



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER 2023
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Jardine, Convener
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor R Bennett
Councillor J Findlay
Councillor S McIntosh
Councillor L-A Menzies
Councillor C Yorkston

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor A Forrest
Councillor C McFarlane
Councillor G McGuire

Council Officials Present:

Ms L Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services
Ms L Byrne, Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer
Mr J Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing & Homelessness
Ms C Cumming, Biodiversity Officer
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Ms S Fortune, Executive Director, Council Resources
Ms C Goodwin, Performance and Improvement Manager
Mr C Grilli, Head of Governance
Ms J Hargreaves, Team Manager, Countryside
Mr D Hood, Head of Operations, NHS Lothian
Mr E John, Service Manager – Sport, Countryside and Leisure
Ms L Kerr, General Manager Planning and Performance
Dr J Lothian, Team Manager – Strategy, Policy and Development
Ms J Mackay, Senior Communications Adviser
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Mr M McGrath, Depot Manager, Amenity Services - Musselburgh
Ms W McGuire, Head of Housing
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms N Sandford, Team Manager, Homelessness
Mr J Stevens, Depot Manager, Amenity Services – North Berwick
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Mr A Stubbs, Service Manager for Roads
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Policy, Improvement and Partnerships
Ms F Wilson, Chief Officer, East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership

Clerk:

Ms L Gillie

Apologies:

Councillor C Cassini

Councillor T Trotter

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

The clerk pointed out that minor errors in the minutes would be rectified prior to them being signed off. Councillor Jardine confirmed the errors were minor and there were no material changes needed.

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 21 September 2023 were approved.

Decision

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes.

2. 2023/24 Q2 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 2023/24. Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, presented the report and provided a brief overview in relation to the July – September timeframe.

Mr Stewart informed the Committee that Appendix 1 provided a list of the indicators along with commentary. He highlighted information from the Q2 performance report including that homelessness new cases had increased slightly and that the number of assessments carried out in under 28 days had reduced. He continued by advising that incidences of fly tipping had increased and that the number of vehicles accessing recycling centres had reduced, but stated that it was an increase compared to the same quarter last year and that the year to date is still within target. 85% of invoices were paid on time which is under target and Mr Stewart advised that the Purchase 2 Pay project is concentrating on three main areas to improve payments made on time. Sports centres and pool attendances decreased in Q2 and are still below pre covid levels. The average time to process a new housing benefit claim has increased but is within target. The time taken to process change of circumstances has also increased and is just out with target. The collection of business rates is above target, the collection of council tax is slightly below target and rent arrears have increased in Q2. Mr Stewart informed the Committee of a new indicator which measures the value of financial gain that has been secured for clients. In the first half of the year 484 new clients were referred to the service. Mr Stewart advised that the majority of people accessing this service were self-referrals.

In response to questions from Councillor Menzies who asked for clarity about the number of homeless cases and the assessment times Nicki Sandford, Team Manager – Homelessness, advised that the figure relates to the number of homeless presentations. Ms Sandford confirmed that she would provide more detail during the presentation of the Homelessness Performance Report later in the meeting.

Councillor Menzies queried when food inspections would resume. Paolo Vestri, Service Manager - Improvements Policy and Partnerships, responded by explaining that Sharon Saunders, Head of Communities, was not able to attend the meeting to answer the question but that it was his understanding that food inspections had been taking place. Councillor Jardine queried whether this difference could be due to the period being reported on and Mr Vestri stated that it could be that they were waiting on data and that he would get data to members as soon as possible.

Councillor Gilbert asked if there was any relationship between the increase in fly tipping and visits to recycling centres and the closure of the Macmerry site. Mr Vestri informed Councillor Gilbert that the figures relate to the period before the site closure. Councillor Gilbert asked if a note could be taken so that a comparison could be made at the next PPRC meeting. Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, advised that they are monitoring the situation and that there has been no reported increase in fly tipping since the site closure. He continued by saying that activity at recycling centres had a correlation with the economic situation and that they will continue to review this. Mr Reid added that it was counter intuitive for him to have a target for fly tipping when there was never an excuse for it. He concluded by saying that if they can identify people they will be prosecuted.

