

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 4 OCTOBER 2016.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Harry Cartmill, Jim Dixon (substitute for Councillor McGinty) and Dave King (substitute for Lawrence Fitzpatrick)

Apologies – Councillor Frank Anderson, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, John McGinty, John Muir

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 28 June 2016. The minute was then signed by the Chair.

3. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE LOCAL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services updating the Panel on the Local Plan Performance for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in West Lothian for the period year to date 1 April 2016 – 30 June 2016.

The report was presented by Local Senior Fire Officer Gary Laing, accompanied by Fire Officer Eddie Ritchie. The report examined performance for the 7 priorities that had been identified for 2014-17. These were as follows:-

- 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 provided year to date figures for 2016/17, together with comparative figures at ward level for the years 2012/13 to 2015/16. A number of improvements were highlighted to the Panel.

The Panel was informed of Operation Pinpoint, a relatively new initiative involving community safety partner agencies collectively, identifying specific areas within West Lothian that had high activity and developing specific targeted initiatives to reduce activity and thereby reducing

resource demand.

The Fire Officer then spoke of the reduction in the number of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS). The reduction was a result of work undertaken with a number of businesses, including St John's Hospital and Livingston Shopping Centre.

Questions raised by Panel members were then dealt with by Gary Laing and Eddie Ritchie.

Panel members were asked to note the contents of the report.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

4. SCRUTINY OF POLICE SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE IN WEST LOTHIAN

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Divisional Commander Ivor Marshall (West Lothian Division), Local Area Commander Stephen Dolan, and Chief Inspector Barry Blair.

The Divisional Commander informed the Panel of recent and forthcoming changes to personnel within the Division.

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Construction and Building Services updating Panel members on the performance of Police Scotland in West Lothian for the period 1 April to 3 July 2016.

The report provided performance information for the eight priorities that were the focus of attention in West Lothian Division. These were:-

- Priority 1- Domestic Abuse
- Priority 2 – Anti-social Behaviour
- Priority 3 – Violent Crime
- Priority 4 – Tackling Substance Misuse
- Priority 5 – Making Our Roads Safer
- Priority 6 – Tackling Serious and Organised Crime
- Priority 7 – Drug Supply
- Priority 8 – Tackling Acquisitive Crime

In relation to anti-social behaviour, it was noted that there had been a 13.1% increase in the current year compared to the previous year. The wards experiencing an increase were Bathgate, Linlithgow, Livingston South and Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh. There had been 340 more incidents than the previous year. The nature of these incidents varied from noise and other issues within domestic properties to vandalism, fire-raising and disorder in public places. Longer term, it was down 4% against the 5-year average.

Community Policing Officers, in conjunction with council colleagues

continued to target identified hotspot areas and carry out intervention visits to known anti-social behaviour perpetrators.

In relation to Priority 5 (Making Our Roads Safer), officers within the region, including Roads Policing Officers were conducting regular patrols and engaging with drivers to improve driver behaviour, enforce legislation and reduce the likelihood of fatal collisions. The prevention of collisions influenced by alcohol and inappropriate speed continued to be a focus with officers regularly conducting pro-active road checks at locations throughout the area. Opportunities were also often taken to engage with and educate young drivers.

In response to the Panel's comments concerning mandatory use of 'P' plates for new drivers who had passed their test, Divisional Commander Marshall undertook to convey the Panel's comments to Police Scotland.

The Panel was asked to note the contents of the report covering the period 1st April 2016 to 3rd July 2016.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

5. RENT ARREARS - PRESENTATION

The Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services provided a presentation on rent arrears levels at 11 October 2016.

The Panel noted:-

- That arrears had reduced by £102,375 when compared to the same quarter in 2015/16.
- That this was the third year to show an improvement from the previous year.
- That the arrears caseload had increased by 187 from the previous year to 5,267.
- That 81% of tenants were either in credit, clear or owed less than £150.
- 'Serious' cases were down by 21% compared to the same point in the previous year.

Questions raised by Panel members were dealt with by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services. He provided information about the corporate approach to debt which had been rolled out to Bathgate and Armadale offices in June 2016.

In response to a question raised concerning rent arrears fluctuations and comparative trends for Council Tax arrears, the Head of Housing,

Construction and Building Services undertook to provide Councillor Cartmill with the relevant information.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

6. PROGRESS ON COMMUNITY SAFETY

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services informing the Panel of the strategic development of Community Safety in West Lothian and other local and national developments. In addition, the report included the quarterly performance information from the Community Safety Unit on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) and the Out of Hours Noise Nuisance Team from April to June 2016.

The Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advised that a restructured Antisocial Behaviour service, provided by the Safer Neighbourhood Team, would commence on 3 October 2016. The report also provided details of local activity relating to West Lothian and Alcohol Drug Partnership, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Safety for Pedestrians.

In relation to national updates, it was noted that Police Scotland was training more than 60 officers to work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community to help prevent hate crime. The training was being delivered by the Equality Network on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to help address this issue and increase public confidence in Police Scotland. The trained officers would form a new network of LGBTI Liaison Officers.

The report went on to provide details of development in the following areas:-

Investment to Help Survivors of Domestic Abuse
New Community Justice Legislation
Performance Information

Appendix 1 to the report provided performance data from the Community Safety Unit for the period April 2016 to June 2016.

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 for the Safer Neighbourhood Team and the Noise Nuisance Team.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

7. PROPERTY TURNOVER APRIL TO JUNE 2016

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services informing the Panel of the property turnover for the quarter April to June 2016.

The Panel was informed that the number of permanent lets for the period 1 April to 30 June was 190 compared to the same quarter in the previous year when 158 properties were let. Details of all lets and property numbers for the quarter were provided in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 related to Assisted Move lets, and Appendix 3 provided details of the total housing stock per area.

It was recommended that the Panel note the current levels of activity relating to property turnover for the first quarter of 2016/17 and in particular to note:

- that there had been an increase in property lets compared to the same period in the previous year.
- that of the 47 communities in West Lothian, 9 had only 1 mainstream property to let and 14 had none.
- that 63% of lets had been allocated to people who were homeless or potentially homeless.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

8. NEW BUILD UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on the 1,000 New Build Council Houses Programme.

Appendix 1 to the report provided the full list of approved sites for the programme.

The Panel was informed that Tenders had been returned for phase 5 at Bathville but an award of contract could not be made until the title deeds for the private house at No. 25 Station Road were altered.

The report provided full details of progress on individual sites. The report also set out the updated position in relation to statutory consents.

It was noted that two sites within the programme remained in the ownership of developers and required to be transferred to the council via planning obligations. The two sites were:-

- Appleton Parkway, Livingston (10 units)
- Winchburgh CDA (41 units)

In relation to Deans South, it was noted that demolition had started in

November 2015. One garage block and 15 blocks of houses had been demolished. Both new build sites were now cleared of buildings.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. note the progress being made on individual sites as set out in Appendix 1.
2. note that 26 houses were complete; sites for 547 houses were under construction; and further completions and site starts were expected over the coming two months; and
3. note that the process of obtaining statutory consents was progressing with 37 planning permissions being granted, 20 building warrants being granted, 15 road construction consents being granted and Scottish Water technical approval being granted for 16 sites.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

9. UPDATE ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMMES AND PROPOSALS

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on various Energy Efficiency programmes and projects that were underway and proposed.

The report explained that, in order to address the issues of fuel poverty in West Lothian, the service was assessing several options to try and reduce the factors that influence fuel poverty. The council could influence this in two ways; firstly by assessing the potential future provision of a cheaper energy source to residents in off gas grid locations which would result in cheaper fuel bills and secondly to improve the energy efficiency performance of the council's housing stock.

The report went on to provide an update on the SGN study into the feasibility of providing mains gas to Westfield. Officers had requested Fulcrum to provide a competitive quotation for supply and connection works for comparison to that provided by SGN. The cost for this quotation was £450.00 ex VAT and had been paid for through the HEEPS enabling budget. Details of the quotation from Fulcrum were contained in the report.

