

MINUTE of MEETING of the SERVICES FOR THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 1ST FLOOR, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, LIVINGSTON, on 20 JANUARY 2015.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Harry Cartmill, Frank Anderson, Dave King (substitute for Lawrence Fitzpatrick), John McGinty, John Muir

Apologies – Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick; Jessie Duncan, Danny Mullen and Alison Kerr (Tenants Panel Representative).

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS, INCLUDING NOTICE OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Panel agreed a suggestion by the Chair that the order of business be changed to allow Agenda Item 21 to be taken immediately following Agenda Item 8.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. MINUTE – 28 OCTOBER 2014

The Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel approved the minute of its meeting held on 28 October 2014. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTE – 18 DECEMBER 2014

The Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel approved the minute of its meeting held on 18 December 2014. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

5. SCRUTINY OF SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services attaching a copy of the Fire and Rescue Service Quarterly Performance Report covering the period April to September 2014.

Area Manager Gary Laing presented the report, advising that within the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for West Lothian 2014-2017, seven objectives for the local Fire and Rescue Service to work towards had been identified for 2014-17. These were:-

Priority 1 – Local Risk Management and Preparedness

- Priority 2 – Reduction of Accidental Dwelling Fires
- Priority 3 – Reduction in Fire Casualties and Fatalities
- Priority 4 – Reduction of Deliberate Fire Setting
- Priority 5 – Reduction of Fires in Non-Domestic Property
- Priority 6 – Reduction in Casualties from Non-Fire Emergencies
- Priority 7 – Reduction of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

The report contained performance information on the six key performance indicators where the service used quantitative data to measure performance.

A number of questions were raised by Panel members and these were dealt with Gary Laing and Stuart Stevens, SFRS. The questions related to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals and, in particular, the number of incidents relating to The Centre, Livingston. The Panel heard that SFRS took a proactive approach and Fire Safety Enforcement Officers worked closely with premises to reduce UFAS incidents. This included discussing technological, procedural and management solutions.

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

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

6. BONFIRE AND FIREWORK PERIOD 2014

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing the Panel with an update on the preventative and operational response activities conducted by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, West Lothian resources during Bonfire and Firework period 2014.

The Panel was informed that, over the 8-day period from 31 October to 7 November 2014, the number of dangerous bonfires dealt with by operational crews had decreased by 28%, when compared to 2013. The number of dangerous bonfire incidents dealt with by operational crews had decreased by 20%, when compared to 2013. There had been 1 report of violence to crews at incidents during the period which had been reported to Police Scotland.

Panel members were asked to note that there had been a continued reduction in emergency calls over the period to bonfires and firework related incidents. In addition, activity on 5 November 2014 had shown a decrease compared to the previous year, continuing a downward trend.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. FUTURES REPORT

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing the Panel with an overview of the key projects the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were currently undertaking.

Local Senior Officer Gary Laing presented a report entitled "Briefing Report on Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Futures Projects". The following appendices were attached to the report:-

- Appendix 1 SFRS Management Structure
- Appendix 2 SFRS Review of Specialist Equipment, Draft Report
- Appendix 3 HM Fire Services Inspectorate, Emergency Medical response and The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Report
- Appendix 4 SFRS Engagement Framework Appendix A and SFRS Engagement Framework Consultation Guidance Appendix B.

Gary Laing amplified aspects of the report and responded to questions raised by Panel members.

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

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

8. SCRUTINY OF POLICE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services updating the Panel on the performance framework which would be used to enable members to scrutinise the work of Police Scotland in West Lothian for the period April to December 2014.

Local Police Commander Gillian Imery presented the report, providing additional information in relation to the seven priorities examined within the report. In addition, Chief Inspector Paul Cameron amplified aspects of the information contained in the report and responded to questions from elected members.

The Panel was asked to note the contents of the report covering the period from April to December 2014.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16 - 2017/18

A report had been circulated by the Depute Chief Executive informing the Panel of the proposed 2015/16 – 2017/18 Housing Capital Programme.

The report recalled that, in January 2013, the council had approved capital resources of £123.545 million for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18 for the housing capital programme. On 11 November 2014, it was reported that progress was being made across all investment areas and SHQS would be met by 31 March 2015. Although effective progress was being made in delivering capital investment in housing stock, slippage of £7.5 million had been noted in the report to Council Executive. Subsequent to the report, further phasing issues had been identified and £9.2 million resources would now be brought forward into 2015/16 to enable delivery of associated works on appropriate projects.

The report before the Panel proposed a housing capital budget of £60.581 million in 2015/16 and Council would be asked to approve this updated investment programme when budgets were next being considered.

The proposed programme for 2015/16 was summarised in the table within the report and individual projects were listed in Appendix 1 and further detail was contained in Appendix 2.

The report went on to examine Capital Resources 2015/16, Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2017/18, Capital Resources 2016/17 to 2017/18 and Governance Issues.

In his conclusion, the Depute Chief Executive advised that the report outlined the Housing Capital programme for 2015/17 to 2017/18, with proposed investment of £144,034 million. Within the three year programme, there was a strong focus on the 1,000 new build council houses programme to deliver affordable homes, to increase the availability of social housing within communities for both existing residents and future generations.

