

MINUTE of MEETING of the SERVICES FOR THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CIVIC CENTRE, LIVINGSTON, on 6 OCTOBER 2015.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Frank Anderson, Harry Cartmill, John McGinty, John Muir

Absent – Councillor Fitzpatrick

In Attendance – Jessie Duncan, Alison Kerr and Danny Mullen (Tenants Panel Representatives)

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair agreed to hear agenda item 20 Scrutiny of Police Performance Framework immediately following agenda item 6 Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Trial.

Observers from the Scottish Police Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. MINUTE

The Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel approved the minute of its meeting held on 26 May 2015. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

4. SCRUTINY OF SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Service providing performance information on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) for the period 1 April 2015 to 30 June 2015.

The report recalled that the service produced a local plan for 2014-17 which had been considered by the Panel and agreed by Council Executive. The plan set out the local fire and rescue priorities and objectives for West Lothian and was a statutory requirement of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The Council Executive had agreed that monitoring of performance against the plan should be reported quarterly to the Panel.

The local plan performance report, which had been provided as an appendix to the report, contained information on the SFRS prevention, protection and operational response activities within the West Lothian

area during the first quarter of 2015/16. The seven objectives for the local Fire and Rescue Service to work towards were outlined in the report and Group Manager David Girrity expanded on various aspects of the information contained in the report.

It was noted that during the reporting period, SFRS had continued to carry out Home Fire Safety visits. The Panel heard that the focus of these visits had been changed to Home Safety visits that would see officers participating in the 1st Through the Door Initiative which would allow them to refer concerns or hazards to partner agencies within hours of their visit. The panel noted that the service also delivered the “Cooksafe” initiative in a number of sheltered housing complexes across West Lothian which would assist residents to stay safe and reduce the carbon footprint of the service making blue light journeys.

Finally, SFRS officers responded to questions raised by Panel members.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

5. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – OUT OF HOSPITAL CARDIAC ARREST TRIAL

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an overview of the participation by the local Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) in an Out of Hours Hospital Cardiac Arrest trial which was due to commence in West Lothian.

The report recalled that in December 2014, officers had advised the Panel that the SFRS was progressing a trial on its involvement in Emergency Medical Response Activities. The report also recalled that in March 2015, the Scottish Government Health Department had launched a national strategy to improve survival rates for patients who experienced Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA).

The report explained that the National Joint Council had introduced a series of medical/health related trials across the United Kingdom and had agreed that trials in Scotland would focus on preventing fatalities linked to cardiac arrests. The SFRS, in conjunction with key stakeholders, had identified 3 areas in Scotland to participate in the trial: Aberdeenshire; Mid Lothian and the Scottish Borders; and West Lothian.

The fire stations selected to take part in the trial in West Lothian were Bathgate, a whole time duty system fire station, and Linlithgow, a retained duty fire station. Personnel involved in the trial were currently receiving specific training on cardiac arrest intervention/treatment techniques. The SFRS was developing procedures for crews to follow and a Memorandum of Understanding was being developed between SFRS and the Scottish Ambulance Service to clarify mobilising criteria and interagency working protocols.

The trial would commence on 16th October and would run for

approximately 6 months. Periodic reviews would be carried out during that period and reported back to the Panel.

In response to a question, the Panel heard of the ongoing work of the British Heart Foundation and the Ambulance Service to map defibrillators across the country and of the willingness of the SFRS to provide defibrillator training to communities.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

6. SCRUTINY OF POLICE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an update on the performance framework used to enable the Panel to scrutinise the work of Police Scotland in West Lothian for the period April–June 2015.

The report recalled that Police Scotland had produced a local plan for 2014-17 which had been considered by the Panel and agreed by Council Executive. The plan set out the local police priorities for West Lothian and was a statutory requirement of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The Council Executive had agreed that monitoring of performance against the plan should be reported quarterly to the Panel.

The scrutiny performance report, which had been provided as an appendix to the report, contained detailed information on seven local police priorities. It also contained performance figures to demonstrate the current position, reasons for targets being met or not and also of the work being carried out to ensure priorities were delivered. Chief Superintendent Imery and Area Commander Cameron then provided members a verbal update, expanding on various aspects of the information contained in the report.

The Panel heard that the new police operational model was to be reviewed following its first 6 months of operation. The Chief Superintendent and Area Commander were disappointed to hear of concerns expressed about 101 response times and police presence locally from Blackburn Community Council.

