



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

**THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2024  
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

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**Committee Members Present:**

Councillor R Bennett

Councillor J Findlay

Councillor S McIntosh

Councillor D Collins

Councillor L Jardine - Convener

Councillor LA Menzies

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor A Forrest

**Council Officials Present:**

Mr J Baker, Service Manager, Economic Development

Mr S Barclay, Team Manager, Housing Assets

Ms H Barnett, Head of Corporate Support

Ms M Cockburn, Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager

Mr S Cooper, Service Manager, Communications

Mr J Coutts, Service Manager, Community Housing

Mr K Dingwall, Service Manager, Planning

Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance

Ms S Fortune, Executive Director, Council Resources

Ms J Fraser, General Manager, Children's Services

Mr P Grant, Service Manager, Property Maintenance

Ms N McDowell, Head of Education

Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing

Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure

Ms C Rodgers, Head of Communities

Ms N Sandford, Team Manager, Homelessness

Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer

Mr A Stubbs, Service Manager, Roads

Ms F Wilson, Chief Officer East Lothian HSCP

**Clerk:**

Ms L Gillie

**Apologies:**

Councillor N Gilbert - Depute Convener

Councillor C Yorkston

**Declarations of Interest:**

None

The clerk advised that the meeting was being held as a hybrid meeting, as provided for in legislation; that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. She noted that the Council was the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for six months from the date of the meeting.

The clerk recorded the attendance of Members by roll call.

## **1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 19 SEPTEMBER 2024**

The Convener asked the Committee to approve the minutes of 19 September 2024.

### **Decision**

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes.

## **2. 2024/25 Q2 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORTS**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, who advised that the report covered July to September 2024. He noted that due to a system error commentary was not shown in Appendix 1 but that the most relevant commentary had been added into the report. Mr Stewart also noted that data was not available for some measures but that it was anticipated this would be available in the next quarter and that technical issues were being worked through for the number of vehicles entering recycling centres. Mr Stewart provided a summary of the report including that the number of homelessness cases had reduced slightly, the average number of days taken to re house households had increased and that the number of homelessness assessments completed had reduced. He continued by stating that instances of fly tipping had increased as had pool visits. Housing benefit processing times were above target with change in circumstances processing times increasing slightly but being within target. The business rate and council tax collection rates were above target with rent arrears increasing but following a similar trend to the previous year. Mr Stewart ended by advising that financial gains were over £843 thousand for 171 clients, with almost half of this relating to disability benefits.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh about sport and pool attendances Mr Stewart stated that he did not have any further information. Mr Reid, Head of Infrastructure, advised that Enjoy Leisure had done a lot of work around marketing and that he believed the upturn was due to the hard work of the team and seasonality.

The Convener asked about vehicles at recycling centres and stud heights and Mr Reid replied by explaining that the stud system had no impact on charging as this was done through the booking system. The stud system is independent and counts the number of axles for the total number of vehicles accessing the centre. He continued by advising they are working through procurement for a new system that would provide the information that is needed.

The Convener asked if there were any concerns around discharge times and people waiting for care packages. Fiona Wilson, Chief Officer East Lothian HSCP, replied that there were concerns about people waiting in hospital and unmet need in the community. She stated that they try to mitigate this by having a daily flow huddle and advised that they have added a daily care at home huddle but that even with mitigation in place there is still a risk.

In response to a question from the Convener Ms Wilson said that she believes they are being as effective as they can be, and they constantly review and look at how things could be done

differently. She continued by saying that they must be realistic about what they can do and how to mitigate the risk. Ms Wilson also stated that too many assessments take place in hospital and the aim is for more assessments to take place in a community setting.

The Convener asked about assessments taking place in a clinical environment and Ms Wilson replied that it was not an easy question to answer. She advised that they have been supporting through an in-reach model across the Royal and the Western. She continued by saying that building a culture of trust had been worked on for years and that this was shifting, but that they had to balance it with the community setting.

In response to a question from Councillor Findlay about street lighting, where he referenced an issue in Gullane, Mr Reid stated that the figure was for the Council's Street lighting responsibility only and did not include Scottish Power. He noted that the team are pushing on the issue in Gullane.

