provided offline as there was no officer present able to provide this. In relation to the Convener's query about operational buildings suitable for current use and why the target was 80% and not 100%, Mr Reid said the measure was a mix of condition of survey and use of buildings. In relation to how buildings flexed and developed it was a constantly evolving process and would continue to be so. He stressed that it was not that a building was not fit for purpose and could not be used but rather getting a building to its best usable position. The Convener asked about the lack of targets against the 3 workforce measures. Mr Vestri again indicated that the position would be clarified outwith the meeting. In relation to his question about future reports and comparison periods, given the pandemic, Mr Vestri advised that this was something scheduled for work by officers over the summer; he added that use of graphs in future reports to give a better visual for Members was also being looked at.

The Convener thanked Mr Stewart and Mr Vestri for the report and all officers for their responses to Members' questions.

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 further analysis.

4. COVID-19 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place providing Elected Members with information on the range of performance indicators that reflected on the Council's performance in respect of Covid-19.

Mr Vestri presented the report, indicating that this had been requested by Committee Members. It linked into the previous two reports highlighted today. He took Members through the report in detail. He drew attention to the appendices; Appendix 1 (Performance Summary of the 25 Indicators reported via the Improvement Service Covid-19 Dashboard), Appendix 2 (Covid-19 Business Support Provided) and Appendix 3 (Council Plan Top 50 Performance Indicators).

Mr Vestri and other officers responded to questions. Councillor Bruce asked for further details regarding the Discretionary Housing Payments and Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants indicators. Mr Vestri stated that considerable work had gone into these funds last year, many people were getting help earlier and the Council had managed to get finance to those in need. A leaflet was issued to people in need outlining how they could apply to these funds for assistance; the Council was doing everything it could to provide assistance and support. Ms Fortune reiterated Mr Vestri's comments; she reassured Members that services worked proactively with people in need and that this area was monitored closely. Responding to Councillor Bruce's query on domestic abuse incidents, Mr Vestri advised that all that could be reported on was the information from the Improvement Service's Covid-19 Dashboard. There was an anomaly and clarification was being sought as to why East Lothian's trend differed from that of other local authorities. Work was ongoing with the Public Protection Unit, Police Scotland and other relevant agencies and consideration of whether provision of additional funding was needed was also being looked at.

Councillor McLennan asked, in relation to the budgetary process, about the long term financial implications and work ongoing in respect of Covid-19 recovery. Ms Fortune stated that this was an active area of consideration. The pandemic continued to challenge how and where the Council provided services. Looking at pressures going forward formed part of the Covid-19 recovery response in relation to the budgetary process. She referred to the Recovery and Renewal Framework and economy work streams, stating that all of these elements would be taken forward. She gave an assurance that work in this area was ongoing, reviewed and monitored regularly. Councillor McLennan, referring to home working and potential future working patterns coming out of the pandemic, asked about the effect on service delivery and on Council assets. Mr Vestri gave a detailed response. He drew attention to the Working Differently Group which had a representative from each service area and outlined the numerous aspects this Group was looking at. A detailed lessons learned log would be provided to Members later this year and the Council Management Team would receive a structured debrief. A report on flexible working policies would be going to Council on 22 June. The Group was also looking at assets and how the public could access services differently; a new customer service portal was being rolled out. Work was also ongoing regarding the digital divide and how people not online were supported. Supplementing Mr Vestri's response, Mr Proudfoot gave further details, focusing on the opportunities available by working innovatively, including the changing employment base and also in the context of reducing carbon emissions.

Councillor Hoy, referring to the latest indicator for reducing the attainment gap, asked when the 2019/20 figure would be available. Mr Vestri indicated it had not been available at the time of the report, adding that it would be reported differently and comparisons would not be possible due to the pandemic and how the SQA had dealt with awards.

Councillor McMillan asked, in relation to economic development, how indicators showing benefits to businesses but also dis-benefits were decided and collected. Mr Vestri advised

that 11 indicators in the Top 50 were related to the Growing our Economy indicator. A wealth of data was available on economic development, it depended on how Members wished to use this. He reported that the Connected Economy Group was looking at these indicators and at identifying other key areas. Mr Proudfoot stated there was recognition that recovery of the economy would take a long time, there were substantial challenges for businesses. Analysis of the business base and direct engagement with businesses was taking place; the Connected Economy Group was repurposing and had added considerable value to partnership working. A transitional picture was developing, with a need to flex and respond as required; further analysis would be done. Merits of all the indicators in this category would be considered and new measures may be needed. The new Economic Development Strategy and the new Tourism Strategy would be coming forward later.

