



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**THURSDAY 12 JUNE
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor R Bennett
Councillor D Collins
Councillor N Gilbert - Depute Convener
Councillor L Jardine - Convener
Councillor LA Menzies
Councillor S McIntosh
Councillor C Yorkston

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor G McGuire

Council Officials Present:

Mr J Baker, Service Manager, Economic Development
Ms H Barnett, Head of Corporate Support
Ms L Byrne, Head of Children's Services
Ms A Cameron, Service Manager, Early Years and Childcare
Ms M Cockburn, Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager
Mr S Cooper, Service Manager, Communications
Ms L Crothers, Service Manager, Protective Services
Mr K Dingwall, Service Manager, Planning
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Ms S Farrow, Team Leader, Customer Feedback and FOI
Ms J Fraser, General manager, Children's Services
Mr C Grilli, Service Manager, Governance
Mr D Hood, Head of Operations, ELHSCP
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms C Rodgers, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Fiona Wilson, Chief Officer, ELHSCP

Clerk:

Ms L Gillie

Apologies:

Councillor J Findlay

Declarations of Interest:

None

Councillor Menzies made a transparency statement stating that she was an Enjoy Leisure board member.

The clerk advised that the meeting was being held as a remote 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 five years from the date of the meeting.

The clerk recorded the attendance of Members by roll call.

The convener advised of a change to agenda for the meeting. Item 5 (Local Government Benchmarking Framework) on the published agenda will be presented as item 4 and item 4 on the published agenda (2024/25 Q4 Performance Indicators) will be presented as item 5.

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 20 March 2025

The Convener asked the Committee to approve the minutes of 25 March 2025.

Decision

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes.

2. ACTION NOTE

The Convener asked the Committee if there were any comments on the action note and asked for committee approval to close the following items:

- 4, Details of young people leaving foster care.
- 6, Details on the 5% lowest paid women.
- 10, Details on the number of complainants.

Councillor McIntosh stated that item 4 was closed and thanked officers for the information received on item 6, noting it was an interesting correlation against the top paid staff.

Councillor Menzies confirmed that she was content with the information received in relation to item 10.

Item 9 will be carried forward and Fiona Wilson, Chief Officer, ELHSCP, advised that practices hold their own data and complete their own reports. She further advised that she would follow this up again.

Decision

The Committee approved the closure of the following actions:

- 4, Details on young people leaving foster care.
- 6, Details on the 5% lowest paid women.
- 10, Details on the number of complainants.

3. 1140 Hours

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services and presented by Alison Cameron, Service Manager, Early Years and Childcare. Ms Cameron advised of the Council's statutory duty since 2021 to provide 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare places for all eligible children. She continued by noting the three main benefits of the expansion of early learning and childcare entitlement, children's development improves, the poverty related attainment gap narrows and family resilience increases. Ms Cameron stated that there are a range of options and models within local authority settings as well as private early learning and childcare settings and child minders. The Council is required by legislation to be provider neutral and to provide enough places for all eligible children, but the statutory duty does not require the Council to provide places within a specific locality. From 2024 -25, the monies received from Scottish Government became part of the general revenue grant and not a specific grant allocation as it had been in previous years. Ms Cameron advised that they have a responsibility to ensure all settings meet the national standards and of the Council's responsibilities to consult with families. They are required to consult with parents and carers every two years and are currently working with the Scottish Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Scottish Government to support a Scotland wide survey for parents with children aged zero to six who have not yet started school.

In response to questions from Councillor Gilbert about local nursery provision and the take up of 1140 hours Ms Cameron replied that there is ongoing work to improve the number of places in specific areas. They look at this weekly and know where the gaps are. Ms Cameron advised that she would provide figures for the uptake of 1140 hours offline.

Councillor Yorkston asked about the provider neutral approach and national standards. Ms Cameron stated that they have a provider neutral approach to every provider who provides 1140 hours. They have an allocated education support officer who works with the service, this she noted was in line with Care Inspectorate and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) reports. They have created onboarding procedures that are now in place for any provider who would like to become a funded provider and focus on the ten national standards because these are needed for a provider to become a funded provider. Ms Cameron stated that she would provide information offline and said that they use RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings and that significant support is in place for improvement with at least monthly visits and weekly support. This she said was never a tick box exercise and they put support first.

Councillor McIntosh asked about areas where there is insufficient provision and Ms Cameron replied that they are actively working with other departments to look assets and working in partnership with providers.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh about the financial viability of providers Ms Cameron stated they have a support officer who works with funded providers on financials and that this is part of the sustainability of the business in accordance with the national standards. She continued by saying that they would expect providers to have a year's worth of documentation to show that they are sustainable in all aspects not just financially. There are regular meetings with funded providers and these always have a business element.