The 2015/16 capital programme consolidated movements reported to Council Executive on 11 November 2014, recognising the requirement to phase projects and expenditure during the programme period. Alongside investment in new housing stock, there would be continued investment in existing council housing and the environment, to improve homes, amenity and address energy efficiency.

As the council moved forward beyond 2014/15 it would maintain quality standards and further invest in the suitability and sufficiency of its housing stock to improve the environment within communities and meet the needs of existing and future tenants across West Lothian. The comments of the Panel would be reported to West Lothian Council when the council next met to set the budget.

The Panel was invited to note and comment on the proposed 2015/16 – 2017/18 Housing Capital Programme and related funding as detailed in the report.

In response to a question raised, Colin Miller provided information

concerning four projects contributing to the slippage figure reported. He undertook to provide Councillor Anderson with further information on slippage of the capital programme.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

10. RENT ARREARS UPDATE

Elaine Byrne, Performance and Change Manager, gave a presentation on the rent arrears levels to 20 January 2015.

The presentation contained the following tables:-

- Year on Year Comparison figures for the current period, together with comparative figures for the periods 2012/13 and 2013/14.
- Arrears Caseload
- Banded Arrears Value and Number

Elaine highlighted that there had been a caseload reduction of 1,000 in 12 months and 'serious' cases were down 15% in 12 months.

Questions raised by Panel members were dealt with by the Performance and Change Manager.

Decision

To note the information on the rent arrears levels.

11. REVIEW OF HOUSING REPAIR CATEGORIES

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of the outcome of the recent consultation with tenants regarding the proposed changes to the Housing Repair categories following the Repairs Working Group review.

The report recalled that a paper had been reported to the Panel on 8 April 2014 outlining the review of the housing repair categorisation and performance for 2013/14.

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services reported that the Building Services Repairs Team had carried out a total of 50,739 housing response repairs with 94.76% completed within target timescales for the period of 2013/14 date to council housing stock.

Emergency repairs formed 48% all responsive repairs and Table 1 within the report showed a full breakdown of the repairs by category.

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services proposed the

introduction of a new L2 category, which would be a 5 working day repair, for example, partial loss of heating which might not be an emergency but to wait 15 days would affect the tenants comfort and convenience.

The Repairs Working Group was also proposing to introduce a new L4 category, which would be a 30 working day repair, for example, for programmed repairs, such as external repairs requiring the services of an external contractor for scaffolding or asbestos.

The report went on to explain the consultation process and details of communication with tenants on the arrangements for implementing the changes.

Panel members were asked to note that Housing, Construction and Building Services were committed to the continual improvement and development of services to meet the needs and expectations of customers and the demands of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Decision

To note the results of the tenants consultation regarding the changes to the Housing Repair categories.

12. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMMES FOR SCOTLAND (HEEPS) 2015/16

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of the funding awarded to West Lothian for 2015/16 for home energy efficiency measures in private sector housing.

The report provided details of arrangements for using 2013/14 funding approved by the Council Executive in March 2014.

In relation to the allocation for 2015/16, the Panel was informed that on 12 December 2014, the Scottish Government had confirmed that West Lothian was to receive £1,082,475 in 2015/16 for area-based schemes to tackle fuel poverty and improve the energy efficiency of private sector housing stock. A copy of the letter received from Scottish Government was attached as Appendix 1.

A further £12m was available for councils that were able to show they could spend more than their initial allocation. Details of the bidding process for further allocations of funding would be announced soon. Proposals to bid for a share of the additional funding would be worked up and submitted to Scottish Government.

It was anticipated that details of how the council intended to allocate the HEEPS funding would require to be submitted to Scottish Government around mid February. A tendering process had been completed to secure a managing agent for 2015/16 and the tender returns were currently being assessed. Detailed proposals would require to be approved by Council Executive and details of the proposals would be circulated to Panel

members in advance of Council Executive consider the proposals.

It was recommended that the Panel:-

1. note the allocation of funding of £1,082,475 to West Lothian for 2015/16 under the government's Home Energy Efficiency Programme for Scotland (HEEPS);
2. note that a further £12m was available to councils that were able to show they could spend more than their initial allocation and that there would be an opportunity for the council to bid for a share of this additional funding later in the year; and
3. note that a managing agent for the HEEPS programme for 2015/16 would soon be appointed by the council and the successful agent would prepare the detailed proposals to be submitted to Scottish Government.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

13. PROGRESS ON COMMUNITY SAFETY

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel on the strategic development of Community Safety in West Lothian and other local and national developments. In addition, the report included performance information from the Community Safety Unit on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and the Out of Hours Noise Nuisance Team from July to September 2014.

Detailed information was provided in relation to the following activities:-

- Best Bar None
- Keeping Children Safe
- Communication
- No Knives Better Lives
- Youth Volunteers
- Drink Drive Limit
- Performance Information

Statistical returns from WLC Safer Neighbourhood Team and Out of Hours Noise Nuisance Team was attached as Appendix A to the report.