Responding to questions from Councillor Trotter regarding the business grants detailed in Appendix 2, Mr Vestri clarified that these were grants that had been given out from the Council. Ms Fortune added that the financial year end report was in the throes of being finalised and more detail would be provided then. Mr Proudfoot outlined the funding given to businesses and interventions delivered during this year, adding that details were in the Covid-19 report brought to the April Council.

The Convener queried the figure of 210 business gateway start-ups; Mr Vestri indicated this figure would be checked. Regarding his query about increasing the target for the percentage of procurement spent on local small/medium enterprises Mr Proudfoot said in the context of the Sustainable Procurement Policy that this target would be reviewed. Ms Fortune referred to a recent report to the May Cabinet on procurement, adding that she would raise this with the Commercial Procurement Manager. The Convener then asked, in relation to superfast broadband rollout, whether there could be an indicator showing the figure for fibre into homes. Mr Vestri said that obtaining this information would be looked at.

The Convener thanked Mr Vestri for the comprehensive report. He commended all staff for their work during this pandemic. Referring to Appendix 2, specifically the business support grants issued, he expressed thanks to Mr Proudfoot and John Cunningham.

Decision

The Committee:

- i. Noted that the Improvement Service's COVID-19 Dashboard, the Quarterly Performance Indicators report and the Council Plan Top 50 Scorecard provided elected members with a large number and range of indicators that showed how the council and council services had been impacted by the pandemic. These indicators provided members with information on how the council had responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19 as well as baselines from which recovery from the pandemic could be measured;
- ii. Noted that this year's Annual Performance Report provided members with a detailed update on the impact of COVID-19 on council performance using the indicators that were already reported to members and the Improvement Service's COVID-19 dashboard;
- iii. Indicated whether there were any particular measures of performance or impact of COVID-19 that were not included in the Improvement Service's COVID-19 Dashboard, the Quarterly Performance Indicators report and the Council Plan Top 50 Scorecard.

5. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REPORTING 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources on the use of the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure for 2020/2021 (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021) and also raising awareness of implemented and planned improved processes as result of trends seen in the reporting.

Kirstie MacNeill, Service Manager – People and Governance, presented the report. She outlined the complaints handling procedure for local authorities introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. She drew attention to the key areas of the report, advising that the Customer Feedback and FOI Team continued to grow in experience and knowledge. Turning to the overview, she gave details of complaint outcomes highlighting those service areas with the highest volume of complaints at stages 1 and 2. She drew attention to compliments and comments received during the reporting period. The appendices provided a more detailed breakdown. Ms MacNeill also highlighted improvement actions taken as a result of feedback.

Responding to a query from Councillor Bruce, Ms MacNeill clarified the difference between a comment, a complaint and a compliment.

The Convener, referring to Appendix 2, Education service area, queried the low figure of 39% for stage 1 complaints responded to within 5 working days. Ms Brown explained that stage 1 complaints were dealt with directly by schools. Considerable work was being carried out with Head Teachers by the Quality Improvement Team, supported by the Feedback Team, to ensure improvements in the future for this figure.

Councillor Bruce, referring to compliments, especially over the past year, remarked that these showed how grateful the public were for the work carried out by Council staff during this pandemic.

The Convener echoed those comments; feedback formed a very important part of the Council's processes.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report and where appropriate highlighted areas for further consideration.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for meetings in the next committee session, 2021/22, was discussed.

Councillor Bruce requested two reports. In relation to finance for education, he asked for a report outlining additional options as he wanted to ensure that all areas were being explored. Also, in relation to the wider skills question, he would welcome a report on the skills gap.

Councillor McLennan, referring to the local government elections in 2022, asked that a legacy report, similar to the one provided at the end of the 2017 session, be brought to the March meeting.

The Convener requested that a further update on Covid-19 Performance Indicators be brought forward to a future meeting.

Regarding the Review of the Coast and Countryside Management Plan Mr Proudfoot indicated that an Interim report would be brought forward to the September meeting. He

added that the reporting route for the actual review needed clarified as the Land Management Rules report, which formed part of the CCMP, had been approved at the May Cabinet and a review had been part of that approval.

Following further discussions regarding appropriate timescales for reports requested by Members were agreed as follows –

September: Public Protection Annual Report, Review of Social Care Charging, Interim Report on Coast and Countryside Management Plan

December: ELC Records Plan Progress, Immigration Policy Impact, Covid-19 PI Update, Skills Gap, Education Finance – Options

March: Legacy Report

Signed

Councillor Jeremy Findlay
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee