



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**THURSDAY 10 MARCH 2021
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Bruce
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor C Hoy
Councillor G Mackett, Convener
Councillor C McGinn
Councillor T Trotter

Other Councillors Present:

None

Council Officials Present:

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
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms M Sullivan, Head of Development
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms J Tait, Head of Children's Services
Mr C Grilli, Service Manager – Legal
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Ms M Ferguson, Head of Corporate Support
Mr I Gorman, Head of Operations – Adult Wellbeing
Ms Z Rathe, Team Manager – Information Governance
Ms K MacDiarmid, Team Manager – Public Protection
Mr N Craik-Collins, Education Service Manager
Mr M Kennedy, General Manager – Adult Social Work
Ms C Rodgers, Team Manager – Improvement

Clerk:

Ms B Crichton

Apologies:

Councillor J Findlay

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 16 DECEMBER 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 16 December 2021 were approved.

2. Q3 2021/22 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Place on the performance of Council services during Quarter 3 (October to December) 2021/22.

Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, presented the report. He provided a short overview of the report and drew attention to particular indicators relating to: homelessness; recycling centres; universal credit claimant counts; leisure centre attendances; rent arrears; and council tax collection rates. Appendix 1 contained the full suite of indicators.

Responding to questions from Councillors Gilbert and Bruce, Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing, advised that the increase in the average number of days for rehousing was due to the ongoing limited supply of housing and fewer housing allocations this year. The rehousing of a handful of longstanding cases in temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation had also contributed to the increase, which represented a positive step. She advised that the figure was likely to remain high in Q4, as there was a push by the Scottish Housing Regulator to rehouse longstanding cases, of which there were in number in East Lothian. There were a total of around 700 active cases, and this was being closely monitored with the regulator.

Responding to a question from Councillor Bruce, Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Policy & Improvement, advised that the area's percentage of 18-21 year olds seeking work and on Universal Credit had always been higher than the Scottish average. He would provide the Scottish figure to Councillor Bruce offline.

Responding to a question from Councillor McGinn, Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, provided several reasons explaining the slight fall in visits to recycling centres, namely: weekly recycling collections had commenced in November; inclement weather had discouraged visits; and the cost of living had changed consumer habits with a concomitant decrease in material coming in to recycling centres. He expected that the current slightly lowered figures may continue due to the increased recycling collections and socioeconomic factors. An increase in visits was expected when garden waste season came in, and officers would continue to monitor figures.

Decision

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

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Place to provide the Committee with a summary of East Lothian Council's performance according to the Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2020/21.

Mr Vestri presented the report. He provided background information on the work of the Improvement Service's and advised that further indicators relating to child poverty and CO2 emissions were expected the following year. He drew attention to key indicators and noted the effect of the pandemic on some of the figures. He advised that some figures could not be

compared to previous years' figures, such as SQA examination figures being affected by differences in how the attainment data was gathered. He noted that satisfaction data was not provided due to the delay in the publication of the Scottish Household Survey. He highlighted data relating to expenditure on key services, with Appendix 2 providing detail as to the performance and cost of service delivery. He drew attention to the report headlines, including positive trends within: environmental services: school staff absences; the number of days people over the age of 75 spend in hospital; waste recycling rates; and rent arrears. He also noted some of the indicators which had declined in performance or were within the third or fourth quartile, such as: payment of invoices; and the percentage of people who were unemployed being assisted through the council's employability programme; and financial sustainability, although this was still well within tolerance figures provided by Audit Scotland.

Officers responded to questions from Members. Nicola McDowell, Head of Education, advised that attainment in schools continued to be monitored rigorously. Quality Improvement Officers visited schools more than once each month and used live tracking data in Associated Schools Group (ASG) discussions to ensure support was provided to any learners who were not on track.

Regarding questions on the availability of employment land from Councillor Bruce, Mr Vestri confirmed that the land referred to in the report was that which was identified within the Local Development Plan (LDP) as being available for employment purposes. Douglas Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place highlighted the proactive role taken by the council in seeing projects on employment land come to fruition, to bring forward jobs and business growth. Michaela Sullivan, Head of Development, noted difficulties with employment land sites immediately contiguous to housing sites, some of which were held on to as options by developers. Ms Sullivan advised that the next iteration of the LDP would look to choose sites that were not immediately contiguous to residential land, or potentially make some combined allocations so that released sites would include employment land development along with housing development. There was a significant difference in land value sales for residential use and commercial use, causing land owners to retain land for longer. Although there was no simple solution, officers would be considering how to address some of these issues through the next iteration of the LDP.

Responding to a question from Councillor Trotter, Mr Vestri advised that the increased cost of library visits was due to the impact of the pandemic, as costs had stayed the same but the number of visitors had fallen substantially. The cost of each visit would fall with an increase in visitor numbers.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

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

4. ELC RECORDS MANAGEMENT PLAN

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Place to report on the delivery and ongoing implementation of East Lothian Council's Records Management Plan, under the terms of the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011.