Councillor McIntosh asked about the training programme and Ms Cameron stated that a lot of it is self-directed. The training programme was developed with providers and is open to everyone. The programme is available to people when they have free time, and online sessions for questions and answers have been built in. She continued by thanking Councillor McIntosh for the suggestion to adapt the materials for foster carers.

Councillor McIntosh asked if the thoughts of the children were collected, and Ms Cameron advised that this is done through observation generally but that they could consider asking.

Councillor Menzies asked about how attendance at the training is mapped across the county and asked if it was possible to have a breakdown of the models offered in areas. Ms Cameron advised this information could be provided and in addition they could expand the spreadsheet they currently use to add their funded providers.

Ms Cameron responded to a question from Councillor Menzies about the Education Committee's agreement to give the Head of Education the ability to alter the hourly rate paid to funded providers by a limit of plus or minus 10 %. Ms Cameron stated that the sustainable rate is looked at year on year and that they need to be agile and responsive to the needs of funded providers. Ms Cameron added that any future change to the rate would be put in place in line with Scottish Government and COSLA guidance. The sustainable rate is a standing item at meetings and any change to the rate would never be a surprise to a provider. Ms Cameron ended by saying that there has never been a reduction in rates as far as she is aware and that any rate must be affordable and sustainable for the Council also.

Councillor Jardine asked for assurance that the funding received is in line with last year's funding and Ms McDowell replied that Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance, was unable to attend the meeting but would be happy to provide the information offline.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about benchmarking Ms Cameron advised that every local authority benchmarks their service. She added that they are a member of the Southeast Early Years Network with similar processes in place, and they are all looking for similar themes in terms of quality. Ms Cameron stated that through the self-improving schools model schools have school team groups where reviews take place. They are working with funded providers to put a process in place in line with the school reviews so that they can be part of the quality agenda.

Councillor Menzies commented on the need to remember the original aims of 1140 hours and stated that she was happy to see the Council working actively to reduce poverty and inequality. She also commented on the training that was available.

Councillor McIntosh commented on the importance for children's development but acknowledged that it was not without its challenges.

Councillor Jardine welcomed the report and thanked the entire team.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report

Sederunt: Ms Cameron left the meeting.

5. Local Government Benchmarking Framework

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Michelle Cockburn, Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager. Ms Cockburn advised that the report presented the performance for 2023 -24. She highlighted that the Council had maintained or improved performance in many areas. Ms Cockburn noted positive highlights including education costs being amongst the lowest in Scotland for primary, secondary and preschool pupils, a significant improvement in planning application processing time and an improvement in business start-ups. She continued by highlighting high public satisfaction with refuse collection, leisure facilities and local schools. The gender pay gap has reduced and is well below the Scottish average while areas for improvement include level 5 awards and literacy numeracy attainment gaps which are below average. Ms Cockburn advised that non-emergency repair times have increased significantly and that the number of invoices paid within 30 days is below target. There has been a decline in the number of adults receiving

personal care at home, there have been fewer unemployed people assisted into work and town vacancy rates have increased. She ended by stating that street cleanliness, satisfaction and cleanliness scores have declined and that the Council faces increasing demand and inflationary pressures.

Councillor Menzies asked about household waste and recycling and Mr Reid replied by that the figure for the move to fortnightly recycling was not yet available, but he hoped to see an increase and improved performance. He added that there may a slight fluctuation and that the garden waste collection had seen a high customer sign up. He ended by saying that dry weather can impact on the amount of garden waste and that the economy can also impact waste collection.

In response to a question from Councillor Menzies about street cleansing complaints Mr Reid stated that 51 complaints from over five million interactions is very low. He added that they do interrogate complaints to identify areas of improvement. In regard to street cleaning Mr Reid noted that over 800 homes are being added every year, so the number of houses and areas has increased while over the last eight years £1.2 million has been taken out of the service.

Councillor Menzies asked about the town vacancy rates and Ms Carmichael replied that this was a nationwide issue. She highlighted changes in consumer behaviour and the changing uses and types of businesses in town centres. She noted the issue of larger retailers moving out of town centres and said that there were a lot of factors at work. Ms Carmichael advised that they are looking at what can be done to support new businesses and new types of activity for the town centres. They are working with colleagues in other departments on the change of use and upgrades for properties. Councillor Menzies also asked for a rough mapping of where the highest decreases were, and Ms Carmichael agreed to provide information offline.

In response to questions about litter from Councillor McIntosh Mr Reid stated that there will be an anti-littering campaign and that fly tipping is being looked at by a dedicated fly tipping team. He also confirmed that that they are tied in with organisations such as Keep Scotland Beautiful and are aware of the resources available.

