



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 07 MARCH 2024
VIA A DIGITAL MEETING FACILITY

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L Jardine, Convener
Councillor R Bennett
Councillor J Findlay
Councillor C Yorkston

Councillor N Gilbert, Depute Convener
Councillor D Collins
Councillor S McIntosh

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor T Trotter

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
Ms A Cameron, Service Manager – Early Years & Childcare
Mr K Dingwall, Service Manager, Planning
Ms E Dunnet, Head of Finance
Ms S Fortune, Executive Director, Council Resources
Mr C Grilli, Head of Governance
Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms M Patterson, Chief Executive
Mr T Reid, Head of Infrastructure
Ms N Sandford, Team Manager, Homelessness
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities
Mr G Stewart, Policy Officer
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Policy, Improvement and Partnerships

Clerk:

Ms L Gillie

Apologies:

Councillor L-A Menzies

Declarations of Interest:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – PPRC, 14 December 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Review Committee of 14 December 2024 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 Q3 2023/24. Gary Stewart, Policy Officer, presented the report and provided a brief overview in relation to the October – December timeframe.

Mr Stewart advised that Appendix 1 gave a full list of the performance indicators and provided commentary. He advised that the number of new homelessness cases had reduced, although were higher when compared to last year, and that the number of days to rehouse had increased. Sport and pool attendances were also highlighted with indoor facility attendances increasing while pool visits were down. Mr Stewart advised that a new recording system had been implemented last year and a detailed analysis of the figures was planned. He also advised that economic and seasonal factors could be affecting attendance. Housing benefit processing times were highlighted with the number of days taken to process new claims being on target and changes in circumstances having improved. Mr Stewart commented that the number of invoices paid on time had improved and that the Purchase to Pay project aims to make further improvements. Mr Stewart also noted that council tax collection is below target while business rates collection is much higher than last year and rent arrears have reduced but show an increase in comparison to Q3 last year. Mr Stewart stated that the financial gains indicator has seen 642 new clients being supported this year. This service is being promoted in a number of ways, such as through Council networks and the Cost of Living Booklet. In conclusion Mr Stewart advised that the Planning indicators will be reported every 6 months and updated in Q4 alongside the set of new Health and Social Care indicators.

In response to questions from Councillor Yorkston Mr Reid, Head of Infrastructure, advised that there had been an increase in fly tipping overall from last year. He stated that this was partly down to better recording but also that neighbouring councils had introduced different ways of managing waste and costs had gone up. He advised that these new ways of recording will continue. Mr Reid informed the Committee that Anti-Social Behaviour Wardens go through fly tipping waste and if addresses are found then prosecutions do take place. He informed the Committee that they had a robust system and highlighted that it is usually not domestic waste but businesses working illegally. Mr Reid further advised that they are working on a system where vans entering sites to dump rubbish will need to be booked in and postcodes will be checked. At present they are carrying out a physical check at sites.

Councillor Yorkston asked about the rent advice surgeries and whether these were available across the whole area. Ellie Dunnet, Head of Finance, responded by advising that the team ensured there were opportunities across the whole county and that these were targeted where they were most needed. Ms Dunnet offered to get more detailed information on what was available in Councillor Yorkston's ward.

In response to a question from Councillor McIntosh on whether budget cuts will impact on the work around fly tipping Mr Reid advised that Sharon Saunders, Head of Communities, was not currently logged into the meeting. He commented that he was not sure of the amendments in the service area but stated that he had not noticed a reduction in support.

Councillor Findlay asked about food standards inspections and when the new system would be online. Councillor Jardine replied by stating that Ms Saunders was not currently logged into the meeting but asked for a note to be taken so that a response could be provided.

In response to questions from Councillor Jardine about the initiatives that are being trialled for homelessness and the sustainability of allocations to homeless households Nicola Sandford, Team Manager, Homelessness, stated that she was pleased with the new ways of working and the progress over the last 3 months. She advised that people are going through the system quicker than previously and that the percentage of homeless allocations had increased. This was the result of several factors including new builds from registered social landlords and tenancy conversions. Ms Sandford also informed the committee that they are potentially exploring a pilot scheme for single person households. She noted that they had implemented different ways of working across the team and that this had reduced the number of live homelessness households. Ms Sandford did not have the figures for sustaining homelessness tenancies but stated that they had a low level of repeat homelessness. She concluded by saying that East Lothian Council had one of the highest levels of sustainability in Scotland and a good record of working with challenging households. Councillor Jardine suggested that sustainability be included in the next update report on homelessness.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about the target for street lighting and traffic lights Mr Reid replied by advising that the delay with traffic lights was due to supplier problems and parts taking longer but that he was not aware of an issue with street lighting. He commented that he would be happy to pick this up offline. Gary Stewart, Policy Officer advised that the targets are local targets and commented that a risk-based approach had been discussed. Mr Reid stated that street lighting had a schedule of repairs in place and that he had less concerns around this.

Councillor Yorkston stated that he was aware of an issue in Prestonpans but believed that this was due to Scottish Power and not the Council. Mr Reid advised that work by Scottish Power did take longer and it was dependant on the urgency and risk factor but stated that this was not included in the recorded figures.

In response to questions from Councillor Jardine about street lighting reported through housing Mr Reid advised that this was not included in the figures. He further advised that he did not have the figure for the percentage of street lighting in housing rather than infrastructure but that he would provide the figure to the Committee.

Ms Saunders joined the meeting and Councillor Jardine gave Councillor Findlay the opportunity to ask his earlier question. Ms Saunders replied by stating that they are targeting the more high-risk areas for food standard inspections within resources and the capacity that they have. She further advised that the figure could be updated and that she would take this offline.

Councillor Jardine asked about the economic figures included in the indicators and Mr Stewart stated that these figures are reported on a 6 monthly basis.

Councillor Jardine asked about the jobs that are being created by start-ups and Sarah Fortune, Executive Director Council Resources, informed the Committee that she did not have that information but that she would ask Jamie Baker, Service Manager Economic Development, to provide an update to the committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about how the financial gains service is being promoted Ms Dunnet advised that the key method was through the Cost of Living Booklet. She also commented that health and social care and community groups were being made aware of the service and that teams such as social work had a significant role.

Councillor Jardine thanked Officers for the commentary with the report stating that this is what made it meaningful.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

3. POVERTY AND EQUALITY INDICATORS

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 advised that this report was a follow up to the September report. He commented that this was still a work in progress but that he hoped it showed progress. Mr Vestri advised that the report was split into 4 sections and said that where possible they were trying to provide more detailed analysis of protected characteristics. He is hopeful the next report will be ready for PPRC in June. He continued by highlighting the percentage of children in households with less than 60% of median net income where the figures are from 2022. This has increased but is below the Scottish average. Mr Vestri also commented on how citizens are managing financially with the figures taken from the 2021 residents survey. Updated figures will be reported in June for the indicators on closing the poverty related income gap. The figure for employees of the Council saying it was a great place to work was noted with Mr Vestri advising that the figures from the next staff survey may be available for June. Mr Vestri commented that the figure for being below the living wage was above the Scottish average but that this was taken from a national survey, and it may just be a quirk of the statistics. He also commented that hospitality and care work were typically low wage employment and that this may contribute. Mr Vestri advised on a new indicator on life expectancy and said that more detailed figures would follow in June possibly on a ward level. For the indicators on domestic abuse, and hate crime reported to the police Mr Vestri stated that he hoped to have up to date figures for the June meeting. Finally Mr Vestri highlighted the CAB service outcomes.

Mr Reid replied to questions from Councillor McIntosh about the bus routes and the community bus fund by stating that it had been a phenomenal achievement to maintain the bus routes and that the main reason for not increasing was the economic challenges faced. He continued by advising that this is a significant budget every year and it is impossible to increase or develop the services in the current climate. Mr Reid informed the Committee that he would check with the team about the community bus and provide the information to them offline.

Councillor McIntosh queried the fuel poverty data which was from 2017-2019 and Mr Vestri advised that this was from national sources. He further advised that he would check the Local Housing Strategy to see if more up to date data was available.

Councillor McIntosh noted that a food pantry had opened in Musselburgh and that she believed that this was the case in other wards, she questioned whether the food bank referral numbers reducing was due to this extra provision. Mr Vestri advised that they were looking at this and that he would try to get more detailed information for committee.

Councillor Findlay asked about the managing financially indicator and queried what was being done to encourage people who were more disadvantaged to respond to the survey. Mr Vestri explained that they had increased the sample size in areas of deprivation and that the sample represented the whole area. Mr Vestri also informed the committee that of 16,000 surveys there had been 3,500 responses.

In response to questions about employment initiatives from Councillor Yorkston Mr Vestri replied by saying that the target had been set several years ago. Since the target was set the number of programmes and activities has increased, including apprenticeship schemes. Mr Vestri stated they have performed better and that the target will need to be reviewed upwards.

In response to a question from Councillor Yorkston on what the figures in growing our people mean Ms McDowell explained that the poverty related attainment gap is the gap between the performance of the most and the least disadvantaged children. They use the Scottish index of

multiple deprivation and quintiles are used as measurement of the attainment, quintile 1 being the most deprived and quintile 5 being the least. Ms McDowell pointed out that they had an ambitious target and that there is improvement in the figures. She advised that they would be able to provide more detail at the Education Committee. Councillor Yorkston asked whether the figures from 2022 were during Covid when grades were assessed in school and Ms McDowell confirmed this and said that this did make comparison problematic. She continued by saying that they had been allowed to set the next set of stretch aims on a 3-year basis to allow time to measure the gap accurately.

Councillor Yorkston asked about the gross weekly pay figures and asked whether females being paid less was due to nature of employment. Mr Vestri responded by agreeing that this was largely due to the nature of the employment as hospitality, care and retail work are generally lower paid.

Councillor McIntosh asked if it would be possible if the reporting on raising attainment could be over a 3-year average as the statistics can fluctuate depending on the number within the quintiles. Nicola McDowell, Head of Education, advised that they have figures over a 5-year period and that the stretch aims are set over 3 years as a requirement of Scottish Government.

In response to a question from Councillor Gilbert about school exclusions and there being no data available Ms McDowell advised that indications are that the rate is falling and that figures will be brought to the meeting in June.

Councillor Jardine questioned what the national average was for Indicator 7 (people of working age in employment) and Mr Vestri replied by stating that the figure was 80.

Mr Vestri replied to a question from Councillor Jardine about the Health and Social Care indicators by explaining that the Health and Social Care Partnership was still working on them. He was hopeful that they would be brought to the meeting in June.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about indicator P1, percentage of workless households, Mr Vestri replied by saying that they would have to interrogate this in more detail. He continued by saying that it may be removed as an indicator if it was felt it was not telling us anything about poverty.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine about how the CAB data could be used to show any geographical change Mr Vestri replied by saying that they do get the data broken down geographically and that in future they could provide the geographic detail.

Councillor Jardine asked if the 1140 hours policy was alleviating poverty whether it could be included in the indicators. Mr Vestri advised that he would work with Ms McDowell to look at this and that it may be possible to break this down by geographic area.

Councillor McIntosh commented that the first three indicators were not within their control. She continued by saying that they do have direct control over some other indicators and thanked everyone for the work that went into the report.

Councillor Jardine commented that it was an essential part of scrutiny committees to look at poverty and that it was down to devolved and local government to maximise the situation of those with the least.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

4. EXPANSION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE TO 1140 HOURS

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services. The report was presented by Nicola McDowell, Head of Education.

Ms McDowell began by advising that the report was to provide an update to PPRC. She continued by saying that since August 2021 there has been a statutory duty to provide 1140 hours to all eligible children from 3 years of age and from 2 years of age for those whose families meet the eligibility criteria. Ms McDowell detailed the benefits of early learning for children and their families. Ms McDowell explained that appendix A1 included the range of options and models that were provided and that they were responsible for ensuring that all providers met the National Standards. She further explained that there were no catchment areas for the 1140 hours and that it was not always possible to provide a chosen place. Ms McDowell commented that they continue to consider funded providers to join to provide the 1140 hours. She informed the committee that funding from Scottish Government has reduced since 2012 and that they need to make the best use of funding. She continued by saying that they are required to consult every 2 years and that this will inform changes to service delivery, but that it must be within budget. Ms McDowell concluded by informing the committee that Alison Cameron, Service Manager – Early Years and Childcare, was also present to assist in answering questions.