Councillor Findlay asked if anyone could say if the presumed upsurge in planning applications for short term lets has had any negative impact on the efficiency of the planning process. Sarah Fortune, Executive Director - Council Resources, advised that no one was attending the meeting from planning but that she was happy to liaise with planning and circulate information.

Councillor McIntosh asked that if fly tipping was to get worse around Christmas whether it was possible to get the message out more broadly on the Council's electronic media. Mr Reid replied by saying that they regularly communicate in this way, with an emphasis on the services available. He confirmed that he was happy to accentuate the impact and consequences of fly tipping and take it as an action. Eamon John, Service Manager - Sport, Countryside and Leisure, added that during October and November there was a downward trend and stated that it was heading in the right way.

Councillor Bennett joined the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine Ms Sandford informed the Committee that the number of days to rehouse fluctuates and there is no real trend. She continued by saying that it is influenced by factors such as a new build development coming on stream. Ms Sandford advised that a continued reduction going forward is likely as some temporary accommodation is converted to permanent housing stock. She further advised that the figures could be skewed as people who have been in temporary accommodation for a long period are rehoused.

Councillor Jardine asked how we compare to our peer group in relation to arrears and Ms Fortune replied by saying that she did not have that information. She confirmed that she was happy to circulate the information to the Committee. She continued by saying that the team do tend to benchmark quite well and have high collection rates in comparison with other authorities.

Councillor Yorkston asked about the Financial Inclusion Team and whether the increase in demand could be met. Ms Fortune responded by saying that it was a small team and that they had seen an increase in demand. She stated that the team probably does not have the right level of resource but that the important message was that if people are in need, they should contact the team to see if any assistance could be given.

Councillor McIntosh commented on the new indicator and the amount of financial gain and stated that it was a great way to capture the benefit that communities were getting.

Councillor Jardine thanked officers for such a full report and commented that the new format was much easier to get data from. She thanked Mr Stewart for his endeavours.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

3. 'TOP 50' COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT UPDATE

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place. The report was presented by Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Policy, Improvement and Partnerships.

Mr Vestri stated that this was the second report and that 50 indicators had been identified as being key to track progress. He also advised that they are waiting on some more up to date data and that the residents survey data is from 2021. A further report will be produced for Council in February. Mr Vestri highlighted that they are still trying to get targets for twelve of the indicators, seven of these are new indicators. Mr Vestri stated that in relation to the climate emergency, carbon emissions have reduced and that this is moving in the correct direction. He continued by saying that there has been a reduction in the number of participants moving into employment from Council operated programmes but that the number of people participating is significantly higher. A positive indicator commented on by Mr Vestri was the number of 16-19 year olds participating which was just over target. The number of days spent by people over 75 years of age in hospital while ready to be discharged has increased but is still below target and is significantly below the Scottish average. Mr Vestri added that affordable house completions had increased and were above target and the number of online transactions has increased. The final point mentioned by Mr Vestri was referrals to the mental health single point of access and he advised that he had circulated further information to members.

In response to a question from Councillor Findlay about the benefit of climate emergency training Mr Reid stated that the Council had made a commitment to look at all services and their impact on the climate. He advised that the training raised the awareness of principles and behaviours and the impact they can have.

Councillor Findlay queried the spending on local enterprises and how this could be improved. Ms Fortune replied by saying that this was part of the updated procurement strategy and that there was a clear commitment to focus on local spend. She continued by saying that work is ongoing to engage with local suppliers to encourage them to bid for contracts and that the council spend in the local area is actively managed.

Councillor Findlay asked about the score for the question on the Council being good at listening in the resident's survey and Mr Vestri replied by saying that it was as much on Councillors as on the Council to try and improve this indicator. He continued by informing the Committee that a new survey would be carried out in 2024. Mr Vestri advised on the current budget consultation and that as many people as possible were encouraged to respond. He further advised that some of the issues were out with the control of the Council and gave the example of planning and Scottish Government. He concluded by commenting on the number of projects that were ongoing to consult and engage with people and said he hoped that this would lead to the public feeling that they had more say in the decisions being made.

Councillor Jardine commented on the fact that a regular report on complaints was received and asked if it would be useful to look at a more collaborative way of working within this Committee to understand the issues. Councillor Findlay agreed.