In response to questions, the Chief Superintendent advised that representatives from the Professional Services Department could be invited to attend a future meeting of the panel to give an overview of police complaints. Further work to improve the format of future police scrutiny reports would be carried out to include a ward by ward analysis of crimes and solvency rates at the foot of each page.

Following recent negative reports arising from the publication of the results of a police staff survey, Chief Superintendent Imery wished to reassure the Panel of Police Scotland's continued commitment to effectively serve local communities.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. RENT ARREARS PRESENTATION

Sarah Kelly, Performance and Change Manager, provided a presentation on rent arrears levels for the period to 30 September 2015.

The Panel noted:-

- Arrears were down £13,000 compared to the same time period year, with arrears back under the 14/15 position, despite a slight increase during the first 6 months of 2015/16
- Arrears caseload had fallen by 1/3rd (2000) since the arrears task group had commenced in October 2013 and more that 320 since the same point in 2014/15
- 59% of tenants had a clear or credit rent account, 19% owed up to £150, 14% owed £150-£500, 5% owed £500-£1000 and 3% owed more than £1000.

The Performance and Change Manager informed members that the Multi Service Task Group would continue with quarterly update reports to be provided to the Panel. Following the application of Discretionary Housing Payment to legacy under-occupancy arrears, cases were moving through the legal stages quicker. Work was currently focussed on year end, although preparatory work for universal credits was underway with a service working group and multi-agency delivery group having been established. The number of claimants initially in receipt of universal credits would be small and officers did not anticipate a major impact in 2015/16. The preparatory work being done would seek to mitigate impact from 2016/17 onwards.

Officers undertook to provide the panel members with information of the banding position of the 502 cases that were progressing through the legal stages.

Decision

To note the terms of the presentation.

8. 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. The report also included performance information from the Community Safety Unit on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and the Out of Hours Noise Nuisance Team for the period April to June 2015.

Appendix 1 to the report showed statistical returns from the Council's Safer Neighbourhood Team and Out of Hours Noise Nuisance Officers.

It was recommended that the Panel note the developments of partnership working in the field of community safety and to note the performance information detailed in the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. WELFARE REFORM: QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT

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 set out the current position in relation to :-

- Discretionary Housing Payment Fund
- Scottish Welfare Fund
- Universal Credit
- Chancellor's Summer Budget and impact on Household Benefit Cap, Housing Support for 18-21 year olds, Benefit/Credit Freeze and Tax Credit Changes
- Smith Commission and Devolution of Welfare

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services concluded that the ongoing welfare changes presented significant challenges to the council's customers, its 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 this 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.

During the discussion, the panel was assured that work was ongoing with Registered Social Landlords to assess the potential impact of housing support reduction for 18-21 year olds.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

10. PROPERTY TURNOVER APRIL TO JUNE 2015

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of the property turnover for the quarter April to June 2015.

Details of all lets and property numbers for the quarter were provided in Appendix 1 and Council Stock figures by Ward were detailed in Appendix 3. Appendix 2 provided details of Assisted Move lets.

The report provided a table showing thirteen communities that had no properties becoming available.

It was recommended that the Panel note the current levels of activity relating to property turnover for the first quarter of 2015/16 and in particular:-

- 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, 8 had only 1 mainstream property to let and 13 had none.
- That 74% of lets had been allocated to people who were homeless or potentially homeless.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

11. HOMELESS PERFORMANCE 2014/15

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services informing the Panel of West Lothian Council's annual Homeless Performance outcomes for 2014/15 compared to the National position as outlined by the Scottish Government in the recent publication 'Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland 2014-15'.

Appendix 1 to the report provided an overview of the Council's Homeless Performance in 2014/15, with comparisons to 2013/14, 2012/13, 2011/12, 2010/11 and the national position.

The report examined the current position in relation to:-

Homeless Applications
 Statutory Assessment Decision
 Homeless Prevention
 Temporary Accommodation
 HL2 Return
 ARC Return
 Final Outcomes of Applications
 Sustainability
 Repeat Applications

The Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services concluded that West Lothian had placed homelessness prevention and sustainable outcomes for homeless applicants at the core of its service. The levelling off in 2014/15 followed significant reductions in previous years as a result

of the work of the prevention team and housing options approach which had been instrumental in allowing the Council to achieve the 2012 target. The Council would continue to work with those in greatest housing need to secure an appropriate temporary and permanent accommodation and thereby ensure the provision of sustainable, settled outcomes for people homeless or threatened with homelessness.