The Panel was asked to note the developments of partnership working in the field of community safety and to note the performance information detailed for the Safer Neighbourhood Team and the Noise Nuisance Team.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

14. HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services updating the Panel on performance against the Housing Asset Management Plan.

The Panel was informed that the Housing Asset Management Plan 2013/14 to 2017/18 highlighted a number of performance indicators for each of the measures and these were outlined in Appendix 1 together with the respective results. One of the key indicators in Housing condition was the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). During 2013/14, the percentage of the council housing stock complying with the SHQS had increased from 85.5% to 94.7%.

The report provided a detailed list of projects and planned improvements undertaken during 2013/14.

Within the approved Housing Asset Management Plan 2013/14 to 2017/18, there were a number of activity themes that were being progressed to improve the performance of the council's housing assets. These were outlined within Appendix 2 together with the current position.

It was recommended that the Panel note:-

1. the overall performance of Housing Assets for 2013/14 as set out in the report; and
2. the projects delivered during 2013/14 that contributed to the delivery of the Housing Asset Management Plan.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

15. SCOTTISH HOUSING BEST VALUE NETWORK - BENCHMARKING

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of the results of the benchmarking exercise conducted with other local authority landlords through the Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN).

The Panel was informed that a fully copy of the presentation slides from SHBVN was available on request. A summary of the key benchmarking results was provided in the report under the following headings:-

- Customer Satisfaction
- Voids
- Arrears
- Repairs
- Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)
- Homelessness
- Tenancy Sustainment

- Allocations
- Value for Money

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services concluded that the results from the most recent SHBVN benchmarking exercise provided further evidence that the Council was a high performing landlord with many areas of strength recognised. While there were a few areas for improvement, plans were well underway to address these.

The Panel was asked to note the results of most recent benchmarking exercise and the consistently high levels of performance achieved by Housing, Construction and Building Services.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

16. PROPERTY TURNOVER JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2014

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of the property turnover for the quarter July to September 2014.

The report provided the following appendices:-

Appendix 1 – Information on Lets excluding Assisted Moves

Appendix 2 – Assisted Move Lets

Appendix 3 – Total Housing Stock per Area

It was recommended that the Panel note the current levels of activity relating to property turnover for the second quarter of 2014/2015 and in particular to note:

- that there had been a decrease in property lets compared to the same period in the previous year.
- that of the 47 communities in West Lothian, 6 had only 1 mainstream property to let and 16 had none.
- that 58% of lets had been allocated to people who were homes or potentially homeless.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

17. WELFARE REFORM: QUARTERLY UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Finance and Estates informing the Panel of the continuing implications of the ongoing

programme of welfare changes.

The report provided an details of the scale of the financial loss in Scotland and noted that the loss in West Lothian was estimated at £470 per adult of working age.

The report went on to provide an update on Discretionary Housing Payment Fund, Bedroom Tax Legacy Arrears 2013/14, Scottish Welfare Fund, The Smith Commission, and Universal Credit.

It was noted that the ongoing welfare changes presented significant challenges to customers communities and to the council itself.

As the changes took effect, officers were assessing the cumulative effects in order to develop and shape work going forward. The results of the work would continue to be reported to elected members via the PDSP process and relevant action would be proposed by the council and partners to address issues arising.

Appendix 1 to the report was a list of the types of households and individuals affected by the welfare reforms.

It was recommended that the Panel note the impact of the welfare changes in West Lothian and the action which the Council was taking in response.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

18. ANNUAL TENANTS SATISFACTION SURVEY

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services concerning the results of the 2014/15 Annual Tenants Satisfaction Survey.

The Panel was informed that a survey was issued to all 13,000 tenants and 690 responses had been received, achieving a 5.3% response rate, up 164 or 1% on the previous year's figures.

Appendix 1 to the report providing some degree of comparison of the 2014/15 results with previous years and also noted the changes to the question set where appropriate.

It was noted that the results were generally very good, and overall satisfaction levels showed a steady increase from 2013 or where there was decline it was only marginal. Areas showing improvement included overall satisfaction, ease of contacting the council, being kept informed, state of repair of home, satisfaction with local neighbourhood, and satisfaction in services for the rent paid. The service constantly strived to improve service delivery and where the survey had shown slight dips in performance, every effort would be made to address these concerns. For example, the repair service proposed to introduce new categories to help

meet the needs of tenants and carry out customer care training with operatives to improve customer satisfaction. Issues around safety would be taken forward with Community Safety colleagues and partners.

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services concluded that the results from the 2014/15 Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey were to be welcomed with most areas showing high level of satisfaction and increasing from previous years; results. The survey would allow the service to fulfil the tenant satisfaction requirements on the Charter when the Council reported in May 2014.

The Panel was asked to note the results of the survey.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

19. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services examining performance for Housing, Construction and Building Services indicators that were the responsibility of the Services for the Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel.

The Panel noted that, of the nine performance indicators reported, six were categorised as green, three were amber and there were no red. Each indicator in the appendix displayed the latest note which offered an explanation from the service on current performance levels.

The Panel was asked to note current performance levels and actions being taken to address where current performance was below target.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

20. WORK PLAN 2015

A copy of the Workplan had been circulated.

Decision

To note the Workplan.