

MINUTE of MEETING of the PARTNERSHIP AND RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 22 SEPTEMBER 2017.

Present – Councillors Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Chair), Kirsteen Sullivan, Peter Johnston, Charles Kennedy (substitute for Chris Horne), Dave King, George Paul, Damian Timson

Apologies – Councillor Chris Horne

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The Partnership and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel approved the minute of its meeting held on 23 August 2017. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

3. COMPLAINT PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/17

A report had been circulated by the Depute Chief Executive examining the council's complaint annual report 2016/17 and providing detailed analysis of council-wide complaints closed during 2016/17.

Tables within the report provided the following information:-

Table 1 Council's Total Complaints Closed per 1,000 Population

Table 2 Complaints Closed by Service

Table 3 Complaints By Category Covering Period 2012/13 – 2016/17

Table 4 Quarter 1-4: 2015/16 and 2016/17 Service Performance Summary

Table 5 2015/16 and 2016/17 Service Upheld/Part-Upheld Complaint Performance

Table 6 Ratio of Complaints to Customer Group (for main generators of complaints)

The Depute Chief Executive concluded that in 2016/17 the council had received 3,414 complaints and this represented an increase on the number of complaints received in 2015/16. The increase was primarily linked to the 126% increase in complaints closed by Operational Services and an increase of 36% by Housing, Customer and Building Services.

The service changes carried out over 2016/17 in Waste Services had led to a range of complaints linked to the 140 litre bin replacement programme, routing changes and the waiting time to provide additional/replacement bins to customers. Operational Services had implemented various corrective actions over the course of 2016/17 to manage the demand that was currently being placed on the service.

The council had shown a year on year improvement in the processing of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and had generally maintained customer satisfaction performance relating to complaint handling. It was noted that the council performance results exceeded the Scottish national average benchmark figures for key SPSO measures.

Finally, it was noted that services would continue to monitor complaints on a regular basis and use this information to develop and improve service delivery.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. Note the corporate and service complaint performance against the standards outlined in the council's complaint handling procedure.
2. Continue to monitor complaint performance and request additional information as required.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

4. PERFORMANCE REPORT FROM THE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A report had been circulated by the Depute Chief Executive examining the current levels of performance for all indicators that supported the council's Corporate Plan and were the responsibility of the Partnership and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel.

Of the 36 performance indicators, 32 were categorised as green, 1 was amber and 3 were categorised as red. The Panel noted that in the appendix to the report, an explanation was provided for each indicator from the services on the performance levels.

The report concluded that the majority of performance indicators which were the responsibility of the Panel were within target.

The Panel was asked to note the performance information and determine if further action or enquiry was necessary for any of the performance indicators in the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

5. WELFARE REFORM: QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT

A report had been circulated by the Head of Finance and Property Services informing the Panel of the recent developments in, and the continuing implications of, the ongoing programme of welfare changes.

The Panel was informed of developments relating to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund.

In relation to Universal Credit, it was noted that the UK wide expansion of UC began in February 2015. Initially this involved the roll-out of the UC 'Live System' which dealt with simple claims usually from new, single, job seekers with no partner, no children, and no complicating factors. The latest UC Official Statistics published by the DWP on 16 August 2017 stated that, as at 13 July 2017, a total of 1427 people in West Lothian were on UC. These were all 'single claimants only'.

The report advised that on 18 July 2017 the Director General of the Universal Credit Programme wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives outlining the updated UC roll-out schedule.

Although UC was a reserved matter, in January 2017 the Scottish Government published its draft Regulations concerning two aspects of the payment of UC which were being devolved:-

- Providing more frequent payments – twice monthly rather than monthly, to assist in budgeting, and:
- Giving the option of paying the Housing Support (rent) element direct to the landlord, to minimise rent arrears.

The Panel was informed that the Scottish Government laid the Regulations in the Scottish parliament on 29 June 2017 to make Universal Credit payments more flexible. The Regulations, which came into force on 4 October 2017, represented the first use of the new devolved social security powers.