Councillor Gilbert questioned whether the number of people awaiting discharge was due to a lack of care staff or if there were other factors. In response Fiona Wilson, Chief Officer, East

Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership advised that at the time there were issues around recruitment and that this was a national challenge. She advised that they are still trying to attract people to work in care and continued by saying the problems fluctuate but that at that time it was around care at home.

Councillor Jardine commented that it looked like a large increase but that it was still within target. Ms Wilson confirmed that East Lothian is a top performer around discharges and that they work to scrutinise the resources available and look at all the options such as day centres. She advised that a decision could be made that care at home is not the best option to support people. She concluded by saying that they wanted people in their own homes and not in hospital.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about the poverty and inequality indicator Mr Vestri advised that the increase is almost certainly due to the cost-of-living crisis. He also commented on an increase in unemployment and that the Council is doing all they can, highlighting the work of the Financial Inclusion Team. Mr Vestri also mentioned the Citizens Advice Bureau and Foodbanks which can offer advice and supportive services to help mitigate the impact. Mr Vestri informed the Committee that all the evidence suggests that the level of benefits and employment will have the biggest impact. He concluded by saying that the Council was doing all that it could to help reduce the impact of poverty across East Lothian.

Councillor Jardine asked if whether the work on the economic strategy included a discussion on a wellbeing economy and meaningful indicators that could assess how we are doing. Mr Vestri replied by saying that when the Top 50 Indicators were adopted it was agreed that the growing our economy ones would be under review. He continued by saying that he believes that more indicators around wellbeing will be introduced to track how we are doing in relation to community wealth building and wellbeing more generally.

Councillor Jardine's final question was on relet times and the impact on homelessness. Mr Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing & Homelessness, answered by saying that clearly there was a correlation and that he would be covering this in more detail in the landlord report.

Councillor Jardine commented that she was pleased that they were moving towards a presentation of the data that enables a better understanding. She continued by stressing the importance of having as much commentary as possible and saying that it may be that consideration is given to the extent in which deadlines are put on targets.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

4. USE AND MANAGEMENT OF GLYPHOSATE ACROSS THE COUNTY

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place. The report was presented by Eamon John, Service Manager – Sport, Countryside and Leisure.

Mr John began by introducing his colleagues. He stated that the purpose of the report was to inform the Committee of the current use of glyphosate, the context for this and the work underway to reduce its use and enhance Nature Networks. Mr John gave a summary of the report and what each section within the report covered. He then passed over to Dr Jennifer Lothian, Team Manager – Strategy, Policy and Development. Dr Lothian advised that they use glyphosate to meet their duties and public expectations. She continued by saying that they take an active role in advisory groups and continually monitor this, looking at what other councils around the country are doing, best practice, research and alternatives. She informed the Committee that alternatives have been trialled, but that glyphosate is more efficient and

cost effective and has been certified safe for use. Dr Lothian highlighted that the EU have just approved the use of glyphosate for the next 10 years and continued by noting that amenity operatives receive specialist training to apply the chemicals. She stated that the use of glyphosate has been reduced and alternative methods such as mulching are used when possible. Dr Lothian noted that opportunities have been taken to reduce the use of glyphosate such as engaging with communities, trialling a device and using wood chips around the base of trees. Dr Lothian concluded by informing the Committee of the Nature Networks Project where wildflowers are planted and grass is left to grow long to enhance these areas for nature with public support.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh about the trialling of a device in East Lothian Mr John responded by saying he was aware of Edinburgh Council's trial and that he would be watching to see the result. He stated that he could not prejudge the result but informed the Committee that he has seen a number of authorities reverse after carrying out trials. Mr John concluded by saying that they will monitor Edinburgh for 2024.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh about the use of yellow rattle Mark McGrath, Depot Manager – Amenity Services, informed the Committee that they had tried yellow rattle in a particular area as it is a parasite to grass but that they now had an infestation of mare's tail. He continued by saying that it was mainly used on motorway verges but that it is now not as important as grass was being allowed to grow longer. He concluded by saying that yellow rattle was a good trial but that it had its downfalls as it allows other invasive plants to grow.