Councillor Jardine said that she had questions that she would send to Officers and asked about participation rates and how achievements are captured. Nicola McDowell, Head of Education, stated that they are keeping an eye on measures 5 and 7. She advised that what they do not want to do is to close the poverty related attainment gap by quintile 1 improving and everything else decreasing. She stated the aim was to close the gap by everyone improving at an equal level. Ms McDowell noted that they track the number of young people aged 16-19 years who are not in education, training or employment and work closely with Skills Development Scotland. She mentioned a report that went to the Education Committee earlier in the week and said that there is a hope that an improvement will be seen soon due to work which has been carried out with secondary schools. A higher level of young people are not seeking education, training or employment due to health reasons and a hangover from COVID. Ms McDowell noted work carried out by East Lothian Works to get young people closer to the labour market. She continued by advising that schools do track achievements. and ended by saying that the schools have a mantra of 'no one leaves with nothing'. This may be an award such as Duke of Edinburgh rather than formal SQA qualifications and that they aim to get the best possible level of numeracy and literacy for young people.

Councillor McIntosh raised that 36% of carers feel supported in their caring role and Ms Wilson replied by saying that this was a fair reflection but not as good as they feel it should be and that they need to do more.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report

4. Q4 2024/25 Performance Indicators

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Gary Stewart, Policy Officer. The report covered performance from January to March. Mr Stewart advised that Appendix 1 provides a full list of indicators and noted highlights including the number of homelessness cases increasing slightly but that the year-end figure of new applications saw a decrease compared to the previous year. The average number of days to be housed has decreased with a continued downtrend being partly due to the change in allocations policy. The time taken for homelessness assessments to be completed has improved and is above target. Mr Stewart continued by saying that fly tipping incidents have continued to increase and that the trend over the last few years has seen as a gradual upwards movement. Indoor sports facilities annual visits were above target and visits to pools increased. He then highlighted housing benefit processing times which had increased but stated that performance remains within the annual target. Business rates collection was on target along with council tax collection rates. Mr Stewart stated that 882 new properties were added to the property base and that rent arrears have reduced. For financial gains the team have secured over £1.62 million in annual benefit for 361 clients, almost half of this relates to disability or health related benefits. The number of invoices paid on time was just below target. Mr Stewart then provided an update on some of the planning targets that have been updated on the four planning indicators and confirmed that all planning indicators are well within the national targets.

Councillor Jardine requested that an up-to-date version of the report be put onto the website when data was delayed in coming through.

Councillor Menzies asked about sport centre and pool attendances and whether the figures could be broken down by facility. Mr Reid replied by stating that this should be possible as the information is available. He advised that he would look at this for future reports.

In response to a question from Councillor Menzies about Business Gateway Ms Cameron stated that she would provide the information offline.

Councillor Gilbert asked about the homelessness applications figure and the number of breaches of unsuitable accommodation. Ms McGuire stated that they are monitoring this and added that in comparison to last year they have seen a 10% drop in applications. She advised that she would speak to the team and come back with information. The number of breaches has reduced significantly but Ms McGuire said that it was still not acceptable, and they are looking to improve.

Councillor Gilbert asked about the timeline for the declared housing emergency to continue and Ms McGuire advised of a paper going to Council at the end of the month and said she hoped it would be clearer in due course.

Mr Reid replied to a question from Councillor Gilbert about recycling centres by advising that the software is standalone and now at the end of its' life. They have one centre up and running with the rest in test mode with new software and there should be a resolution soon with full data recording. At present Mr Reid advised that they take regular feedback and log the weight of waste taken. He also noted anecdotal data is received from staff.

Councillor Gilbert asked when the new finance system would be fully in place and Ms Cockburn advised that they are working on the implementation. Phase 1 should be in the autumn of this year and phase 2 will take it into the new year.

Jen Fraser responded to a question from Councillor McIntosh about the average number of placements for looked after children by saying that it was not all negative as there were several

reasons such as moving to be with siblings or moving back to East Lothian. The figures are for the life of the child, and she noted that the child could move from their home to a placement multiple times. The processes around pre move have been strengthened in the last 18 months and disruption meetings has been introduced to get the views of the child. The views of the whole team around the child are sought and recently some of the improvement work from the disruption meetings has been moved into the wider service.

Councillor McIntosh asked about child and families networks and Ms Fraser advised that they are very aware of this and stated that anyone can be in a child and families network. This is always looked at as part of an assessment and it would be followed up at the looked after review. Ms Fraser concluded by saying that it was probably a work in progress but added that it's certainly on the agenda in terms of maintaining connections.

