MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 20 MARCH 2012
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON

Committee Members Present:
Councillor N Hampshire (Convener)
Councillor D Berry
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Williamson

Council Officials Present:
Mr A McCrorie, Executive Director of Corporate Resources
Mr P Collins, Executive Director of Environment
Mr D Ledingham, Executive Director of Education & Children’s Services
Mr J Lamond, Head of Governance and Performance Management
Mr P Vestri, Corporate Policy Manager
Mr A Strickland, Policy Officer
Mr A Forsyth, Head of Community Housing and Property Management
Ms S Bogunovic, Customer Feedback Manager
Mr K Christie, Revenues Manager

Clerk:
Mrs F Stewart

Apologies:
Councillor L Broun-Lindsay
Councillor W Innes
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor M Libberton
1. PERFORMANCE REPORTS

a) Progress to Date In Relation To Homelessness In 2012

The Executive Director of Community Services had submitted a report to inform on the current position regarding the Council’s Legislative Requirements in relation to Homelessness in 2012, progress to date and the likelihood of the Council meeting anticipated statutory duties, both initially and beyond 2012.

The Head of Community Housing and Property Management advised that local authorities were working towards delivering the Scottish Government’s 2012 Homelessness Policy target that all unintentionally homeless households would be offered settled accommodation. He highlighted an important change to legislation that would see the distinction between priority and non-priority homelessness removed by 31 December 2012. However, before making the legislative change, Scottish Ministers had to be satisfied that all Councils would be able to meet the 2012 commitment and have the capacity to provide settled accommodation for all unintentionally homeless households who require accommodation. The Head of Service advised that, as at August 2011, Scottish Government Statistics on progress towards the 2012 target showed that East Lothian’s outturn figures on priority assessment were among the lowest in Scotland. The key concerns for East Lothian Council remained a lack of affordable housing and increasing levels of homeless presentations. A range of positive steps had been taken to increase capacity, including the introduction of a Housing Options Approach by the Homelessness Service, increased uptake of the Rent Deposit Scheme and funding for a Homeless Mediation Service. The Local Housing Strategy 2012-17 also included a range of actions to increase the housing supply and a commitment to fewer people becoming homeless.

Councillor Berry enquired if East Lothian would be in a position to meet the Government’s target by the deadline date and the Head of Service outlined how he hoped to achieve this with additional Private Sector Leasing (PSL) homes and new affordable housing. He reported that work had already begun on the development at Pinkie Mains in Musselburgh. Councillor Berry also enquired if the Council could anticipate how many people might present themselves as homeless this year and was advised by the Head of Service that it was difficult to determine such a figure.

Councillor Williamson asked what the consequences might be for the Council if it failed to meet its target by December 2012 and was advised by the Head of Service that the Housing Minister had not disclosed what the penalty would be.

The Convener commented that an increasing number of people could be at risk of losing their homes due to the economic downturn and enquired if the Council could still expect to meet its targets if this was to be the case. The Head of Service replied that this would indeed make it more difficult for the Council to meet the Government targets, although the Scottish Government’s Mortgage to Rent Scheme could assist homeowners in certain circumstances.
The Convener was satisfied that all possible steps had been taken by Officers to address the challenges ahead and acknowledged that a number of factors were outwith the Council’s control.

**Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the contents of this Report with regard to progress to date and the significant challenges facing the Council in meeting the Homelessness Legislative Requirements in 2012 and beyond.

**b) Rent Arrears**

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources had submitted a report to inform the Committee about how the Council was planning to address the rise in council house rent arrears with a Housing Revenue Account funded improvement plan for 2012/13. The report also informed the Committee how the Council’s rent arrears collection process and performance reporting compared to other Scottish councils.

The Revenues Manager advised that council house debt had become a growing problem in East Lothian, with current tenant arrears now amounting to over £1m. Effective housing debt management was therefore vital to moderate the risk of arrears to the Council increasing further. A sum of £100,000 from the Council budget for 2012/13 had been allocated to assist with rent arrears collection and a new Rent Arrears Policy had been formally adopted in October 2011.

The Revenues Manager outlined the Council’s arrears management strategy which included the recruitment of three temporary rent income assistants who would spend time in the community, mobile chip and pin devices and a campaign to maximise benefit take up. These measures would prioritise early intervention which was considered to be fundamental in a robust arrears strategy. He also brought to the attention of Members the potentially detrimental impact of welfare reform, in particular, payment of universal credit direct to tenants.

The Convener strongly supported an early intervention policy and furthermore suggested that the Council should have a strategy to gain access to a property if a Council officer failed to gain access after 6-8 visits. He stated that the Council, as Landlord, had a responsibility to its tenants and gaining access would ensure that tenants would have access to support and assistance, if required. He proposed that such a strategy could form part of new tenancy agreements.