The report went on to provide commentary in relation to:-

- The Scotland Act 2016 and the Devolution of Welfare
- Further Welfare Changes
- New Ministerial Team

The Head of Finance and Property Services concluded that, as the welfare changes were rolled out, and as further changes took effect, officers would assess the cumulative effects of these challenges in order to develop and shape work going forward. This would include further analysis of the measures in the Social Security (Scotland) Bill and

engagement with the new Social Security Scotland Agency and with COSLA, and the IRRV, as the practicalities of the proposed changes in Scotland were considered.

The potential challenges resulting from the DWP led reforms, notably the roll-out of UC Full Service, would also be addressed.

The results of this work would continue to be reported to elected members via the PDSP process and relevant action would be proposed by the council and community planning partners to pro-actively address issues arising.

The Panel was asked to note the impacts of the welfare changes in West Lothian and the actions which the council and community planning partners were taking in response.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

6. SICKNESS ABSENCE (1 APRIL 2017 - 30 JUNE 2017)

A report had been circulated by the Head of Corporate Services examining sickness absence rates for the 3 month period from 1 April 2017 to 30 June 2017 and providing an update on the ongoing application of the council's Policy and Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence.

The sickness absence SPI for the full council for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 June 2017 was set out at Appendix 1 to the report, together with the SPI performance indicators for the full years (2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17).

The sickness absence SPI for each individual service area for the period 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2017 was set out at Appendix 2.

The Panel was informed that of the seven council service areas, six had reported sickness absence rates above the council target of 3.6%. Only CEO/Finance and Property Services had reported an absence rate below the Council target of 3.6%.

The report went on to provide details of Long-Term Absence and Disregarded Absences. It also provided an analysis of categories of Absence, highlighting that the most common reason for long term across the council fell within the category of Mental and Behavioural.

The Head of Corporate Services advised that the absence management team with HR Services had continued to work closely with managers across the council, providing advance and guidance on the management of sickness absence and monitoring the application of the Policy and Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence.

The report provided commentary in relation to the Occupational Health Tender, Mentally Healthy Workplace Training, HR Adviser Input and

Employee Health and Wellbeing.

The Head of Corporate Services concluded that the first quarter of 2017/18 had seen an increase in sickness absence rates which was indicative of a rising trend over the previous 3 years although the rise during the equivalent quarter in 2016/17 was less steep and similar to 2015/16 levels.

During the year, nearly 20% of all day lost to sickness absences had been disregarded under the provision introduced with the 2011 policy changes. In 2015/16 disregarded absences accounted for 18% of all sickness absences, however these days lost still counted towards the sickness absence SPI.

The Head of Corporate Services then responded to questions raised by Panel members. She advised that the policy on Sickness Absence would be reviewed and recommendations brought to the Panel by the end of 2017.

The Panel was asked to note the content of the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. HORIZON SCAN

A joint report had been circulated by the Head of Finance and Property Services and the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration providing:-

1. A horizon scan on potential implications following the UK referendum vote to leave the European Union (EU) and a summary of the latest UK economic indicators and announcements.
2. An update on the estimated revenue budget position facing the council as a result of ongoing unavoidable spending pressures and government funding constraints, as well as highlighting the budget model risks and uncertainties.

The Head of Finance and Property Services provided commentary in relation to the following key issues:-

- Debt and Borrowing
- Economic Growth
- Exports and Inward Investment
- Inflation
- Interest Rates
- Unemployment
- House Prices

In relation to West Lothian, it was noted the proportion of West Lothian's

international trade with its EU partners was estimated to be higher than the Scottish level. Economic Development were currently in the process of developing an import/export survey of West Lothian businesses and the results of the survey would be reported in the quarterly update report in December 2017.

Economic implications of the decision to leave the EU remained highly uncertain and would not become clearer for some time. It was almost certain however that a downturn in economic activity within the UK would lead to further public sector expenditure reductions. Officers would continue to monitor key announcements in relation to public spending, interest rates, CPI forecasts and economic risks, in order to assess the likely impact on the council's budget position for 2018/19 to 2022/23.

The report went on to provide details of the Revenue Budget planning scenario and changes to the budget model. The report also noted that there were significant risks and uncertainties associated with the long term financial assumptions underlying the budget model. These were examined within the report.

The Head of Finance and Property Services concluded that the horizon scan provided a high level overview of the latest economic indicators and other announcements likely to have a financial impact on the council and an update on the council's budget model. The UK, Scottish, West Lothian and council position would be reported on a quarterly basis as part of the horizon scanning of factors that could have an impact on the council's medium term financial strategy.

The Head of Finance and Property Services then gave a verbal update in relation to the estimated budget gap. He advised that the budget gap had been updated from £66.1 million to £73.3 million as a result of revised pay assumptions.

It was recommended that the Panel note:

1. The latest potential economic and financial position of the UK and Scotland, and the potential financial implications for West Lothian and the council's future financial planning.
2. The increase in the estimated budget gap to £73.3 million for the period 2018/19 to 2022/23.
3. The significant risks and uncertainties relating to the budget model.

Decision

To note the terms of the report,

8. ELECTRICAL SAFETY POLICY AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

A report had been circulated by the Head of Finance and Property Services attaching a draft Electrical Safety Policy and Electrical Safety Management Plan in relation to the council's statutory obligations in

respect of property assets.

The Panel was informed that the Council had a duty of care to ensure employees and other parties entering premises were not at risk of danger of electric shock, or electric burns, electrical explosion or arcing, or from fire or explosion initiated by electrical energy.

The proposed Electrical Safety Policy and Management Plan had been developed using good practice identified in the Electricity Regulations, HSE guidance, 17 Edition of the IEE regulations and BS7671.

The report provided the following appendices:-

Appendix 1 - Proposed Electrical Safety Policy

Appendix 2 - Electrical Safety Management Plan.

The Construction and Design Manager responded to a question raised by Panel members, explaining what was meant by “skilled person” within the plan.

The Panel was asked to:

1. Note and consider the draft policy and management plan in the appendix to the report which was intended to be submitted to the Council Executive for approval.
2. Note that following approval of the new policy, the management plan would be put in place to support and implement the policy.

Decision

1. To note the report and draft policy.
2. To note that, prior to submission to Council Executive, officers would amend the management plan to clarify what was meant by “skilled person” on page 3 of the plan.

9. PLANNING FRAMEWORK 2018/23

A report had been circulated by the Depute Chief Executive outlining proposals to develop the council's Corporate Plan, as part of a review of the wider planning framework, and in line with the development of the Revenue and Capital Budget Strategies.

The Panel was informed that it was intended that the new Corporate Plan would be developed in line with the findings of the public consultation and the emergent Revenue and Capital Budget Plans. This would conclude with an approved Corporate Plan for the period 2018/23 at the Council budget setting meeting in 2018 and would follow the established corporate and financial planning approach that the council implemented in 2012. The new Corporate Plan would also influence, and be influenced by, the development of future corporate strategies and the new

management planning approach.

The next Corporate Plan would be delivered during a period of transformational change in the council. It was important that the plan reflected the challenge and ambition of the period ahead but also, provided clear direction for all council employees, stakeholders, partners and also, for the public. It was therefore proposed that the Corporate Plan would expand on some of the practicalities of transformation.

The Depute Chief Executive concluded that the council's eight priorities and three enablers provided a strategic framework around which prioritisation of resources and decisions about service provision could be agreed and evaluated.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. Note the proposed approach to review the eight agreed priorities of the Corporate Plan 2013/17
2. Note the proposed approach and timescales for the development of the Corporate Plan 2018/23.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

10. WORKPLAN

A copy of the Workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the Workplan