

Partnership Working Update

Report by Chief Executive

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update in relation to the following areas of partnership working across Midlothian and East Lothian Councils:

- Trading Standards
- Contingency Planning

2 Background

- 2.1** On 23 June 2015 Council received a Partnership Working Update Report which included an update on the position of the previously agreed pilot for Environmental Health and Trading Standards, which, in paragraph 3.2 stated:-

“The experience of the pilot partnership, the external national context, and the outcome of substantial discussion with the staff in both Councils, indicates that joining together to form a single Trading Standards service can be regarded favourably. Accordingly, work is ongoing to examine practices with a view to recommending a move to a partnership service within the next six months.”

And at paragraph 3.3 noted that further consideration would be given regarding the existing Emergency Planning (Contingency Planning) arrangements.

3 Partnership Working Updates

- 3.1** In relation to Trading Standards a report to the Joint Liaison Group on 18 January 2016 advised that:-

“The experience of the pilot partnership has demonstrated that there would be merit in moving to a permanent single service arrangement. The small size and limited capacity of each of the Councils’ teams suggest that continuation of the status quo would not be consistent with trying to develop an excellent level of services. This issue is recognised at national level, with Scottish Government clearly indicating that Councils should consider sharing of their trading standard services. A full assessment of the operational arrangements in both Councils shows that there are no significant impediments to integration. Similarly, consultations with existing staff and the trades unions have not revealed any matters which would prevent integration.

Accordingly, moving to a co-located single service has benefits for customers in terms of quality and consistency of service, for staff who will have greater opportunities for gaining wider experience and training, and for the Councils which will be able to provide the service more effectively and efficiently.”

- 3.2 At their meeting on the 18 January 2016, the Joint Liaison Group, having heard from the two Chief Executives, endorsed the proposals to proceed with a single co-located service.
- 3.3 In relation to Emergency Planning a report to the Joint Liaison Group on 18 January 2016 considered Contingency Planning Services and proposed the sharing of East Lothian’s Risk and Emergency Planning Manager for an initial 12 month period starting 1 April 2016.
- 3.4 Whilst the report noted the primary benefits of joint working relating to resilience and expertise and knowledge sharing it also noted the following:
 - *Greater resilience in the ability to respond to complex and/or prolonged emergencies, due to having more trained staff with cross-boundary responsibility*
 - *Minimised duplication at regional liaison and co-ordination meetings;*
 - *Streamlined systems for plan updates, emergency contact directories and communication methods and techniques;*
 - *Shared expertise to draw on best practice including rolling-out support staff initiatives, creating a combined pool of officers to act as advisors for each Councils strategic representatives;*
 - *Development of other mutual aid initiatives for emergency responses;*
 - *Increasing capacity for future specialisation, replacing the current generalisation of contingency planning officers’ skills. This could be realised through, unifying existing training and plan development skills e.g. for hazardous sites; outbreaks of human disease; pollution; animal health or emergency rest centres;*
 - *Staff development in a larger structure would offer improved personal development opportunities leading to improved retention and promotion opportunities*

Furthermore in recent times the support of the Council in responding to emergencies has increased partly due to the changing climate conditions and a greater expectation from communities that Local Authorities will have a role in responding to emergency situations. Additionally the sharing of resources enables a flexible approach to be adopted to take cognisance of the requirements of the two Councils.

- 3.5 The initial proposal in the report is that East Lothian Council’s Risk and Emergency Planning Manager will spend up to 33.33% of his time supporting Midlothian Council over the first twelve month period to program and manage the planned joint Contingency Planning functions, allowing information to be gathered to support and refine the arrangement in due course.

As a result Midlothian Council would pay 33.33% of the cost of the Risk and Contingency Planning Manager for the twelve month period from April 2016.

- 3.6** The purpose of the initial 12 month period is to provide service resilience for both Councils, while allowing the benefits of the arrangement between the Councils to be examined more closely and based on real time joint working arrangements and experience. The report further noted that an interim update report would be provided after 6 months by the two Councils to the Joint Liaison Group.
- 3.7** The Joint Liaison Group, having heard from the two Chief Executives, at their meeting on the 18 January 2016, endorsed the proposals for an initial sharing of East Lothian's Risk and Emergency Planning Manager for a 12 month period with an update report due following the first 6 months of operation.

4.0 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

Whilst the Partnership Working proposal updates noted in this report will be progressed within the existing resource plans across both Councils there is an additional cost associated with sharing East Lothian's Risk and Emergency Planning Manager for Midlothian as noted in 3.5. The anticipated cost of the proposal as set out in this report is £20,000 which has been included in the 2016/17 base budget.

4.2 Risk

Continuing to explore partnership working arrangements ensures that services are provided in accordance with best value principles as effectively and efficiently as possible. A pre-requisite to any partnering arrangement is that the Council's resilience in these areas at least should be maintained and, if possible, should be improved.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The proposals set out in this report contribute to the Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership Working.

4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

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4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

As set out in section 3.4 the benefits of joint working contribute to both Councils to insure resilience and contribute to the wellbeing of both Council areas.

4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

There has been extensive dialogue between the two Councils as part of the ongoing joint work.

4.8 Ensuring Equalities

This report has no direct impact on equalities.

4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

The proposals outlined in this report enhance the ability of Midlothian and East Lothian Council's contingency planning capacity.

4.10 IT Issues

There are no direct IT implications arising from this report.

5 Summary

This report updates members on specific partnership working activities being progressed across council services in Midlothian and East Lothian. A principle which has been followed in all of these deliberations has been to seek opportunities which will enhance the quality of service delivery and/or allow service delivery levels to be sustained in the light of current and future budget reductions.

6 Recommendations

Council is asked to:

- (i) Note and approve the proposal for a single co-located Trading Standards service for East Lothian and Midlothian Councils.
- (ii) Note and approve the initial sharing proposals in relation to Contingency Planning and note that an update report will be presented to the Joint Liaison Group after 6 months.
- (iii) Approve the additional budget requirements for the costs associated with the 33% apportionment of the joint Risk and Emergency Planning Manager to be included in the 2016/17 budget.

Date: 18 January 2016

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Background papers: None