Councillor Berry suggested that more collaborative and partnership working would have a positive impact and suggested that consideration could be given to rewarding good tenants in some way.

Members discussed the arrears figures, the position on direct debit payments and the implications of the new legislation.

**Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the current position in relation to rent arrears in East Lothian and the positive steps being taken to manage rent collection.
2. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK Q2 AND Q3, 1 JULY 2011 TO 31 DECEMBER 2011

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources had submitted a report on the use of the Council’s Feedback Procedure for the period 1 July 2011 to 30 September 2011 (Q2) and 1 October 2011 to 31 December 2011 (Q3).

The Customer Feedback Manager summarised the report. She explained the current 3 stage internal feedback procedure and advised that a change to this process would soon remove the third stage. She advised that should complainants remain dissatisfied after completing this process, they had a legal right to appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. She reported that the total number of complaints received between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011 (Q2) had decreased and continued to decrease through to 31 December 2011 (Q3). A breakdown of Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints was given and Members were advised that more complaints were being resolved at the point of service (Stage 1). The most common issues complained about were the planning process, Council Tax administration and the Social Work financial assessment process.

The Customer Feedback Manager reported on Performance targets, examples of service improvements as a result of complaints and customer feedback developments. In the interests of balance, she advised that 55 compliments had been recorded during Q2 and 54 during Q3. It was also proposed that Customer Feedback reports would, in future, be brought to the Committee on a half yearly basis in order to present a more detailed analysis.

The Customer Feedback Manager also advised that a review of the Social Work Complaints process had been ongoing and she looked forward to receiving details of the outcome.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report and agreed to accept Customer Feedback reports half yearly instead of quarterly.

3. FROM IMPROVEMENT TO EXCELLENCE; THE EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK 2012

A report had been submitted by the Chief Executive to provide the Committee with the opportunity to comment on and approve From Improvement to Excellence: The East Lothian Council Improvement Framework 2012 (Appended to the report).

The Corporate Policy Manager summarised the five inter-related elements of the new Improvement Framework (formerly the Performance Framework), highlighting the following points:

Setting Clear Outcomes
The Council’s outcomes and priorities were derived from the 2020 Vision, the Statement of Intent drawn from the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and the Council Plan 2012-2017. Each service developed ‘Service Outcomes’ reflecting the
service they provide and they, in turn, made a contribution towards achieving the outcomes and priorities in the SOA, Council Plan and core principles.

**Self-Evaluation**
The How Good is Your Council (HGIYC) process had been revised and the self-evaluation stage had almost been completed. The results from this process were important as they would feed into the Service Plans.

**Service Improvement Planning and Management**
This element included Service planning, financial and asset management planning and workforce management planning. Risk management was now also included.

**Performance Management**
Accurate, high quality and comprehensive performance data was essential to the effectiveness of the Improvement Framework. The PPRC also played an important role in scrutinising the Council’s performance.

**External Assessment**
There was now greater emphasis on external inspections and the Council was subject to various inspections and audits carried out by national inspection agencies including Audit Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland.

**Decision**
The Committee agreed to approve *From Improvement to Excellence: The East Lothian Council Improvement Framework 2012* and noted that the Framework was also being considered by Full Council on 27 March 2012.

4. **REVIEW OF THE USE OF THE GUIDE TO SCRUTINY AND REVIEW BY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Chief Executive had submitted a report to review the use of the Council’s Scrutiny Toolkit by the Policy and Performance Review (PPR) Committee.

The Policy Officer advised that the Guide to Scrutiny and Review was approved by Council in October 2010 as a toolkit to be used by the PPR Committee to assist Members fulfil their remits and conduct their scrutiny role. In approving the Guide, Council noted that it should be reviewed in autumn 2011 to take account of practice and experience of the first year of operation. This report made recommendations for how the Committee might consider strengthening its scrutiny role by using the Guide more fully.

The Policy Officer advised that the remit of the PPRC allowed Members to undertake reviews of policies and/or performance. However, although the Committee had selected several policy areas for scrutiny, it had not conducted a detailed review of policy or performance as allowed in the Scheme of Administration. He advised that the Committee was able to set up short-life sub committees to undertake policy review work and suggested that this could be considered in future. The PPRC did not
have decision making powers, but could make recommendations to Council and Cabinet. Appendix 1 to the report showed all the items considered for scrutiny by the PPRC in 2011/12.

Decision

The Committee agreed the following actions to strengthen its role in scrutinising the policies and performance of the Council:

i. add reviewing/monitoring Service Plans as a standing item on the work programme of the Committee

ii. consider undertaking a review of policy or performance where a policy is identified as not working effectively or where a service area is performing poorly

iii. consider making formal recommendations to Council / Cabinet as appropriate on actions arising from reports.

Signed ..............................

Councillor Norman Hampshire
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee