

Customer and Housing Services Performance Report 2019/20



01. Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

Customer Services:

Following on from the telephony upgrade, a Queuebuster system has been introduced which offers a call back to customers during periods of high demand. Phase 3 of the Customer Services Review has been concluded. The new library opening hours commenced from the 1st October 2019 delivering efficiencies and savings. There have been a number of national and local events in libraries for Book Week Scotland and the Midlothian Science Festival with some highlights including erupting volcanoes, author visits and a teddy bear's sleepover. Service re-design for the Scottish Welfare Fund has been paused as a result of COVID-19, but has been tried and tested by staff and will deliver a better customer experience once launched. The Online Payments and Services (OPAS) project solution remains a key part of the development of Customers Services and is progressing. During COVID-19, other members of Council staff have been drafted into the Contact Centre to deal with switchboard calls and those relating to Kindness and Shielding. Library services have maintained a strong online presence with Book Groups, Bookbug and storytelling sessions, an online Lego Club and increased provision of eBooks, eAudiobooks, eNewspapers and eMagazines. Registrars have adapted to a combination of remote and office working in response to changes in legislation in registering deaths.

Homelessness and Housing Services:

Continued good progress has been made in respect of the 4 strategic outcomes set out in Midlothian's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) 2019 – 2024:

- The supply of permanent accommodation for homeless households increases.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation is no longer routinely used as emergency accommodation for homeless households and the time household's spend in temporary accommodation reduces.
- Homeless households with support needs are supported to access and maintain permanent accommodation.
- Housing options and support are in place to prevent homelessness.

Examples of work to achieve these strategic outcomes are detailed below for information.

The Revised Housing Allocation Policy agreed by Council in December 2019 has been implemented. This places a renewed focus on addressing homelessness, with a significant increase in the proportion of lets to homeless and increased flexibility in the properties being allocated which will reduce waiting times. The impact of these changes will also reduce the demand for bed and breakfast accommodation during 2020/21.

A number of sites are under construction as part of the council's new build housing programme at Bilston, Penicuik, Loanhead and Shawfair. The 1st phase of properties was let to housing applicants at Charpentier Avenue, Loanhead.

Additional temporary accommodation services are progressing which will reduce reliance and cost of using bed and breakfast accommodation. The Mayfield Family Service became operational during April. This service delivers eight, fully furnished, self-contained flats to be used as emergency accommodation for households with either children or a pregnant person as a member of the household. This service provides an excellent standard of accommodation.

The Housing First programme will commence in July providing 20 secure council tenancies per annum targeted at hard to reach and vulnerable homeless households. Many of these households have previously spent lengthy periods living in emergency accommodation. A tender process was completed to appoint a specialist support provider as these household's will require intensive support in order to sustain their accommodation.

A service provider was appointed to manage the supported accommodation services and deliver a tenancy support service on 1st April 2020.

The use of shared temporary accommodation as an alternative to bed and breakfast will be available to single homeless applicants and couples. Each household will be provided with their own bedroom, while sharing kitchen, bathroom and living room areas. The accommodation provided will be more affordable for households who are in employment.

For those not in employment access to education, training and employment opportunities will also be improved. A 0.5 FTE Temporary Accommodation Officer has been recruited to manage up to 20 properties per annum for a fixed term period to 2023/24. These will provide a more satisfactory temporary accommodation option for up to 40 households per annum. The first of these properties to be available by July 2020.

Midlothian Council has a long-standing nominations agreement with East and Midlothian Women's Aid. The purpose of this agreement is to enable households fleeing domestic abuse to access secure accommodation quickly, without the need to present for homeless assistance. Removing the need for potentially lengthy placements in temporary accommodation. In previous years this agreement resulted in two households being housed. This agreement was recently revised. As a result of this review a minimum of four nominations will be made by East and Midlothian Women's Aid.

Planning is underway with Children's Services to establish the National House Project to commence later this year, providing direct access to secure tenancies for looked after young people in accordance with the Housing theme, Corporate Parent Strategy.

02. Challenges and Risks

Welfare Reform: The additional pressures presented by Welfare Reform are monitored in relation to income disruption to housing rent payments and Council Tax Reduction scheme, evident in increased arrears and increased demand for crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund. DWP commenced the Move to UC pilot scheme in Harrogate in July 2019 and state that the pilot will end in 2020, with full migration to be achieved by the end of 2023. Due to the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak across the UK from March 2020, work on the pilot is suspended until further notice. From November 2020, it had been expected that more people would be moved across to UC through the managed migration process until completion. In early 2020, the expected completion of the full move over to UC was put back from December 2023 to a revised completion date of September 2024 (this revised date may need to be changed again, depending on the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak). During the migration period the accurate and secure administration of Housing Benefit remains with Midlothian Council Revenues Services as required service provision for citizens across Midlothian. Demand and budget expenditure will continue to be monitored and priorities updated, if required, in relation to the number of applications received to the Scottish Welfare Fund.

Financial Strategy: Customer Services have delivered part of the 2019/20 savings and efficiencies identified across teams. Some savings are reliant on the performance of other services so there is a risk that these might not be realised. Transformative changes such as putting the Scottish Welfare Fund process online may assist for some areas but will not take into consideration all proposed savings.

Homeless: There continues to be a significant demand on the homeless service set against an ambitious and challenging legislative environment, including the changes proposed by the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020. There is a risk of a significant increase in homelessness presentations as the financial and legal measures put in place to protect households during the Covid pandemic are withdrawn. This will require a collaborative preventative approach as set out in the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Some examples of current work to mitigate these challenges are detailed in this report.

Customer and Housing Services

Midlothian 

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

7 6 0 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

5 7 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

6 3 0 8

Service Risks (latest)

5

Corporate PIs Off Target as at 31st March 2020

PIs 7

Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence (cumulative)

Performance against revenue budget

% of Service PIs that are on target/ have reached their target. (does not include Corporate PIs)

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 working days

% of service priorities on target / completed, of the total number

Average time in working days for a full response for escalated complaints

Percentage of complaints escalated and complete within 20 working days

Key
PIs

- Off Target
- On Target
- Data Only Indicator
- Data is not yet available

Service Plan Actions Off Target as at 31st March 2020

Actions 5

Minimise re-let timescales for temporary accommodation.

Minimise re-let timescales for mainstream housing.

Number of social housing completions

Prevent homelessness through the delivery of an education programme

Designate housing for particular needs with existing and new build stock

Key
Actions

- Off Target
- On Target/Complete
- Data is not yet available

Service Plan PIs Off Target as at 31st March 2020

PIs 6

Re-let time permanent properties (days)

Percentage of housing units provided for particular needs with existing and new build stock.

All recovery overpayments - as a % of all HB overpayment debt

Re-let time temporary accommodation properties

Number of social housing completions

Number of school homeless prevention presentations undertaken

Key
PIs

- Off Target
- On Target
- Data Only Indicator
- Data is not yet available

High Risks as at 31st March 2020

Risks 0

5 Risks at Medium and 0 Risks are high

Key
Risks

- High Risk / Medium Risk
- Data is not yet available