



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET

**TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2021
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar
Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor N Hampshire (Convener)
Councillor J McMillan

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor L Bruce
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor C McGinn
Councillor F O'Donnell

Council Officials Present:

Mrs M Patterson, Chief Executive
Ms S Fortune, Executive Director for Council Resources
Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Mr D Proudfoot, Executive Director of Place
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities
Ms M Sullivan, Head of Development
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Ms J Tait, Head of Children's Services
Ms F Ferguson, Head of Corporate Support
Mr C Grilli, Service Manager – Legal
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement
Mr S Cooper, Team Manager – Communications
Ms L Small, Team Leader – Housing Options and Support
Ms L Alexander, Equalities Officer
Ms R Crichton, Committees Officer

Clerk:

Ms A Smith

Apologies:

None

Declarations of Interest:

None

The Convener announced that as this was the first Cabinet meeting since the sad passing of the Council Leader, Councillor Willie Innes that a minute's silence would be held before commencement of business.

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – CABINET 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 14 September 2021 were approved.

2. EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL EQUALITY PLAN 2021-2025

A report was submitted by the Executive Director of Place seeking Cabinet approval for the East Lothian Council Equality Plan 2021-2025.

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement, presented the report. The Equality Plan, which incorporated the Equality Plan for the Education Authority and the Licensing Board, had to be reviewed and a new Plan adopted every 4 years. He took Members through the report, outlining the aims of the Plan, which had been drafted at a time of unprecedented challenge caused by the pandemic. The Plan took account of legislative changes and other developments since adoption of the previous one. It formed part of a suite of Council and Partnership Plans. The Plan identified key priorities to improve equality outcomes and set out 7 high level outcomes and 38 actions that the Council would work towards during the next few years to ensure statutory duties under the Equality Act were met. A detailed action plan would be drawn up and progress reported bi-annually.

Responding to Councillor Hampshire's query, Mr Vestri confirmed that the Council worked with partners and communities to try and reduce inequalities and socio-economic deprivation. He made reference to the action in the Plan to re-establish the Equality Diversity Network, to engage with community organisations on equalities issues.

Councillor Akhtar, referring to Audit Scotland's report and action point on equalities, asked if this recommendation would be met. Mr Vestri stated that one of the Council's actions was to look at all performance indicators and then, for those that were equality related, to breakdown these down to obtain more granular detail; this was ongoing work.

Councillor McMillan referred to Section 7 of the Equality Plan, Mainstreaming Equality, acknowledging the considerable amount of work that had been done in this regard in relation to changing attitudes, engagement, accessibility, health, safety and tackling poverty. It was vital for the rural economy that there was equality of opportunity; broadband was a key element. This was a very important paper. It was essential to foster good relations within communities. He hoped that future Community Council and Local Area Partnerships meetings would champion participation in reducing inequalities. He welcomed this report.

Councillor Goodfellow referred to the housing aspect of the Plan highlighting one of the equality outcomes *that everyone in East Lothian had access to a decent, affordable, warm and dry home*. Also, he drew attention to recognition nationally of the Council's library service which had won the inaugural Scottish Library and Information Council award for its sustained, imaginative and ambitious response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Library branches were organised now to be invaluable community hubs. The Council had to be seen to be serving its communities and this Plan went a long way to achieving this.

Councillor Dugdale acknowledged the focus on equality of opportunities and outcomes for everyone in East Lothian. This paper was important and showed the challenges being faced, the effects of Covid-19 and also the consequences as the county emerged from this pandemic. She referred to the increased numbers of reported instances of domestic abuse,

the impact on mental health, widening inequalities as a result of the pandemic and the socio-economic disadvantages faced by children and young people. This Plan formed part of a whole suite of plans as reported and was welcomed.

Councillor Akhtar highlighted the impact of the pandemic on local communities, especially the significant impact on women. She also referred to the disproportional impact on particular groups within communities. It was important as regards health for a close working relationship with NHS Lothian. It was imperative that partners also played their part in taking this agenda forward. She welcomed the report and the range of interactions proposed.

Councillor Hampshire noted the duty to review the Equality Plan every 4 years, remarking that the world today was totally different to that of 4 years ago. He referred to the huge impact of Covid-19 on communities across the county; all areas and all Council services had been significantly impacted. It was very easy for people to be left behind with all these changes taking place, he referenced health, poverty and employment. He stressed it was important, and the Council had to ensure, that everyone had equality of opportunity going forward. He welcomed this Plan.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed, by roll call vote:

- i. to approve the East Lothian Council Equality Plan 2021-2025; and
- ii. to note that a detailed action plan based on the seven outcomes and 38 actions in the plan would be developed and progress would be reported on in bi-annual Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Progress Reports.

3. AFGHAN LOCALLY ENGAGED STAFF (LES) SCHEME AND AFGHAN CITIZENS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

A report was submitted by the Executive Director of Place updating Cabinet on the Afghan Locally Engaged Staff (LES) Scheme, also known as the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme for the resettlement of 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan and East Lothian Council's plans to respond to this humanitarian crisis and support Afghan families.

Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing, presented the report. She outlined the background to the different schemes. She took Members through the housing requirements. In the initial stages the Council planned to commit to supporting 3 families; this would enable careful planning and ongoing review prior to accepting additional refugees. She advised that 2 properties had been identified; their suitability was being assessed along with identification of a third property. A Short Life Working Group was now in place. She gave details of the funding package, explaining that this was all separate to housing costs. The rehousing of refugees could be established under the existing Allocations Policy.