Councillor McIntosh asked if there was any scope to go faster in reducing the use of glyphosate and Dr Lothian replied by saying that they have trialled a lot of other options, such as manual weeding and wood chips around the base of tree. Mr McGrath added that they are balancing this against the public perception of the Council letting things go wild. He stated that they are now starting to see a positive reaction and hopefully this will continue. Mr McGrath continued by advising that the damage to hard surfaces from weeds such as dandelions can be phenomenal and cause trip hazards. Johnn Stevens, Depot Manager – Amenity Services, agreed with the comments made and stated that on public pavements weeds can become dangerous by causing damage and creating trip hazards. In park areas Mr Stevens advised that they are using leaf growth that has come down in parks to feed and mulch the beds and encourage wildlife but that in the public domain the use of chemicals was necessary.

Councillor McIntosh then asked if they would look specifically at reducing the use of glyphosate in Nature Networks and Mr John confirmed that this was the purpose of the Nature Networks along with looking at doing things differently. Jenny Hargreaves, Team Manager - Countryside, drew attention to examples such as ragwort and piri-piri being dug out by hand by volunteers. She continued by saying that where they can they are using alternative methods. Dr Lothian commented that it was about taking people with us, and this involved signage on the ground and getting communications out so people understand.

In response to a question from Councillor Gilbert about the reduction in use of Glyphosate Dr Lothian advised that they previously used three different chemicals but that in 2019 they stopped using two of them. She confirmed that the amount of glyphosate purchased has reduced although she did inform the Committee that there has been a slight increase recently due to wetter, milder summers and the growth of the county. She stated that she would circulate figures to members.

In response to the comment from Dr Lothian about taking the public with us Councillor Forrest asked how this had been done. He commented that 3-4 years ago he was aware of complaints but that this now seemed to have stopped and he questioned what the public reaction had been to the changes. Mr John responded by saying that there are always conflicting views and that some people wanted more done while others wanted the use of glyphosate to stop.

He continued by saying it was important to get the balance right and be selective about where and when they use glyphosate. Mr John continued by saying that the biggest thing was the look and feel of the areas in respect of the wildflower meadows compared to what was there previously. He commented on turning grey areas into green areas and that people are starting to see the difference and be more accepting of the change.

Councillor Jardine asked whether the declaration of the nature emergency was being taken into consideration. Mr John replied by saying that the team had contributed to the narrative of the declaration and are the ones who have protected and enhanced the natural environment across the county. He continued by saying that the Council has a balance of duties and responsibilities and that they take these responsibilities seriously and professionally.

Councillor Jardine stated that she would email other questions.

Councillor McIntosh commented that she had requested the report and was looking forward to Musselburgh being trialled. She continued by saying that she agreed with the use of Glyphosate for invasive plants such as knotweed but that she did think that it should be reduced a bit more. She highlighted that she was sceptical of the research that it is safe to use and that a new court case had opened up in the US. She commented that she understood about the public perception and taking the public with you and noted the wildflower areas. She concluded by saying that she wanted it put on record that she wanted the Council to be more proactive with this.

Mr John highlighted for the sake of clarity that the product in the US mentioned by Councillor McIntosh was a different product to that used in the UK.

Councillor Jardine stated that she had enjoyed the report and that the team had done a phenomenal job in exploring the area. She further stated that she was heartened to hear about the effort, research and consideration being put in.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

5. HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report was submitted and presented by Fiona Wilson, Chief Officer, East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership.

Ms Wilson started by stating that this report had been requested by the PPRC and that the purpose was to list the proposed performance indicators for future reporting and provide contextual information. She asked that members approve the proposed indicators and note performance to date. Ms Wilson continued by saying that the Annual Performance Report 2022/23 is reported to the IJB (Integrated Joint Board) meeting in June and that they are keen to provide future reports to the PPRC to provide details on the performance of services. She continued by detailing other reports which she stated could be brought to PPRC as required either as a summary or in full. Ms Wilson concluded by drawing attention to appendix 1 which shows the requested performance report and includes the new performance indicators.