Officers were also investigating the feasibility of installing a series of ground source heat pumps as a mini district heating scheme to council owned properties which could also be offered to owner-occupiers in Westfield. Ground source heat pumps would provide tenants and residents with a cheaper source of renewable energy that was more sustainable long term compared to mains gas.

Based on the analysis of the possible options officers would recommend

further investigation into a fully detailed and designed system of ground source heat pumps as the connection of mains gas was not economical in comparison. Funding would be required and a detailed report would be provided with full costs once these were determined.

SGN had completed desktop studies in the feasibility of connection Breich to mains gas, and also connecting Newton and Wilkieston mains gas.

The Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advised that Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) had been introduced by the Scottish Government to drive improvement in the social housing sector by requiring properties to have a minimum energy efficiency rating by 2020. A table within the report showed the property types and minimum levels required to be reached by 2020.

Following the recent Programme for Government announcement a possible grant of up to £500,000 had been made available for each Scottish Local Authority to bid for funding to carry out works that would help social landlords meet EESH requirements. It was a condition of the grant that it was to be fully spent within the 2016/17 financial year on work that was considered as additional economic activity. Any works not completed by the 31 March 2017 would be required to be paid for by the council and projects planned for the current financial year were not eligible for funding. Officers were identifying the possible options to utilise this funding. There would not be time to have Council Executive approve the details of the application in advance so it was proposed that approval under Standing Order 31 be exercised.

The report went on to provide an update on the following developments:-

Gas Boiler Replacement Programme
Solar PV Panels
HEEPS:ABS
SEEP
Energy Switching

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. Note that officers continued to investigate the options for cheaper energy supply to areas not connected to the mains gas network;
2. Note that the contract for the supply and installation of Solar PV panels to council owned domestic properties off the mains gas network had been awarded;
3. Note that the council continued with its rolling gas boiler replacement programme where boilers were replaced with highly efficient combi boilers;
4. Note that officers were currently assessing current level of compliance with EESH which would be reported on once determined;
5. Note that officers were currently developing the process for

performing Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) for void properties;

6. Note the Scottish Government had awarded HEEPS:ABS allocation in full and the announcement on West Lothian Council's SEEP funding was imminent;
7. Note officers continued to investigate the options available to provide tenants and residents with the best possible energy tariffs and;
8. Notes that the Scottish Government had advised officers that following the recent Programme of Government a one-off grant of up to £500,000 could be applied for to help social landlords fund works to meet EESSH standards and it was intended to make a submission seeking the full grant funding available.

Questions raised by Panel members were then dealt with by Housing Strategy & Development Manager and the Housing Investment Officer (Energy Efficiency). In response to a question raised concerning the number of houses being fitted with Solar PV Panels in Orchardfield Terrace, Wilkieston, officers undertook to provide Councillor King with a response in due course.

Decision

1. To note the terms of the report.
2. To note that the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services would seek approval under Standing Order 31 to submit a bid for funding by the deadline set by the Scottish Government.

10. DEANS SOUTH UPDATE

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on the current position at Deans South.

The Panel was informed that a demolition contractor had been appointed in 2015 to demolish 15 blocks of houses and one garage block. This work had been completed in July 2016.

Appendix 1 to the report showed the parts of the site estate that were proposed to be developed for new build council housing as part of the 1,000 houses programme. Phase 1 was to be developed by McTaggart Construction for 54 houses. Planning permission had been granted in August 2016. McTaggart were currently drawing up a programme of enabling works and liaising with utility providers on removal of various services.

Phase 2 was to be developed by Lovell Partnerships for 63 council houses. Lovell were currently carrying out a number of surveys and preparing their planning application for submission.

.The report went on to advise that the masterplan had recently been finalised and a copy of it was attached as Appendix 2 to the report. The masterplan showed that the parts of the estate that were not being developed as part of the current new build programme could accommodate around 116 houses.

It was proposed to carry out consultation on the masterplan between 10 October 2016 and 28 October 2016.

The Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services concluded that good progress had been made at Deans South since the Panel was updated in June 2016.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. note that the demolition of 15 blocks of houses and one garage block was completed in July 2016;
2. note that a masterplan had been prepared for the estate to show how the parts of the estate not currently being taken forward for new build council housing could be developed;
3. note that consultation on the masterplan would be undertaken to seek the views of the remaining homeowners and residents in the area;
4. note that the council's new building housing development at Deans South was expected to gin the coming few months; and
5. note that 10 of the houses on the estate remained in private ownership.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

11 WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL'S OPEN MARKET ACQUISITION SCHEME

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advising the Panel of the outcome of a review of the Council's policy on buying back former council houses and seeking the views of the Panel on proposed changes to the policy.

The report recalled that the council's policy of buying back former council houses had been changed in June 2009 when it was agreed that the council would carry out a formal valuation of each property being considered for buy back. It had been agreed that the offer price would be the lesser of the actual selling price or 80% of the current market value.

With the improved market conditions, the council's offer to purchase at the lesser of the actual selling price or 80% of the current market value was not attractive to owners and there had been no recent take up. Only three

properties had been bought back using the policy since 2009.

The report went on to advise that other councils, including Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, and the City of Edinburgh had adapted their buy back policies to reflect current market conditions and subject to certain criteria being met, were willing to pay up to full market value. Examples of Buy Back Policies in other local authorities were outlined in the report.

It was now proposed that a revised policy be introduced on buy backs which would result in more former local authority houses and flats being acquired. It was also proposed to rename the scheme as the Open Market Acquisition Scheme. This was consistent with the terminology used in the Strategic Local Programme which set out proposed projects which were to be allocated grant funding.

The Panel noted that it was important to set clear criteria for the Open Market Acquisition Scheme and it was recommended that the properties should only be considered if they met all the essential criteria.

Suggested essential criteria for buying back properties was as follows:-

- The property must have originally been part of West Lothian Council or Livingston Development Corporation (LDC) housing stock.
- The property must be sold with vacant possession.
- Properties should be for sale on the open market and each party would bear the costs of their own legal and valuation fees.
- A value for money assessment would be carried out and the council would seek to secure the best value price that did not exceed the Home Report valuation.
- The property should not require more than £8,500 to be spent on it to bring it up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.
- The property must be located in an area where there was demand for the type of property being purchased.
- Only one and two bedroom properties would be considered unless there was a strategic reason for purchasing a larger property (e.g. to facilitate works in the Housing Capital Programme).

The report also provided details of the proposed desirable criteria for buying back properties.

It was noted that no budget currently existed specifically for open market acquisitions. However, it would be recommended to Council Executive that the existing £1.3 million budget for homelessness for 2017/18 was used to purchase former local authority stock which would be used as temporary tenancies in order to meet the increasing demand for homeless accommodation. It would also be recommended that the expenditure was

brought forward to 2016/17.

Scottish Government grant of at least £450,000 was available for buying back former council houses in West Lothian during 2016/17, and the level of funding proposed for 2016/17 (£1.75 million) would allow a pilot scheme of up to 20 open market acquisitions.

It was recommended that the Panel:

1. Note that since the council's buy back policy was reviewed in 2009, three former council houses had been bought back under the terms of the policy.
2. Consider the proposed changes to the policy which were intended to increase the number of houses bought back by the council;
3. Note that it was proposed to change the name of the policy to the 'Open Market Acquisition Scheme';
4. Note that grant of at least £450,000 was available during 2016/17 to support the Open Market Acquisition Scheme in West Lothian during 2016.17;
5. Note that Council Executive would be asked to agree funding for a pilot scheme of up to 20 open market acquisitions during 2016/17; and
6. Note that the views of the Panel would be reported to Council Executive when it considered the policy changes.

Decision

To note the terms of the report and the recommendations set out at Section B of the report and, in particular, that the Council Executive would be asked to agree funding for a pilot scheme of up to 20 open market acquisitions during 2016/17.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

A report had been circulated by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services examining the current levels of performance for Housing, Construction and Building Services that were the responsibility of the Services for the Community PDSP.

Of the eight performance indicators, six were categorised as green and two were red. This was an increase in performance from the previous report. 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 the current performance on Housing, Customer and Building Services key performance indicators and determine if further action or enquiry was necessary.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.

13. WORKPLAN

A copy of the Workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the Workplan.