Zarya Rathe, Team Manager – Information Governance, presented the report. She advised of plans to resubmit the ELC Records Management Plan to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. She gave an account of the council's submission to the Keeper in 2015, and officers now looked to proactively resubmit a new version of the Records Management Plan; this was partly due to drastic differences in digital ways of working and home working. Officers intended to move back to yearly reporting to the Committee on progress against the plan. She highlighted key areas of activity, which had resulted from the Keeper's previous assessment comments and from an internal audit completed in February 2020. These included: progression of a Corporate Information Asset Register; work on the retention schedule; development of a mandatory new e-learning module on records management; management arrangements for electronic and paper records; and digital preservation and maintaining accessibility. Ms Rathe advised that officers would continue to report back to the Policy and Performance Review Committee on an annual basis.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

- i to note the council's intention to re-submit an updated Records Management Plan to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland for approval, at a time to be mutually agreed between the council and the Keeper; and
- ii to note the contents of the report and where appropriate highlight areas for further action or consideration.

5. PUBLIC PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

A report was submitted by the Chief Social Work Officer to present the East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee Annual Report for 2020/21.

Judith Tait, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer, introduced the report and gave information on the role of the East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee (EMPPC). Kirsty MacDiarmid, Team Manager – Public Protection Office, presented the report and highlighted some of the key themes and messages. She advised that, notwithstanding challenges for EMPPC partners during lockdown, the Committee, the Performance and Quality Improvement Sub-Group, and the VAWG Delivery Group continued to meet with increased frequency. She noted that whist services adapted to restrictions and case conferences moved online, those subject to adult protection and child protection processes continued to be seen on a face-to-face basis. She then highlighted the high level data and performance information contained within the report.

Councillor Hoy referenced the gender-based violence situation during the pandemic, whereby the closure of courts, delays in processes, and release of abusers on bail rather had caused a significant source of anxiety for victims, and asked whether officers felt this situation had improved. Ms Tait advised that although courts had now opened up, there would be a significant lag in catching up on court business and therefore an impact of people's lives. She advised that officers were assured that police were prioritising gender-based violence cases, and Ms Tait had not received notification that changes had put anyone significantly at risk. She would ask Julie Morton, Service Manager – Criminal Justice, to provide further information to Councillor Hoy offline.

Responding to a question from Councillor Bruce regarding the number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR), Ms Tait advised that there had been an increase in child protection business and referrals following the return to schools after lockdown, but that this

had not necessarily resulted in an increase in names being added to the CPR. Numbers were generally quite low, but could be impacted by large families of children being added or removed from the CPR. Numbers were monitored closely and review arrangements were in place on a multiagency basis for quality assurance of decision making. She advised that there was not necessarily a link between children on the CPR and numbers of children being placed outwith the local authority because children on the CPR would be living at home. Ms MacDiarmid noted that data provided was only a high-level snapshot of the significant amount of information held about on child protection processes. No significant rise in the number of children on the CPR had been seen since April 2021.

Responding to a question from Councillor Trotter, Ms MacDiarmid advised that a reduction in domestic abuse incidents had been recorded by the police during the period of lockdown, and noted challenges faced in lockdown for victims to make reports. Patterns of reporting were being reviewed on a quarterly basis. She advised that victims were offered support through the domestic abuse referral pathway, and could be referred either to the Domestic Abuse Service or to Women's Aid. She noted that police reports did not provide a full picture as a victim would have experienced many previous incidents before making a report, and some victims may never be in a position to seek support. Awareness-raising was ongoing across different services. Ms Tait commented on the task to create a culture within communities of with zero tolerance towards gender-based violence, and the challenges caused by people finding gender-based violence a difficult subject to discuss.

Responding to questions from Councillors McGinn and Bruce, Ms MacDiarmid advised that Women's Aid monitored waiting lists on a weekly basis; Women's Aid had never had a waiting list until the period of lockdown and restrictions, but these had become particularly long in the latter part of 2021. Waiting lists were reducing, but Women's Aid were also experiencing challenges in recruiting staff to posts, and as such they were reviewing their recruitment policies, practices, and pay grades. Ms MacDiarmid also provided information on some of the support available to those on waiting lists: there was an initial duty system whereby a duty officer would make contact with those on waiting lists; a prioritisation system was in operation for access to the outreach service based on levels of need and risk; detailed risk assessments was undertaken; and those on the waiting list would still have some contact with Women's Aid and would also be signposted to other services. Councillor Bruce was interested in the changes planned by Women's Aid and support they may need from the council, and asked that Councillors be kept informed.

Councillor McGinn commented on the hard work going on behind the report to improve the lives of vulnerable people, and how these challenges had been exacerbated by the pandemic. He was struck by the increase in violence against women and girls and felt that the message had to get out to men in the community or the situation would not improve. He thanked officers for a comprehensive report which made clear the challenges faced by some of East Lothian's citizens.

Councillor Trotter echoed Councillor McGinn's sentiments, and commented on the vital importance of the work of the Public Protection Committee to communities.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

5. LEGACY REPORT

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Place to provide the Committee with a report on legacy matters to be passed on to the new Committee to be appointed following the new 2022 Local Government Elections.

Paolo Vestri presented the report. He gave an overview of the reports brought to the Committee since 2017, including quarterly and annual reports, as well as the wide range of reports and additional information requested by Members. The annual work programme for the new Committee would take forward any reports outstanding within the current work programme.

Councillors Bruce, Mackett, and Hoy expressed thanks to officers for the reports, assistance, and information they provided to the Committee.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report and to approve for the report to be passed on to the new committee in June 2022.

Signed

Councillor Gordon Mackett
Depute Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee