



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**THURSDAY 15 DECEMBER 2022
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Jardine, Convener
Councillor R Bennet
Councillor D Collins
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor S McIntosh
Councillor L Menzies
Councillor C Yorkston

Other Councillors Present:

None

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Chief Executive
Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Ms S Fortune, Executive Director for Council Resources
Mr D Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place
Ms M Ferguson, Head of Corporate Support
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms M Sullivan, Head of Development
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Mr I Gorman, Head of Operations
Mr C Grilli, Head of Governance
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Ms L Byrne, Group Service Manager
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Policy, Improvement and Partnerships
Mr A Stubbs, Service Manager – Roads
Ms L Kerr, General Manager – Planning and Performance
Ms K MacDiarmid, Team Manager – Public Protection (Multi-agency Partnership Post)
Mr I Lennox, Team Manager – Assets and Regulatory
Ms C Goodwin, Assistant Strategic Programme Manager – Adult Wellbeing
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Ms H Lundstrom, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer

Clerk:

Ms B Crichton

Apologies:

Councillor J Findlay

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 8 SEPTEMBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 8 September 2022 were approved.

2. Q2 2022/23 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place to provide Elected Members with information regarding the performance of Council services during Q2 2022/23 (July – September 2022).

Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, presented the report, and provided an overview of the salient points and the results of the key performance measures as detailed in the appendix. In particular he commented on: homelessness, providing relevant statistics and advising that the number of new cases had increased, but the average number of days moving from temporary accommodation had reduced; attendance at recycling centres; key data in relation to fly-tipping, which had increased sharply in Q2; the position regarding attendance figures at enjoyleisure pools and sports facilities, which were closer to target despite remaining below pre-pandemic levels; and performance measures in relation to the processing times for new housing benefit claims, council tax and business rates collections, and tenant rent arrears. He also advised of a three-fold increase in customers accessing financial support and struggling to meet essential living costs, with the cost of living crisis likely to have an impact on future collection rates and debt recovery work.

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Policy, Improvement and Partnerships, added that figures relating to homelessness, rent arrears, and business rates collection were starting to be impacted by the cost of living crisis and economic situation. He highlighted improved indicators within street and traffic light repairs, planning. There had also been improved figures within delayed discharge, which went against trends seen in other areas.

Officers responded to questions from Members. Mr Vestri would ask service managers to capture any issues relating to staffing within the comments section of future reports. Sharon Saunders, Head of Communities and Partnerships, advised that community centres operated on a bookings basis and did not fall within the broader sports development area, and therefore data captured occupancy and usage of the building rather than individual visits. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, would seek clarity from EnjoyLeisure as to how visitor data was calibrated in relation to staff shortages and venue closures. Sarah Fortune, Executive Director – Council Resources, confirmed that rates collection was shown as a quarterly target, with council tax collection at 48% at the end of Q2.

Responding to questions on foster placements, Lindsey Byrne, Group Service Manager, advised of recruitment challenges in finding carers who could meet the needs of particular children. There was a national recruitment crisis and a decline in people remaining in foster care as a long-term career. East Lothian would undertake a fee review in the near future, and she advised that the Scottish Government looked to create a minimum level for fostering allowances. She advised that external resources were required for a number of reasons, and while new foster carers would be welcomed, new recruits would be unlikely to have the skills and experience to help the most distressed children. Ms Byrne also advised that there was no expectation of expanding the area's residential placement footprint. Ms Byrne said there were more children in residential care than the service would like to have, but an increased number of experienced carers would be required to help this situation. She described a difficult time in fostering, with an increase in placements breaking down. Improvements to fees and allowances were being considered to try to address some of these issues. She described the impact of The Promise, which had challenged the service to think differently about fostering,

and said there was now a greater need for foster carers to support the wider family to retain connections with the child.

Responding to questions from the Convener, Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing, put the increased homelessness figures down to the cost of living crisis, and said there had not been any increase in evictions. The service would also monitor the impact on homelessness figures by changes in policy relating to local connections. Mr Reid advised that the increase in fly-tipping could also be explained by the economic situation, including some commercial traders avoiding paying disposal fees. Ms Fortune would provide further information to Committee Members on benefits officer recruitment and staffing levels.

Sederunt: *Councillor Bennet joined the meeting.*

The Convener commented that she was heartened by the performance in relation to delayed discharge, particularly in light of challenges experienced in the recruitment and retention of staff.

Decision

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

3. DRAFT 2022 – 2027 'TOP 50' COUNCIL PLAN INDICATORS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place to present the draft 2022 – 2027 'Top 50' Council Plan Indicators for consideration before going to Council for approval.

Mr Vestri presented the report, and drew attention to Appendix 1, which showed previous indicators which had been removed and replaced. The indicators were based around six of the Council Plan objectives: reducing poverty, responding to climate change, growing our economy, growing our people, growing our communities, and growing our capacity. He then drew attention to Appendix 2, which provided the proposed new set of indicators and commentary as to reasons for inclusion and possible future amendments. He noted that new targets would be identified and reported to Council when the final set of indicators was presented for approval. Officers would liaise further with the Convener and with the Council Leader as there were still some amendments proposed.

Officers responded to questions from Members. Councillor McIntosh asked if there was a way to monitor the number of empty homes, including council tax collected from empty homes, to try to reduce the number of empty properties. Ms Fortune would circulate this information. She advised that the council had an Empty Property Policy, approved in 2014. An income of around £400,000 each year from empty homes was directed into affordable housing. Ms McGuire advised that the Housing Strategy and Development Team collated information on empty houses. Mr Vestri suggested this may be more appropriate as an annual or quarterly indicator as it had not been identified as key priority as part of the Council Plan; he suggested that Members assess whether this should be included as a future indicator when they had had sight of the data.

Councillor Menzies was keen to see inclusion of indicators relating to both short term lets and Equally Safe/reports of domestic violence. Mr Vestri advised that a work on a new Antisocial Behaviour Strategy was underway. He pointed out that reports of antisocial behaviour represented an input figure rather than an outcome indicator, but said that officers could look into an indicator relating to the Equally Safe national strategy. He advised that the East Lothian Partnership was looking at developing an East Lothian Equally Safe Strategy. Mr Vestri would report back to the Committee when the new Antisocial Behaviour and Equally Safe strategies were adopted, as relevant indicators would arise from these pieces of work. He highlighted

indicator 47, whether people felt safe or very safe going out after dark; this data from the Residents' Survey could be considered further to look at responses by age and gender, which was a proxy indicator for the Equally Safe strategy to show how safe residents felt in their community.

Councillor McIntosh felt there was a diverse range of indicators, and commented positively on the spread of indicators relating to climate change.

The Convener commented that the indicators encompassed the wellbeing of the community, sustainability, and noted there was a suitable mix to provide an overview of performance in a wide range of areas. She highlighted that the indicators remained a draft document; comments from Members would be taken on board, with further work to be undertaken to find baseline data for new indicators, etc. She then moved to a roll call vote to approve the draft 2022 – 2027 'Top 50' Council Plan Indicators, to be sent to Council for final approval. This was unanimously supported by Committee Members.

Decision

The Committee agreed to approve the draft 2022 – 2027 'Top 50' Council Plan Indicators, to be sent to Council for final approval.

4. EAST Lothian AND MIDLothian PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021 – 2022

A report was submitted by the Chief Social Work Officer to present the East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee (EMPPC) Annual Report for 2021 – 2022.