Mr Reid raised the issues of fly tipping and that charging for garden waste, the booking system and access to recycling centres had led to an increase in fly tipping. He continued by advising that they were looking at enhanced measures, including an advertising campaign and harder measures being taken against those who offend.

Councillor McIntosh asked about persistent sites of fly tipping and Mr Reid replied by advising that they are looking at enforcement action and that the team have been successful with those caught being forced to clear up.

Councillor Menzies asked about food inspection and whether there had been any movement on this since the last meeting. Caroline Rodgers, Head of Communities, replied by highlighting a summary, which is at the end of the paper, showing how many inspections had taken place.

In response to a question from Councillor Forrest Mr Reid said there are various reasons why people produce waste and that communal spaces can be abused, and this can lead to some residents not having enough capacity for their waste. He highlighted that they always ensure there is enough capacity for residents and work with residents when there are issues. When this fails, they can move on to enforcement action, but this can take a while to work. Councillor Forrest responded by thanking Mr Reid and saying that he did know that this was working as areas he has seen are improving.

In response to a question from the Convener about the number of days for rehousing and single persons Nicola Sandford, Team Manager, Homelessness, stated that the number of days was slightly elevated but that this shows a positive improvement as some long-standing cases had been housed. She continued by highlighting that since the changes to the allocation policy they have accommodated around 20 single person households.

The Convener asked about the length of time for assessment for homeless households and Ms Sandford advised that the service had recently undergone a significant period of transformation. She continued by saying that this area had slipped as they had concentrated on other areas of improvement but that going forward an improvement should be seen.

Councillor Menzies queried business gateway startups and Jamie Baker, Service Manager, Economic Development, replied that there was a mixture of ways in which business gateway startups are generated and that there was a large cohort of businesses not receiving support from business gateway. He concluded by saying that while it was useful to look at figures quarterly to compare year on year it was not useful to focus on particular quarterly figures.

Councillor Menzies thanked Officers for the report particularly Mr Reid and his team.

The Convener thanked officers and commented that the system issues experienced had possibly made it more difficult this quarter. She also stated that broadly improving performance could be seen across several areas.

### **Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **3. LANDLORD PERFORMANCE REPORT**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by James Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing. Mr Coutts advised that the Social Housing Charter sets out key outcomes for landlords and other services and that an annual report must be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 May. He also highlighted other requirements such as the need to produce a Landlord Performance Report by 31 October with tenants involved in the preparation of this report. Mr Coutts stated that East Lothian Council has a strong regard in relation to involving tenants and is seen as an example of good practice. The Landlord Report shows some of the key indicators against their peer group and the national average figures. Mr Coutts advised that East Lothian Council had the joint highest percentage rent increase for 2023 – 2024 in the peer group but that the average rent is below the national average. He noted improvements in void rent loss due to significant effort in this area. On repairs Mr Coutts advised the length of days had increased and was higher than the Scottish average but that tenant satisfaction with repairs was higher than the Scottish average. He continued by saying that the number of days spent in temporary accommodation remained high and that there would be more detail on this during item four on the agenda. Mr Coutts concluded by saying that Appendix one gives a positive appraisal of the Council's performance in key areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Forrest Mr Coutts replied that the service works closely with East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel and has a range of subgroups. Feedback and comments from the panel and subgroups are listened to and factored into service development activity.

In response to a question from Councillor Forrest about non-emergency repairs and tenant satisfaction levels Mr Coutts responded by saying that there is a strong customer liaison team. Paul Grant, Service Manager, Property Maintenance, added that the question on how satisfied tenants were with the overall time to complete the repair was at 86% which was at the low end but that this was offset by other questions such as how the repair request was handled. Mr Grant concluded by saying that the turnaround time of non-emergency repairs had increased due to diverting resources to voids.

The Convener asked how the rent levels compare nationally including with registered social landlords. Mr Coutts advised that East Lothian Council are third lowest for local authority rents and that the rents were significantly lower than registered social landlords in East Lothian.

In response to a question from the Convener Paul Grant, advised that the time starts from the day that a repair is reported and that some repairs are possibly taking longer as resources are going toward void properties. He also highlighted that some repairs need a Repairs Officer to attend, which can take up to two weeks, but that tenants are informed at the time of reporting how long a repair is likely to take. He concluded by saying that they are looking at an appointment-based system for Repairs Officers to try and improve things.

Councillor McIntosh asked if repairs are closed off if not actioned and Mr Grant replied by saying if it was deemed as a project repair it would be closed off and not included in the figures.

The Convener asked about first stage complaints and Mr Coutts replied that a response would include a resolution or completion of a complaint.

In response to a question from the Convener about the increase in anti-social behaviour Mr Coutts said he did not have the detailed information but suggested that it was neighbour issues, noise and garden condition. Mr Coutts stated he could provide the details off-line. See *Action Note*.

Councillor McIntosh questioned Midlothian Councils' anti-social behaviour figures and Mr Coutts stated that he was surprised by the chart and added that East Lothian do record accurately. He added that benchmarking allows for discussions and that he was happy to discuss this with Midlothian as it may be a different approach to record keeping.

The Convener asked about the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) and Scott Barclay, Team Manager, Housing Assets, replied that EESH data is a voluntary return. He advised that EESH standards are under review in the context of the social housing net zero standards. Mr Barclay noted that the regulatory guidance advised exemptions should only be recorded in rare cases and that the cases could be exemptions that the Council has decided to record as failures in the context of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard reporting.

Councillor McIntosh queried the indication of an underspend in energy efficiency during a conversation at Council and Mr Barclay replied by saying that he was not party to this conversation. He continued by advising that they regularly engage with tenants to look to maximise the energy efficiency of properties and that he would categorise the failures as social (tenant refusal) rather than technical.

In response to a question from the Convener about the meaning of 'let to others' Mr Coutts explained that every local authority has a different approach and not all have the same categories. He advised that 'others' are likely to be nominations in or something that does not fall into the main categories such as armed forces or asylum seekers.

The Convener asked about medical adaptations and Mr Coutts advised that there had been a reduction in staff. He advised that the service was under resourced and major adaptations were taking longer.

The Convener questioned East Lothian rents being the third lowest and asked if it was known whether any other local authorities had had no rent increase. Mr Coutts replied by saying that a handful of authorities had frozen rents due to the pressures felt by tenants but was unable to name them.

Councillor McIntosh thanked Mr Coutts and his team for the report and commented on the Champions Board event that she had attended.

Councillor Menzies commented that she had found the report interesting and that there was a need for context around some of the figures. She noted that 42% of the anti-social behaviour had been in Musselburgh and that action was being taken to bring this down. She further commented that the improvements being made are significant and highlighted the programme of work that had been carried out in properties suffering with mould. Councillor Menzies stated that services were toiling due to levels of staff and that staff are stretched to breaking point but that they are seeing things turn around and seeing positive results. She continued by saying that councillors needed to take responsibility and help officers to turn things around.

The Convener congratulated everyone within the housing team and commented that she was particularly struck by the table from the Scottish Housing Network which shows no red. She stated that she knew how much effort has gone into this.

## **Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

### **4. HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Nicola Sandford, Team Manager – Homelessness who began by highlighting that some data from 2024 – 25 had been included to identify trends. She continued by advising of the positive performance of the housing options team with the number of live cases being reduced from 730 at the end of November 2023 to 450 at the end of November 2024. She noted that this was due to new ways of working and a change in the allocation policy. Ms Sandford highlighted that this had led to a reduction in the need for temporary accommodation and a significant reduction in the time spent in temporary accommodation. At the end of March 2024, the number of households in temporary accommodation was at the lowest level since 2015. The number of days spent in temporary accommodation has also reduced to pre covid levels and the reduction in number of days in self-contained accommodation was the lowest since 2014. Breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order also continue to reduce. Ms Sandford said she anticipated that the sustained reduction in homeless households would translate into an improved budget. She concluded by advising of two weaknesses, these being the increase in rough sleepers prior to homelessness presentation and the time for decision making.

Councillor Bennett asked about the three-month gap between rough sleeping and presenting as homeless and Ms Sandford advised that many clients are aware of the services available, which includes a 24-hour on call service. She noted a correlation of relationship breakdowns and rough sleeping and that a questionnaire was sent out to service users but the response rate was low. She concluded by saying she was confident that they had enough measures in place for anyone rough sleeping.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh Ms Sandford advised that there was a total of 85 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, with one family with children currently breaching the order. Ms Sandford explained that this family has no shared facilities and is living in self-contained temporary accommodation, with the reason for the breach being that the property was in Edinburgh, however their child attends school in Edinburgh. Ms Sandford continued by confirming that no children are living in bed and breakfast accommodation.

In response to a question from Councillor Forrest about rough sleeping, Ms Sandford stated that there was a homelessness prevention service and a 24/7 on call emergency service in place with all services well advertised. Ms Sandford highlighted the public generally contact immediately when they become aware of instances of rough sleeping and the team respond promptly.

Councillor Forrest asked about the more efficient ways of working and Ms Sandford advised that they had implemented a new case management system, revised the process for case closure and that cases had been redistributed. This had resulted in previous caseloads of 100-120 being reduced to around 50-60.

In response to a question from Councillor Bennett about private landlords Ms Sandford advised that a small level of evictions are due to arrears either sustained over a long period of time or at a high level. She highlighted that evictions are more likely to be due to landlords wanting to sell and not related to bad tenants.

Councillor Menzies asked about people presenting after time in prison and Ms Sandford stated that there were a small number of people who were in and out of prison. She advised that over the last 18 months they had tried a more preventative approach including a facility to prevent

rent arrears running up while the tenant is in prison and carrying out homelessness assessments with people in prison.

The Convener asked about homelessness presentations and Ms Sandford stated that this had increased considerably. She commented on the national picture, the change to local connection playing a part and predicted that the number of homelessness presentations would continue. Ms Sanford said some analysis had been carried out which showed that around a third of presentations for September and October 2024 were people who had not previously lived in East Lothian in recent years. She noted that there were a high number of cases from Edinburgh in particular and that this issue was being experienced by other authorities in South East Scotland.

In response to a question from the Convener Ms Sandford advised there was no specific priority given to domestic violence, noting all applicants accepted as homeless are awarded 200 points. She continued by saying that a pragmatic approach can be taken to prevent homelessness for Council tenants experiencing domestic violence, by taking households to the rehousing panel, to seek approval for a management move, which could result in an award of 300 points, enabling priority to be provided. In the meantime, a decant can be offered instead of homeless temporary accommodation. She concluded by saying that the team always try to get the best outcome for vulnerable households and take an individual approach.

Councillor Menzies thanked Ms Sandford and her team, stated that it was not getting any easier and commented that it was not possible to resource the team as they would like to.

The Convener echoed Councillor Menzies comments and noted that tremendous amount of work that had been carried out over the last year.

## **Decision**

The Convener asked members to confirm the content was appropriate for the report going forward. This was confirmed by Members.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **5. ROADS ASSET MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL STATUS AND OPTIONS REPORT 2024**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Alan Stubbs, Service Manager – Roads. Mr Stubbs began by thanking officers for providing the information to enable the report to be pulled together. He advised that if the Council were to reduce funding for the road network it would be quickly realised how vital a good road network is to all areas of our lives. Mr Stubbs stated that overall there was a disbenefit to society of reducing spending and advised of potential environmental issues as well as the issue of potholes. Mr Stubbs stated that the issue was not just for motorists but for the wider community including cyclists and pedestrians. The report provides a summary of the road asset status and includes four options for future funding. Mr Stubbs noted that the report was broken down into key assets, these being carriageways, footways, lighting, traffic management systems, EV charging points and road structures. He concluded by stating that the detailed assessment recommends annual capital investment of £14.37 million.

Councillor McIntosh asked how much of the funding could be coming from car parking charges and Mr Stubbs replied by advising that the report was looking at capital investment.

In response to a question from the Convener Mr Stubbs advised that the report feeds into budget setting and that the purpose of the report was to assist members when setting budgets.

Mr Reid commented that Mr Stubbs had done a phenomenal job with reduced investment but that levels of deterioration are now being seen. He also noted that the cost to cover the deterioration would be significant if they do not get the investment now.