Councillor Bruce asked about discussions with neighbouring local authorities as regards co-ordinating integration and support. Louise Small, Team Leader – Housing Options and Support, outlined details of the support network. She explained that experience and knowledge were shared, also with charitable organisations and the Scottish Refugee Council. East Lothian Council had good links with Midlothian Council. She advised that the difficulty was receiving information from the Home Office, which was sometimes not provided until the last minute so officers were unaware of the number of families/children involved.

Councillor Akhtar referenced East Lothian's proud history in providing assistance to refugees. She welcomed Ms Small's comments regarding working with others to provide the best possible start for these families. She appreciated all the work being done and the need to work collectively. She also welcomed support being offered from local communities.

Councillor Dugdale stated that she completely supported this report and all the work that was being done to provide assistance to Afghan families.

Councillor McMillan echoed comments expressed by his colleagues. This was another example of fostering good relations. This was a hugely important paper which linked into the previous Equality Plan report.

Councillor Hampshire also highlighted East Lothian's participation in national resettlement schemes, even when there were difficulties due to the significant housing demand. The Council could not fail to respond to this humanitarian crisis. He appreciated the difficulty for people on the Council's housing lists and gave reassurance that this Council would continue to build new council houses.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to note the updated position and details shared by the UK Government in relation to the Afghan Relocation Schemes (LES/ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme for the resettlement of 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan over the coming years; and
- ii. to note East Lothian Council's plans to support Afghan families as part of these schemes.

4. UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services on the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and seeking approval for East Lothian Council's participation in the scheme.

Judith Tait, Head of Children's Services, presented the report. She outlined details of the NTS. She reported that COSLA had approved Scotland's participation in the NTS but said that Scotland would only accept young people over 16 but under 17½ years old. She gave details of referrals through the NTS since its commencement, reporting that to date East Lothian had not taken any UASC. It was therefore recommended that the Council accepted 2 UASC young people in the first cycle. A Short Life Working Group had been established to oversee this scheme and the Afghan Resettlement Scheme; the Housing Service would take the lead given their experience with the Syrian Resettlement project. The group would include representation from a wide range of partners, which she detailed.

Councillor McGinn asked whether support for mental health services had been requested and would be available for these young people. Ms Tait stated that officers worked with colleagues and partners to access community based resources. It was an uncertain landscape, some of the challenges would only manifest over time. Keeping the focus on these young people was essential, to offer them stability, but it was challenging accessing mental health services for young people.

Councillor Forrest asked if links had been formed with Afghan nationals and groups in Scotland so that these young people could get support from their peers. Ms Tait gave details

of refugees' ethnic backgrounds stressing that often officers did not know the background of those coming into the East Lothian transfer scheme. Also, in relation to spontaneous arrivals, there was no advance knowledge of someone's background so it was difficult to plan in advance. Ms Small outlined links with other Council services as well as various external bodies. As mentioned there was not a lot of information coming from the Home Office. Regarding the Afghan project funding stream she advised that there was also scope for any exceptional costs. Ms Tait added that collaborating with other local authorities and adopting a regional approach had been suggested by COSLA but this had not been as encouraging as hoped but would be pursued.

Responding to a question from Councillor Goodfellow about the financial implications Ms Tait clarified that young people would be under 18 years of age when they arrived but the Council had a responsibility to continue to support them until they reached 26 years of age. Referring to personnel implications, he asked if some of the funding from the Home Office could be used towards personnel costs. Ms Tait outlined some of the many additional costs in terms of personnel stating that the funding received would not be sufficient.

Councillor Hampshire stressed that these children had been through a horrendous experience to get to this country. Anything the Council could do make their lives easier, to try and bring back some normality had to be done; the Council had a hugely important role.

Councillor Goodfellow remarked that the Home Office was being far from generous for those aged over 18; the level of funding was not sufficient.

Councillor Dugdale said this was a tragic, global, situation. She welcomed the report and the Council's response; there was a responsibility to do all humanly possible to assist these children who were on their own without any support.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed, by roll call vote, to endorse and support East Lothian Council's involvement in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children through the National Transfer Scheme as outlined in the report.

5. QUEENS PLATINUM JUBILEE – JUNE 2022

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources a) informing Cabinet of the UK Government's decision to have a four-day Bank Holiday weekend to celebrate the Queen's 70 year reign from Thursday 2 June until Sunday 5 June 2022 and b) seeking approval for an additional day's annual leave (pro-rata) for all employees on Friday 3 June 2022 to mark the occasion.

Morag Ferguson, Head of Corporate Support, presented the report. The UK Government had announced a change in the date of next year's early May bank holiday from 2 May to 2 June along with an additional bank holiday on 3 June to celebrate the Queen's 70th anniversary as monarch. The Council did not have a general fixed holiday in May for non-school based employees so there was no opportunity to move any existing May holiday. She outlined the Council's proposal, advising that consultation had taken place with the Joint Trades Unions who were supportive. She added that the Council's Leave Policy had been amended in 2019 granting Cabinet the power to make this decision.

Councillor Goodfellow said this would be an event of significant national importance. He was sure people/groups across the county would wish to mark this day and that Community Councils and Local Area Partnerships would provide support if required.

Councillor McMillan informed Cabinet that work had already started on the Queen's Green Canopy Initiative, planting a tree for June. The current and former Lord Lieutenants were liaising with officers, schools and others throughout the county on this initiative. He hoped by doing this that during the long weekend in June 2022 people would see some of the good work being done, aligning with the climate change agenda.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed, by roll call vote, to an additional day's annual leave (pro rata) for all employees on Friday 3 June 2022.

Signed

Councillor Norman Hampshire
Depute Council Leader and Convener of Cabinet