Kirsty MacDiarmid, Public Protection Team Manager, presented the report, and highlighted some of the key themes, messages, high-level data, and performance information. She highlighted the reporting structure, how responsibilities were discharged through the four sub-groups of the committee, and the responsibilities of the staff. She advised that types of harm being reported within adult support and protection mirrored the national picture, and a planned event for Adult Support and Protection Day in February would focus on self-neglect and hoarding. She highlighted staffing issues within Children and Families, although said this had not impacted on child protection work, which continued to be a key focus to protect children most at risk of significant harm. She advised of work undertaken to build staff competence in using a model called Safe & Together to respond to domestic abuse, which involved keeping the child with the non-abusing parent, building protection for the child, and addressing abuser behaviour. She also highlighted the learning events from the Violence Against Women and Girls 16 Days of Activism. She welcomed the move to develop an East Lothian local Equally Safe Strategy, which would sit within the Community Safety and Justice Partnership. Finally, she highlighted the current priorities of the EMPPC, which provided a sense of the scope of the committee.

Officers responded to questions from Members. Responding to a question from the Convener, Ms MacDiarmid gave an account of the EMPPC's communication priorities over the following year, including communications to engage young people; EMPPC intended to link in with communications partners across East Lothian and Midlothian to support their work, and would use materials available on a national basis to support work locally.

Responding to questions from Councillor McIntosh, Ms Byrne advised of a national issue in children and families social work recruitment, partly due to disruptions to placements caused by the pandemic, but also because starting salaries in East Lothian did not compare well with neighbouring authorities. Officers were working to address this in conjunction with HR, but Ms Byrne noted that there were currently an unprecedented number of vacancies within services,

particularly felt by the smaller local authorities. Mechanisms to increase staffing were also underway, such as supporting people through the Open University social work course; these graduates then made a commitment to work within East Lothian for a time after finishing the course.

Councillor Menzies commented that the report provided a good sense of how the council and its partners worked to safeguard those most at risk in communities. She thanked officers for their continued work.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

5. ROADS ASSET MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL STATUS AND OPTIONS REPORT 2022

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place to present a summary of the council's road assets status as of financial year 2021-22, describing the status, condition, and performance of the asset; defining the value of the assets; detailing the service that the asset and current budgets were able to provide; and presenting the options available for the future.

Alan Stubbs, Service Manager – Roads, presented the report. The report dealt with six different asset groups: carriageways; footways; street lighting; traffic management systems; electric vehicle (EV) charging points (street furniture); and structures. Full status and option reports were detailed in Appendix A. He took Members through the main asset groups, drawing attention to the key points, outlining the options for adoption, and advising of officer recommendations for investment levels.

Mr Stubbs answered questions from Members. He would respond to a question from Councillor Gilbert on the extent to which inflation rates affected the stated levels of investment offline after consulting finance colleagues. Responding to a question from Councillor Menzies, he advised that an element of footways investment would support active travel, but officers actively bid for external funding to supplement this. A number of active travel projects had been delivered using external funding, which did not come from the roads capital budget. Responding to questions from Councillor McIntosh, he advised that an inspection and traffic light system was in operation to target funding for replacement of street lighting columns and to ensure that columns which had exceeded their design life were safe. He advised that contracts were in place to recycle materials from the old columns. He also advised that inspections were undertaken to ascertain which parts of the footway required maintenance. Funding was also devolved to area partnerships to invest in projects such as widening footways, and Connected Communities Managers provided a link between community groups and Roads Services.

The Convener asked about risks posed in the adoption of new roads, pavements, and lighting systems. Mr Stubbs advised of a national problem with some residential estates still not having been adopted many years after completion. The council would not take on any scheme unless it was to a suitable standard and any issues had been rectified. He said that rigorous processes were in place and it was for developers to begin the process by offering up a scheme for adoption.

Councillor McIntosh was pleased to see that the recommended increased investment was higher for footways than for roads, which she felt was in keeping with the sustainable transport hierarchy. The Convener commended officers for a clear report which had engaged Members in useful conversation.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report, and to note officers' recommendation of investment for each of the assets covered within the report.

6. ENERGY COSTS

Mr Reid provided a verbal update regarding the effect of rising energy costs on council services. He reported that electricity costs in 2021/2022 had been £2.48m, then £2.85m in 2022/2023, and costs in 2023/2024 were expected to peak around £4.5m, representing an increase of 184%. Fossil fuel costs were expected to rise 280% from just under £1m in 2021/2022, £2.4m in 2022/2023, and an expected cost of £2.8m for 2023/2024, representing an overall increase of 211% in energy costs.