Councillor Jardine commented that she found the commentary in the report extremely helpful and thanked officers.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report

6. Customer Feedback Reporting 2024/25

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Council Resources and presented by Carlo Grilli, Service Manager, Governance. Mr Grilli began by advising of an increase in complaints from last year. He stated that 40% had been completed at stage 1 and that the timeframe for stage 2 complaints had increased from 66 % last year to 95.1 % this year. He noted that the format of the report had been changed from last years in order to take on board comments from members. Mr Grilli noted that in providing a baseline regarding trends it was hoped that it will serve as a reference point for future reporting with a clearer picture of trends and statistics. He stated this will improve transparency and accountability across all services. Mr Grilli added that the team leader has conducted sessions with services to understand their challenges and share best practice, and this will be their key focus in the coming year.

Councillor Menzies stated that she found this report far easier to read and asked if it was possible to be break it down into what was policy and what was operational. Mr Grilli stated that anecdotally he believed that approximately 90 % of the complaints were operationally based. He added that he could try to pull the figures for future reports.

Councillor Menzies stated that it was important to know whether a policy decision was a cause of complaints. She stated that she had other questions that she would take offline. Mr Reid advised that there were times when policy drives complaints and gave the examples of garden waste collections and parking policy. Mr Grilli added that they did identify garden waste complaints and that the team will continue to do this for policy decisions.

In response to a question from Councillor Gilbert Mr Grilli advised that most departments are under pressure and that stage 2 complaints are the result of not being able to respond within the required timeframe. He stated that he would provide information after this meeting on any departments that are under particular pressure.

Councillor Gilbert asked about the number of stage 1 complaints being responded to and Mr Grilli advised that complaints can be logged as stage 1 and the response becomes more complex and they are then logged as stage 2. He added that the feedback team attempt to identify complaints that are more complex and take them straight to stage 2.

In response to questions about the efficiencies and impacts of the online portal and how much customers are using it from Councillor Gilbert Mr Grilli stated he would provide the information after this meeting.

Ms McDowell responded to questions about stage 2 complaints in education from Councillor Gilbert by noting that it is roughly one complaint per school. She advised that many come in as stage 1, become more complex and are logged as stage 2. She added that bullying and additional special needs (ASN) are key areas in stage 2 complaints with quite a lot of stage 2 complaints about ASN. This can be around the perception of what parents would like as opposed to what education policy states and dictates. Ms McDowell noted that a lot of work had been done with schools around anti bullying and what bullying is. She ended by advising of a new child friendly complaints procedure which is being developed and added that this will be communicated with parents and schools to put the child at the centre of the complaint.

Councillor Menzies commented that they need to scrutinise to see if further improvements can be made. She also said that when you look at compliments it gives a different perspective, giving examples such as adult wellbeing where there were 50 complaints and 49 compliments.

Councillor Jardine stated that the report highlights balance but that stage 1 complaints are not getting resolved as quickly as they should, and she would like to look at what could be done.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report

7. Performance Framework Refresh

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place and presented by Michelle Cockburn, Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager. Ms Cockburn began by stating that the performance reporting was in line with best practice and the new approach will begin in September 2025. She noted the purpose and scope of the report was to update members on the improvements to the performance reporting framework, to ensure compliance with the statute of performance information direction and to support better scrutiny and decision making. Ms Cockburn advised that annual reports will be presented to PPRC in June of each year and will focus on high level strategic objectives and strategic priorities. Tactical level reports will be presented by the Head of Service while operational level service specific reports will be managed through service planning internally in the council. The new reporting format will focus on strategic and tactical reports and will be structured around three strategic priorities as agreed by Council. Ms Cockburn ended by advising that performance indicators are to be agreed with the Council Management Team and Members ahead of the first reports coming forward in September 2025.

Councillor Jardine asked how this aligns with the strategic priorities and how easily the reporting format will be able to adapt to changing priorities. Ms Cockburn replied by stating that the appendix of the report shows the format and added that if there are changes in the future, she believed that the format could remain the same under whatever headings are captured. She ended by saying that this will be reviewed as they go, and they will amend the format if necessary.

Councillor Menzies commented that Ms Cockburn had gone far beyond what she had expected and that the new approach will be easier to understand.

Councillor Jardine commented that the new format will enable effective scrutiny to take place.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report and unanimously approved the proposed approach to performance reporting by roll call vote.

8. WORK PROGRAMME – SESSION 2025/26

The Convener asked if there were any reports to be added to the work programme and it was confirmed that the new approach may result in the work plan being updated.

Ms Cockburn confirmed that now the new approach has been approved the work plan will be updated to show what reports will come forward when and look at what is required following the annual report to full Council on 26 August.

Councillor Jardine noted the need for a report on the balance between achievement and attainment in education and the need to understand the extent to which economy development is impacted on by out with. She highlighted that this might be a discussion with Head of Development.

Decision

The Committee agreed to the changes and 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