Councillor Findlay asked if it was known what percentage of children attend council funded settings as opposed to private. Ms McDowell replied by saying that she did not have that figure. Ms Cameron added that she felt it would be good to capture that figure and advised that she would send on the information once she had it.

Councillor Yorkston asked about families that had been impacted by there being no catchment area and Ms McDowell advised that there was no accurate figure. She commented that it was difficult as some families had a split placement as this was more convenient for them and that it may not be possible to get an accurate figure. She stated that the aspiration of 1140 was that it was provided where most convenient for families.

Councillor Gilbert asked whether families having access to their own transport was taken into consideration and Ms McDowell replied that this was not considered but they do support families as much as they can. Ms Cameron added that the application form asked for 3 choices of placement and that they try to give the first choice. She continued by saying that they use the expertise of the team to provide a personal service speaking with families individually to discuss any barriers.

In response to a question from Councillor Gilbert about the split between East Lothian Council facilities and other providers Ms Cameron advised that this is data that could be pulled together and provided. Looking at the specific entitlement and uptake and how many children are blending to meet the needs of families.

Councillor McIntosh asked about the comments from families about the options provided and whether it is known why places are not fully utilised. Ms McDowell replied by saying that the consultation was more about what was not wanted. Ms Cameron added that the results of the consultation are about to be published. Ms Cameron further commented on how to marry the desires of communities within the budget and assets that are available. She continued by saying that they try to be innovative and are looking at floor space and whether it is being maximised. She concluded by saying that they welcome feedback from families.

Councillor McIntosh asked what the impact of the funding being no longer ringfenced from next year would be and Ms McDowell replied by saying they work closely with colleagues in finance and that they would continue to work within the funding to provide the 1140 hours.

In response to a question from Councillor Jardine on engagement with families Ms McDowell informed the committee that the information on birth rates was used for the roll call for schools

and fed into the roll projections for local areas. The figures are used by early learning childcare and colleagues in primary and secondary education.

Following a question from Councillor Jardine Ms McDowell stated that she would usually do an impact assessment for a paper seeking approval, and not for a paper for noting only. Ms McDowell said she was happy to provide further information on how equalities are taken into consideration in 1140 hours planning.

Councillor McIntosh commented that this was an important topic and stated that taking care of young people benefited everyone. She thanked officers for the work that had gone into the report and acknowledged how important partner providers were in the provision of wrap around care.

Councillor Jardine echoed Councillor McIntosh's comments and stated that 1140 hours was a step in the right direction. She commented in particular about the lack of catchment area but said she understood the need for flexibility for families. She questioned whether it would be useful to have an update report on some of the nuanced elements of the provision.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

5. WORK PROGRAMME – SESSION 2023/24

Councillor Jardine advised that the Top 50 Annual indicators and the Customer Feedback Report were on the programme for June.

Mr Vestri commented that the Local Government Benchmarking Framework report will be put into the Members Library and then a decision can be made on whether this is sufficient or whether it will be brought to the June meeting.

Councillor Jardine then highlighted a couple of reports still be scheduled, the Homeless Update and the Impact of Coastal Car Parking Charges. She also asked that a report on the Process to Record Action Points be looked at as the public should be able to see the answers to questions asked in a public forum. She advised that the Tenancy Scrutiny Report was scheduled for December and requested a further Update on 1140 Hours.

Mr Reid asked for a discussion on the coastal parking report to confirm what was required and it was suggested that a discussion take place between Mr Reid, Councillor Jardine and Councillor Findlay to confirm if it needs to be on the agenda.

Councillor Jardine asked about a report on an update on LDP2 and the spread of locality plans. Keith Dingwall, Service Manager – Planning, provided a verbal update and advised that it is in the early stages with information being gathered and that he was hoping to take a report to April Council. He continued by saying that they had engaged widely with local communities and consulted extensively with children and young people. Mr Dingwall advised that they had held training with groups on how to develop local placement plans and had received 1 draft plan. He has meetings lined up with groups who will be bringing other plans forward. He continued by saying that he could not confirm how many are coming forward but that he would be happy to take this offline. Mr Dingwall further advised that the feedback had been fairly positive and that he hoped Community Councils and groups had found it useful.

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