It was recommended that the Panel note the current progress made against the National Outcomes and in particular:

- Performance in the delivery of services for homeless applicants in 2014/15 against the national average set out in Appendix 1.
- Slight increase in homeless applications during 2014/15.
- The significant number of applications from young people and the high number of applications from those who had lost non-secure accommodation due to a breakdown in relationship.
- The council continued to meet its responsibilities as set out in legislation to all who applied for homeless assistance.
- Numbers in temporary accommodation continued to be monitored and of the aim to reduce the length of stay in such accommodation.

In response to a question, the Panel noted the undertaking that had been given by the Council Executive to support families fleeing Syria and of the preparatory work that was underway to ensure support across the range of services that might be required.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

12. NEW BUILD COUNCIL HOUSING UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing the Panel with an update on the 1,000 new build council houses programme.

The report recalled that the council's Corporate Plan 2013 to 2017 committed the council to increasing the number of council houses available for rent through the New Build Council Housing Programme. A full list of the approved sites was provided in the appendix to the report.

The panel noted that contractors had been appointed for all five lots (950 houses) which was a significant milestone in the programme. Lovell Partnership was the successful contractor for Lots 1, 2, 3 and 5 and McTaggart the successful contractor for Lot 4. Tenders would be issued for 9 houses at Bathville and 8 houses at the Former Winchburgh Day Centre before the end of the year.

Developments were underway at West Main Street (Broxburn),

Pumpherstons Old School, Kirkhill (Broxburn), Redhouse (Blackburn) and Glasgow Road (Bathgate). The conversion of an existing property at 43-47 Adelaide Street to six flats had been completed in September 2014.

An overview of the statutory consents was provided on planning permission, building warrants, road construction consents and Scottish Water technical approvals, which were of critical importance to the success of the programme and determining when developments could start on site. It was noted that whilst good progress had been made with obtaining statutory consents, there was concern about progress in obtaining Scottish Water Technical Approvals.

The report then went on to provide an overview of the current position on the transfer of land via the Affordable Housing Policy, the inclusion of Glendevon on the reserve list for the new build programme and an infrastructure update. Finally, the report explained that the financial model for the programme would continue to be updated to reflect changed circumstances and that the programme remained affordable at this stage.

The panel was asked to:

1. Note the progress made on individual site as set out in the appendix to the report.
2. Note that 6 houses had been completed; 371 were under construction; and that all other sites were expected to be started before June 2016.
3. Note that the process of obtaining statutory consents was well underway with 28 planning permissions granted, 4 building warrants granted, 4 road construction consents granted and Scottish Water technical approval for 5 sites.
4. Note that three private sites required to be transferred from the developers, with progress made on all of those transactions.
5. Note the proposal to add a site at Glendevon, Winchburgh, to the reserve list of sites.
6. Note the position on the infrastructure projects required to facilitate parts of the new build programme.
7. Note that based on tender returns received to date and projected costs for remaining phases, the new build programme remained affordable.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

13. CONSULTATION ON A DRAFT STATUTORY CODE OF PRACTICE AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR LETTING AGENTS IN SCOTLAND

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an overview of the Scottish Government consultation on a draft code of practice and training requirements for letting agents in Scotland and providing a proposed response to the consultation.

The report recalled that the government wished to ensure the private rented sector provided good quality homes and management standards given its increasingly important part in the Scottish housing system. Letting agents were key to ensuring the private rented sector was professional and well managed.

The draft Code of Practice produced by the Scottish Government was designed to improve standards, provide good services to landlords and tenants, empower consumers and increase consumer confidence. It drew on existing industry codes of practice and would be vital to the effective regulation of letting agents.

The report went on to provide the panel with full details of the main features of the Code. Information on the complaints system that would be enforced under the Code was also given. The report concluded that the Code should provide improvements to the sector and enable it to function more effectively for both tenants and landlords.

The panel was asked to:

- (i) Note the Scottish Government consultation on a draft statutory code of practice and training requirements for letting agents in Scotland.
- (ii) That the panel endorse the proposed response to the consultation, as set out in the appendix to the report, and refer it to the Council Executive for approval.

Decision

To note the terms of the report and refer the draft response to the Council Executive for agreement.

14. MIXED TENURE ESTATES – FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH PRIVATE OWNERS

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services recalling the current policy for owners in mixed tenure estates where housing capital programme works were being carried out and inviting the panel to endorse altering the policy to ensure appropriate financial arrangements were in place when it was mutually advantageous for work to be jointly undertaken to recover monies from private homeowners.

The report recalled that the policy had last been updated by the Council Executive in December 2012 to address situations where it was

impractical to carry out housing capital programme improvements to adjoining properties without mutual agreement, particularly in the case of roughcasting and roof renewal in four in a block flats. The policy put in place at that time was to offer to carry out works for an owner only where the nature of the proposed works meant that it was technically impossible to exclude adjoining properties. The costs of repairs were recovered from owners rather than the full costs of the improvement. To promote participation, owners were offered the option to make payment on completion of works, or to defer charges until their property was sold, with the council taking a legal security over the property.

The report provided an overview of current experience of the policy. Whilst it was generally working well, with a number of owners agreeing to participate in council contacts and agreeing to pay a share based on the marginal costs or equivalent costs of repair works, there were still some elements which made it difficult for the council to proceed with improvement works to its own houses as follows:

- Some owners remained unwilling to sign up to the council arrangements to have improvement works carried out even when offered at a subsidised rate which could make it impossible to do comprehensive work to benefit council properties.
- Some owners wished to participate in the project and were willing to pay the full costs but were not able to participate in the scheme as the current policy only allowed this where it was technically possible to exclude a property.
- New HRA guidance indicating that councils should not only charge private owners for their share of works carried out but should also be able to agree an affordable repayment period where owners experienced financial hardship.

The report proposed that the policy be updated to allow a single payment plan which would allow owners to make a full payment, adopt a repayment plan or defer the charge until the property was sold at which time a Standardised National Interest Rate would be applied to monies due.

The Panel was invited to note the current position in managing investment in mixed tenure housing estates and the proposed policy guidance to staff. The Panel was also invited to comment on how council policy should be developed in response to the points that had arisen operationally. The Panel was asked to note the updated proposed approach, namely:

- Advise all owners well in advance of any proposed work in the neighbourhood;
- Exclude owners from council housing capital projects where it was possible to do so;
- Discuss proposals with owners where their property required to be

included in works and seek their formal agreement to pay their share of the costs. The costs would be subsidised and be the equivalent cost of the repair. If it was not possible to reach agreement with an owner, they would be formally notified that work would proceed and they would receive a bill for their share of the works. In terms of the conditions in the owners' title deeds, they were required to pay an equitable share of the repair costs of common parts such as roofs of flatted properties. Individual title deeds would be checked at the appropriate time.

- To introduce a single process for the recovery of costs from all homeowners, with a standard security taken on all relevant works where owners agreed.

The panel noted that a report would be submitted to the Council Executive to formally agree the updated approach.

Decision

To endorse the terms of the report and agree that the report be forwarded to the Council Executive for approval.

15. LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an update on progress on the Local Housing Strategy.

The report recalled that the West Lothian Local Housing Strategy had been approved by Council Executive in February 2012 and an update had been provided to the Panel in August 2014. Since then, a number of actions had been progressed and new actions identified. The report provided a summary of the key achievements and those actions that had been developed. The report identified a number of key challenges ahead in terms of delivering the outcomes identified in the Local Housing Strategy. Appendix 1 to the report provided an update on actions since August 2014 and Appendix 2 outlined the updated Action Plan.

The report concluded that overall, good progress had been made on the actions in the Local Housing Strategy. There remained a number of key challenges but the council and its partners were addressing these challenges so that the local housing strategy outcomes would be met.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. Note the progress with implementing the Local Housing Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
2. Note that the key achievements during 2014/15 included:
 - Completing 156 new build council houses and 59 Housing Association houses;

- First site starts on the 1000 new build council housing programme;
 - Providing high levels of assistance to families through Homechoice and the housing options approach to prevent homelessness;
 - 99.9% of council housing meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard;
 - Progressing new housing development in Broxburn and Bathgate that would be suitable for tenants with particular needs; and
 - A reduction in fuel poverty levels.
3. Note that the challenges for 2015/16 included:
- Welfare reform and the potential impact on rent arrears;
 - Continuing to progress the new build council housing programme;
 - Developing the approach to health and social care integration; and
 - Continuing to address fuel poverty.
4. Note that the actions that would be undertaken in 2015/16 would include:
- Progressing the new build council housing programme;
 - Improving support services to prevent people from becoming homeless; and
 - Developing projects to address energy efficient standards in social housing.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

16. DEANS SOUTH UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an update on the position in Deans South, Livingston and outlining the next steps towards securing a long term solution for the regeneration of the site.