In response to questions which Councillor Jardine had sent through earlier Ms Wilson stated that the transformation programme looked at the detail around care at home through the change board meeting. She continued by commenting that internal care at home services are more expensive but that most service is provided through external providers, although lately there has been an increase in internal provision. She continued by saying that they are looking at early intervention and how to get to people before more services are needed and they are working with public health and community partners. Ms Wilson then picked up on hospital flow

and informed the Committee that they are ready for winter but are expecting it to be a difficult time. She advised that they are getting into the detail of how many people are in acute hospitals every day and that they try to work within the bed base and are below it at present. East Lothian plays a part in this along with Midlothian and Edinburgh and is currently one of the top performers and in a really strong position. She continued by saying that she could see more decisions coming to the IJB to see if something different could be done. The Carers Strategy was commented on by Ms Wilson who advised that it contained a support programme to provide support to unpaid carers. Ms Wilson highlighted that she wanted to acknowledge the hard work of Claire Goodwin, Performance and Improvement Manager, and Laura Kerr, General Manager Planning and Performance.

In response to Councillor Jardine asking if Ms Goodwin or Ms Kerr wanted to comment Ms Goodwin stated that the Carers Strategy was recently approved and that there is opportunity to look at how impact is measured for individuals. She also advised that they may have to make changes as they get into the detail of how the strategy will be delivered.

In response to questions from Councillor Jardine about the comparison to the wider area and the ability to get core services Ms Wilson stated that they pick up on it every day. She continued by saying that it was about knowing the detail and that they are very confident that do, including knowing where people are. Ms Wilson stated that they are in a position where they can challenge to make sure that they don't get lost broadly where others are not performing well. She concluded by saying that this is being tested all the time.

Councillor Jardine welcomed the report and the speed at which queries were responded to. She stated that she was pleased to hear that in regard to winter pressures they are as well prepared as possible.

Decision

The Committee agreed to approve the new indicators unanimously.

6. ROADS ASSET MANAGEMENT- ANNUAL STATUS AND OPTIONS REPORT 2023

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place. The report was presented by Alan Stubbs, Service Manager for Roads.

Mr Stubbs began by advising that the purpose of the report was to present a summary of the road's asset status 2022/23. He continued by going through the details in the report including the options available. The assets and the recommendations in the reports were then detailed by Mr Stubbs. Carriageways, the recommendation is for option 4 improvement and an increase in investment. Footways, the recommendation is for option 4 minimising deterioration and an increase in investment. Street lighting, the recommendation is for option 3 for column renewal and option 2 for luminaire replacement with Mr Stubbs noting that of the 18,623 lighting columns 32% have exceeded their expected service life. Traffic management systems, the recommendation is for option 1 current level of investment with equipment within its' service life. Electric vehicle charging points, there is no requirement for investment this year. Road structures, the recommendation is for option 1 current level of investment. In summary Mr Stubbs stated that the recommendation for total annual capital investment within the road network should be 10.6 million, broken down as detailed in the report. Mr Stubbs concluded by highlighting that any additional drainage, signage upgrades or major damage to roads due to extreme weather are funded from the 10.6 million.

Councillor Menzies asked whether income from paid street parking, if this began in East Lothian, would reduce the need for this budget with income coming from elsewhere. Mr Stubbs replied by saying he could not answer the question and would need to take it offline. Mr Reid

stated that the income from street parking charges could be used and invested in local networks, but it would depend on the budget setting process. He continued by advising that whether budgets are changed will also depend on the budget setting process.

Councillor Gilbert commented that budgets had been set but had not taken account of damage caused by unexpected events. He asked what the extra costs were for last year, especially in relation to the roads network. Mr Stubbs agreed he could take that offline and get costs. He added that the report looked at capital costs and not revenue. He continued that some of the costs due to severe weather will be revenue costs.

Council Jardine stated that she would send questions through. She also stated for clarity that the decision around the recommendations in the report will be picked up under budget papers.

Ms Fortune advised that it would be up to Council to determine and set budgets when budget proposals are considered in February.

Councillor Jardine acknowledged the work that had gone into the report.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

7. LANDLORD PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place. The report was presented by James Coutts, Service Manager – Community Housing & Homelessness.