Mr Reid gave an account of assets which had been mothballed as part of a mitigation exercise. Work was underway to mothball Block A of John Muir House, and there were plans to mothball Block C by the end of January or beginning of February. Aldhammer House was also underway for mothballing, and Stoney Hill Community Centre remained mothballed, but there may be an opportunity to move to commercial rent. He added that Innerwick Outdoor Centre, North Berwick Chambers, and Mansfield Road had been also mothballed.

Mr Reid advised that the temperature in buildings with electrically controlled systems had been reduced from 21 to 18 degrees. In buildings with manual settings and primary schools, heating duration had been turned down to try to maintain an ambient temperature around 18 degrees. It was hoped that November figures would show a clear saving compared to previous years, although it was expected that recent cold weather would have an impact. Further, all swimming pools had been turned down by one degree, and EnjoyLeisure staff were considering other practical measures. A review of every electrical meter was also underway, which would be a significant piece of work to be completed by only one member of staff. A change would also be made to the flood lighting of churches and cemeteries to manual switch systems, so that structures could be lit only when in use. This would have an impact on historic monuments and ambient feel around communities, but the current cost was prohibitive as these assets still ran on sodium discharge lamps rather than LED, and money was not currently available to reinvest.

Mr Reid summarised that officers would continue to manage and monitor energy usage and assets. Vehicle tracking had also been useful in minimising miles covered within gritting and recycling and waste services. An Energy Board were also considering renewables and how to change and manage energy supplies and usage.

Mr Reid responded to questions from Members. He advised that spaces remained usable at an ambient temperature of 18 degrees, although some older buildings would develop hot and cold spots, and the team were responding to any issues. At the suggestion of turning off street lighting to save energy, issues with various types of street lighting were discussed, and Councillor McIntosh highlighted that there would be an equalities issue in that women would feel disproportionately less safe in darkened streets.

The Convener asked about lighting at sports facilities, and Mr Reid explained that lighting timers at sports pitches were set according to bookings, and some facilities had an override to allow staff to turn the lighting off should attendees leave early. Replacement with LED lighting had been considered.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the update.

7. WORK PROGRAMME – SESSION 2022/23

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place outlining the committee’s future work programme.

The Convener advised that there were still reports to be scheduled around foster carers and The Promise, as well as homelessness.

Councillor McIntosh sought a report around empty properties and short term lets. Mr Vestri thought relevant indicators on these topics would come forward as part of the landlord report scheduled for June 2023. He suggested that Members may identify quarterly or annual indicators as part of the discussion on this report. Councillor McIntosh thought that discussion as to how properties were being used merited further discussion, and Ms McGuire would discuss empty homes with Councillor McIntosh separately to the landlord report, as this was a wider issue than only council properties. Michaela Sullivan advised that the planning service had undertaken a survey to establish areas where there was concern around the concentration of short term lets. Once the licensing period had come into force in August, this would provide a clearer picture of numbers of short term lets. She noted the balance to be struck with short term lets, to allow tourists to make their contribution to the local economy when there was a limited number of hotels and guesthouses in the area. This work would progress later in the year. The Convener agreed that further conversation was merited to establish what scrutiny would be required going forward.

Councillor Gilbert sought a quarterly report on areas where staffing shortages had caused significant issues with performance. Mr Proudfoot highlighted that staffing had been identified as a significant risk on the Corporate Risk Register, with eight areas remaining under business continuity arrangements. Managers kept this under constant review and were doing everything they could to support recruitment. He suggested that some of the suggested reports could come forward as verbal updates and undertook to discuss this with the Convener.

Councillor Menzies agreed that short term lets and business development should be discussed in greater detail in relation to encouraging hotels into the area. She also sought a report on area partnership payments, including through the lens of equality. Mr Proudfoot would also discuss this offline with officers and the Convener.

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
Depute Convener of the Policy and Performance Review Committee