The report recalled that in November 2013, the Council Executive had agreed a report setting out a revised offer for the 46 remaining private

home owners at Deans South. In January 2014, the Council Executive had agreed minor revisions to the offer being made to home owners on the Deans South estate to allow officers to work with eligible home owners who wished to take up the Scottish Government's Open Market Shared Equity Scheme (OMSE) and move to another house. At that time, it was reported that the OMSE scheme would be available until 31st December 2014 which had thereafter been extended until 31st August 2015.

The report advised that since November 2013, the council had acquired 36 properties on the estate. 19 home owners had moved using the OMSE scheme and 17 through cash sales. Approximately 10 privately owned houses remained on the estate. Whilst the OMSE scheme had remained open during that time, there had been no further expressions of interest from the remaining owners and whilst the council remained open to dialogue, contact had been limited. The Scottish Government had subsequently agreed that the OMSE scheme could continue until 31st March 2016.

The panel heard that Castle Rock Edinvar had agreed to transfer their remaining 56 properties to the council. The purchase of 37 houses was imminent and the remaining 19 would transfer once Castle Rock Edinvar had completed negotiations with their lender on the removal of the standard securities associated with those properties.

A demolition contractor had been appointed to demolish 13 blocks at Deans South. The contractor had taken possession of the first block to be demolished on 29th September 2015 and would complete the demolition work over a period of 20-24 weeks. A further 3 blocks would be demolished once the 19 secured properties were transferred from Castle Rock Edinvar.

The report then provided information on two planning permissions in principle that had been granted for the redevelopment of parts of the Deans South estate: one for a 1.7ha site at the west end of the site; the other for a 1.2ha site at the east of the site. A total of 56 houses were planned and both sites had been included in the 1000 houses new build programme. The developments were expected to commence spring 2016. An appendix to the report identified both sites and the location of properties which remained in private ownership.

In accordance with its duties, the council had recently commissioned an external survey of roofs on all of the council properties that were adjacent to the remaining privately owned properties. A number of issues had been identified and all immediate repairs had been undertaken, with other works recommended to be scheduled as required.

The report concluded that good progress had been made at Deans south and invited the panel to:

- a) Note that only 10 of the houses on Deans South remain in private ownership.

- b) Note that the purchase of 37 Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association was imminent.
- c) Note that a contract for the demolition of 13 vacant blocks had been awarded and that the contractor had taken possession of the first block to be demolished on 29 September 2015.
- d) Note that officers would continue to engage with the remaining owner occupiers to establish their needs and discuss options available.
- e) Note that it was proposed to continue the OMSE scheme until 31 March 2016.
- f) Note that as part of the council's 1000 new build houses programme, McTaggart Construction had been appointed to build 46 new build council houses on part of the site. Planning permission had been granted and a further planning application had been submitted to alter parts of the approved layout.
- g) Note that as part of the council's 1000 new build houses programme, Lovell Partnerships had been appointed to construct 10 new build council houses on part of the site.
- h) Note that Council Executive had approved the West Lothian Local Development Plan (Proposed Plan) for publication and that the plan identified Deans South estate as an area for comprehensive redevelopment for housing.
- i) Note that it was proposed to have a planning brief prepared for the estate; obtain an updated valuation for the estate and undertake a development appraisal; and submit planning applications for the parts of the estate which do not already have planning permission.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

17. MORTGAGE TO RENT SCHEME

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an update on rental charges to be applied to new Mortgage to Rent properties following Scottish Government changes to the scheme, effective from 1 April 2015 and clarification of the rent to be applied to subsequent tenancies.

The panel had received an update in March 2015 on the council's participation in the Scottish Government's Homeowners Support Fund, Mortgage to Rent Scheme. The scheme allowed home owners to remain in their home when faced with financial difficulties and repossession by selling their home to a public sector landlord and becoming a tenant of the landlord.

In May 2015, a report to Council Executive indicated that 123 properties had been acquired under the existing Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme and had summarised changes coming into effect. It noted that from 1 April 2015 Scottish Government purchase subsidies would be calculated by reference to the average rental charges for social properties within each local authority area, rather than a national benchmark level. The resultant effect would be for a greater subsidy to be awarded by the Scottish Government and lower rents for prospective MTR tenants.

The new arrangements had been in operation for a number of months and the panel noted that whilst the revised scheme had attracted a marginally higher purchase subsidy from the Scottish Government, the Government had capped the subsidy level at 60% of the purchase price. With the new capping arrangement, it meant that should the council apply the average social rent figure, a funding shortfall would be created which would require to be met from within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). To ensure the MTR scheme was financially neutral for existing tenants, it was proposed that an individual rent be calculated for each new MTR property to ensure there was no detriment to the HRA. The rent levels would be lower than the Scottish Government benchmark rate but was likely to be marginally higher than the average social rental figure within the council area.

It was further proposed that for subsequent tenancies, where the former MTR property became available for future tenants, the rent would default to standard West Lothian Council average rent for that property size and location. An appendix to the report provided the panel with an example of how it was proposed to calculate the rent for new MTR properties.

The panel was invited to note:

- I. The changes introduced by Scottish Government on 1 April 2015 which impacted on the level of subsidy paid to West Lothian Council.
- II. That an individual rent would be calculated for each new Mortgage to Rent property, which would be lower than the Scottish Government benchmark rent applied prior to 1 April 2015 but higher than the local West Lothian average social rent to ensure the scheme remained financially neutral for existing council tenants.
- III. That when a Mortgage to Rent property became available for subsequent tenancies, rents would default to the West Lothian Council standard applicable rent, based on location and size of property.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

18. REVIEW OF JOINT HOUSING DELIVERY PLAN FOR SCOTLAND AND COMMISSION ON HOUSING AND WELL BEING REPORT

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services providing an overview of (a) the Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland 2015 and (b) the Committee on Housing and Well Being Report (2015) and acknowledging their recommendations in a West Lothian wide context.

The report outlined key details of the Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland which had been produced in May 2015. The plan hoped to refresh and refocus current housing policies, concentrating on mutual public and private sector objectives required to deliver the ambition for housing “that all people in Scotland live in high quality sustainable homes that they can afford and that meets their needs”. The plan, which sat within the context of “Home for the 21st Century (2011)”, outlined 34 priority actions as listed in Appendix 1 to the report, and consisted of two themes: Home and Place; and Housing Journey and Support. The priority actions did not represent every aspect of housing policy and delivery that the Scottish Government and stakeholders were taking forward. They did however capture actions that had been brought forward through the co-production process. The plan would be flexible to take into account changes in circumstances and demographics and would be monitored by the Joint Housing Policy and Delivery Group who would oversee implementation of actions and produce an annual review of progress.

The panel noted that the key actions in the plan reflected many of those already in the West Lothian Local Housing Strategy.

The report then moved on to provide an overview of “A Blueprint for Scotland’s Future” which had been published by the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing in June 2015. The purpose of the report was to make an evidence-based assessment of the importance of housing for overall wellbeing in Scotland. The Commission had identified the following main issues:-

- Need to build more homes
- Need to ensure existing housing is kept in a good condition
- Home should be in well-designed neighbourhoods

The Commission’s report had concluded that there was a home’s crisis and set out 47 recommendations and 18 priority tasks (which were outlined in Appendix 2 of the report) to address issues under 7 key theme listed in the report. Although 18 priority tasks had been identified, they were all considered important to improving the well-being of the Scottish population and creating an improved environment to better lives. Their final recommendation suggested that there should be an independent advisory body to report annually to the Scottish Parliament on the condition of Scottish housing and what that it meant for Scottish people’s wellbeing.

The panel noted that many of the recommendations in the Commission's report also related to those already in the West Lothian Local Housing Strategy.

The report concluded that the recommendations contained in both papers were relevant to West Lothian's current and future local housing strategy and would be taken on board.

The panel was invited to:

- a) Note the key recommendations of the Joint Housing Policy and Delivery Group for delivery of current housing policies
- b) Note the key recommendations the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing in relation to importance of housing for overall wellbeing in Scotland.

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 current levels of performance for indicators that were the responsibility of the Services for the Community Development and Scrutiny.

The Panel was informed that, of the nine performance indicators reported, eight were categorised as green and one was red. This was an improved position from the previous report when there were six green and three amber indicators. Each indicator in Appendix 1 displayed the latest note which offered an explanation from the service on current performance levels.

The Panel was asked to note the current performance on Housing, Construction and Building Services key performance indicators and determine if further action or enquiry was necessary.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

20. WORKPLAN

A copy of the Workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the Workplan.