Mr Coutts began by advising that the report provided an update to members on performance indicators and informed the Committee that benchmarking information was provided in appendix 1. Mr Coutts stated that the production of the Landlord's Performance Report was a requirement of the Social Housing Charter. He continued by highlighting that East Lothian Council was seen as an example of good practice in producing the report in consultation with tenants, this report being produced in conjunction with the East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel. Mr Coutts commented on information in the report including that East Lothian Council had the highest percentage rent increase among its' peer group, but that rent collection was strong. Void rent loss and relet times continue to be challenging, tenancy sustainability levels are good and there has been an improvement in repair response times. He also advised that in areas of challenge such as void turnaround times there is significant development work ongoing.

In response to questions from Councillor Yorkston Mr Coutts informed the Committee that the void rent loss in the report included voids already in the system and that the void re let times only looked at voids that have been turned around. He stated that void rent loss was higher than they liked but that it was better than the average. Mr Coutts added that there have been issues with staff vacancies and absences as well as other issues associated with the pandemic, but these have largely been addressed. A backlog team has been created to deal with the long-term voids and they have developed a framework to find out where the pressure points are to enable them to intervene. He commented that they are not well served by the current housing management system and that they are looking to replace this as it can create challenges. Mr Coutts concluded by stating that they are having regular monitoring meetings to increase scrutiny in these areas.

Councillor Menzies asked about the reasons for the long-term voids and Mr Coutts replied by saying that the reasons are varied, including properties needing structural work or major adaptations and those which are returned in an unacceptable condition. He continued by

saying that the demand for over large properties also needed to be considered and whether properties could be looked at for extension.

Councillor Menzies then asked if teams are in place to work together. Mr Coutts stated that the team has made significant inroads and that kitchen and bathrooms are now programmed in for replacement. He added that it was much slicker but advised that the major voids team dealing with the backlog was new and needed time to settle in. Wendy McGuire, Head of Housing, added that they are monitoring this very closely and that they will look at the new process and review it if it is not performing. She concluded by saying that there had been significant improvement.

Councillor Jardine stated that she would forward questions and asked if the Tenants Scrutiny Reports will come to the Committee in the future. Mr Coutts replied that he was more than happy to bring the reports to the Committee. Councillor Jardine concluded by commenting that she was disappointed that they could not give much time to the report.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

8. HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place. The report was presented by Nicola Sandford, Team Manager - Homelessness.

Ms Sandford began by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to present the report. She stated that this is the first formal report and asked for clarity from members on whether the report was what was expected and met the needs of PPRC. Ms Sandford went through the report advising that it showed trends in last 7 years and covered 13 key themes. Ms Sandford advised that there has been an increase in homelessness applications, a low level of intentionally homeless decisions and that 2022-23 saw the longest period to discharge duty in over a decade. She continued by advising that the Council continued to breach the order on the use of unsuitable accommodation and highlighted that there had been a reduction in the number in temporary accommodation and that the focus is on the number and time spent in temporary accommodation. Ms Sandford advised that they are focussed on putting measures in place to mitigate the pressures on the service.

Ms Sandford referred to the question asked earlier about the number of homelessness cases and confirmed that there had been 203 applications and the corresponding figure was 167 homelessness assessments. Ms Sandford explained that the disparity in the figures was due to some households not engaging with the service, resolving the issues, losing contact and the result of report timing.

Councillor Jardine informed the Committee that Councillor Menzies had left the meeting but had emailed questions that she would like to have asked.

In response to a question from Councillor Yorkston Ms Sandford stated that generally in excess of 80% of assessments were carried out within 28 days. She further explained that there were factors which were out of their control such as medical assessments being needed or not receiving basic information from households within the 28 days. Ms Sandford continued by saying that going forward she would like to think 85-90% would be assessed within the 28 days but that it was unlikely this would be higher due to the factors out of their control.

In response to a further question from Councillor Yorkston about the breaches and the impact of being fully compliant Ms Sanford informed the Committee that this would require around

150 suitable properties being available. Ms Sandford advised that would mean that they would be meeting their statutory duties and that the regulators would be happy. She concluded by saying that there would be a positive impact on the homelessness budget but that it would negatively impact on the number of homes available for let.

Councillor Forrest asked what impact was being seen as a result of the changes to local connection and the refugee and asylum seekers policy agenda. Ms Sandford stated that the change to local connection came in in October 21 and there had been very little impact until the late summer of this year, then the impact had become significant. She commented in particular about the number of applicants who have live applications with the City of Edinburgh Council. She advised that the change was seen overnight and that this was linked to the housing emergency and the policy agenda on refugee and asylum seekers. She informed the Committee that the government had announced a refusals policy which aims to move Ukrain households out of hotels and into temporary accommodation. Edinburgh are now over capacity and have on occasion moved people out of Scotland. Ms Sandford advised that the clients are now approaching East Lothian Council as they are not happy with the accommodation provided by Edinburgh. The Committee was informed by Ms Sandford that in some cases Edinburgh City Council tenants are presenting as homeless on whatever basis they could.

Ms McGuire highlighted that the introduction of the change to local connection came in in November 22 and not October 21. She continued by saying that Ms Sandford was correct and the refugee situation had increased pressure, and that this was an issue in south east Scotland and not just East Lothian. She concluded by saying that they are trying to find a collective way to respond and that it was a topic of focussed conversations.

Councillor Jardine stated that she would forward questions and commented that she would like to focus on the human factor of homelessness and not just the figures and that this was also in relation to the staff who manage the service.

Councillor Jardine commented on the increase in rough sleepers and asked about the impact on staff and applicants. In response Ms Sandford stated that these are generally quite chaotic people who have been through the homeless process before and are aware of the services but that due to their chaotic nature little can be done except put in support when a tenancy is given to try and sustain it. She continued by saying that she would like to flag that there was concern around the difficulty in sourcing emergency accommodation. Ms Sandford concluded by saying that there was also significant concern around the wellbeing of staff due to having zero accommodation available at times.

In response to questions from Councillor Jardine around the wider housing strategy Ms Sandford responded by saying that data would be pulled together to inform a housing need and demand assessment to look at what they go forward with in the future. Ms McGuire added that the housing supply target was under review and that it was critical to ensure that they provide the right mix of housing in the right areas.

Councillor Jardine asked about the void figures and the impact of this on homelessness figures. Ms McGuire responded by saying that there was no doubt that the voids were having an impact but that even if all the voids were turned around it would not meet the demand.

Ms McGuire commented that this was a really important paper and that there is no doubt that there is a housing crisis but that the team are working really well. She also stated that it was not just having an impact on housing it impacted on other areas such as education and crime. Ms McGuire advised that the regulator is coming in in mid January and the intention is to have a briefing session for members after the regulators visit to allow further thought on what indicators are wanted in future.

Councillor McIntosh gave thanks for the report and agreed with Councillor Jardine's earlier comments about this being about people and not figures. She continued by saying that long housing lists and the housing crisis were not down to refugees.

Councillor Bennett gave thanks for the report and stated that there is no doubt we are in a housing crisis and agreed with Councillor McIntosh's comments that it was not the fault of refugees. He gave thanks to the housing team for their unwavering dedication to reduce homelessness.

Ms Sandford informed the Committee that they have not had any homeless applications from Ukrain households as they have had a preventative approach. Over 50 Ukrain households have been housed in private lets and a number are now living independently. Ms Sandford stated that she would like to clarify that the homelessness figures do not reflect refugees in any way.

Councillor Jardine commended the team for their work and referred to Ms Sandford's question at the start of her presentation about the format of the report and stated that what was presented was excellent but that they needed to get underneath it and that the report needed a bit more around context. Councillor Jardine continued by saying that the briefing mentioned by Ms McGuire was useful. Councillor Jardine asked if Ms Sandford was happy there had been sufficient feedback. Ms Sandford responded by saying that the next report would be more of an action plan.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

9. WORK PROGRAMME – SESSION 2023/24

Councillor Jardine requested a follow up from Ms McGuire and Ms Sandford to be added to the programme to look at the changes to the voids management approach and the impact of this.

Councillor Findlay requested a report on the impact of coastal car parking systems is included in the programme.

Lesley Brown, Executive Director for Education and Children's Services agreed that both items be taken forward.

Councillor Jardine made reference to an item in previous minutes and requested that how action points are taken forward be looked at to see how their own performance is managed.

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