The Convener asked Mr Reid if he could comment on how members could balance the range of infrastructure capital investment and he replied by saying that this was hard to answer as they all require investment. He continued by saying that all aspects of infrastructure had been in decline for last 10-12 years and that infrastructure is the backbone of how communities operate. Mr Reid highlighted it will get very difficult if there is no uplift in investment and stated that this is one for the UK and Scottish Government. Mr Reid concluded by saying that if they do not get an adequate level of funding the decline is quite frightening.

In response to a question from the Convener about street lighting Mr Stubbs advised that they had looked at ways of reducing the costs such as dimming or turning lights off at certain times. He stated that the hardware and software has an additional cost but added that they would look at anything that comes with a saving. Mr Stubbs commented on the small team, one part time Senior Lighting Officer and one vacancy. Mr Reid added that they looked at energy savings but that turning off lights is an emotive subject.

Councillor McIntosh commented on the Scottish Government's target of reducing car kilometres travel by 20% and the reduction in wear and tear on the roads. She also commented on the need for an equality assessment as woman are more likely to be using footways.

## **Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **6. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND INDICATORS**

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Michelle Cockburn, Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager, who asked that members continue to report on current indicators for the rest of 2024 – 2025. She stated that the intention was to bring the report back to PPRC in June 2025 including options on format and indicators. Ms Cockburn provided some background including that Section one of the Local Government Scotland Act places a statutory duty on Local Authorities. She highlighted that the most significant change was replacing the two broad indicators with four more specific themes. It is expected that benchmarking data will continue to be used and that reporting should be at least quarterly. Ms Cockburn advised that due to significant development and the potential for statutory changes it was not possible to undertake a full review for this meeting. She concluded by saying that the review will be carried out in line with the new direction and that they will hopefully provide more info graphic information which will be easier to digest.

In response to a question from the Convener Ms Cockburn stated that there was definitely an opportunity to streamline. She advised that there was a need to keep some of the indicators but that they can decide how to present these along with the prioritised indicators. Sarah Fortune, Executive Director of Resources, added that there is engagement with external agencies and that officers are engaged through national conversations and Audit Scotland.

Councillor Collins commented on the work that officers put into the reports and said that she receives emails all times of the day and night and she worried that they are doing too much. She asked what safeguards are in place to prevent staff burnout. Ms Fortune responded by stating the wellbeing of staff is at the heart of what they do. New ways of working means staff can choose to work certain hours and their emails often include a strap line stating this. She continued by saying that all council services are under pressure, and they try to engage with



staff through the staff survey and various wellbeing initiatives. Councillor Collins thanked staff for their work and going above and beyond.

The Convener echoed the comments of Councillor Collins and stated that part of the rationale for the review of performance reports was to free up time for officers. She also mentioned the work of fellow councillors who also put in a great deal of work.

### **Decision**

A roll call vote was taken to approve the recommendations in the report:

Councillor Menzies had left the meeting. The remaining members unanimously approved the recommendations.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME – SESSION 2024/25 AND ACTION NOTE**

The Convener asked if there were any reports to be added to the work programme and for comments or questions on the action note.

Ms Cockburn stated that the Review of Performance Reporting and Indicators would be brought back in June 2025.

The Convener advised that she would have a discussion offline with officers to see if any other reports were to be added.

Ms Cockburn stated that the information had been provided for item three on the action note.

Ms Fortune stated that information had been provided for item two on the action note and apologised for the delay in providing the detail on the lowest paid women. She explained that they were waiting for an updated equalities report which hopefully could be presented in the New Year. She continued by saying that on average the workforce is approximately 72% female and that in the lowest quartile 75% were women.

The Convener said that she would like to see less awaiting information on the action note and commented that she would prefer to see the action note follow the minutes of the last meeting and include a date raised and a date concluded. Ms Fortune responded by advising that it had been agreed that before papers go out the action note will go to Council Management Team. Hayley Barnett, Head of Corporate Support, added that she was happy to make these changes.

### **Decision**

The Committee agreed to note the work programme and the emerging reports under consideration as a result of the meeting of the PPRC.

Signed

Councillor Lyn Jardine  
Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee