

Customer and Housing Services Performance Report Quarter One 2019/20



Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

The pace and scale of change is accelerating with new legislation driving better integrated local services and collaboration to determine priorities at the most local level. Working together as a whole Council approach in a collective vision for our area and communities in Midlothian is built on shared understanding of local needs, circumstances and opportunities. Customer and Housing Services are driven by a consistent focus on performance and outcomes for our residents to apply effective support, challenge and scrutiny in monitoring our progress towards the objectives of the Single Midlothian Plan.

Access to Affordable Housing

Midlothian Council has been consulting with all tenants, housing list applicants and other key stakeholders on changes to the Housing Allocation Policy. A report on the consultation will be considered by elected members later in the year in order that the Policy continues to meet housing need and makes the best use of available housing.

Midlothian Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan was approved during 2018. This sets out strategic investment priorities for affordable housing over a 5-year period. The Council continues to identify future sites for development as part of the programme of 1,000 new council homes being developed.

In Q1 the Council was able to hand the keys to new tenants in Danderhall, with 23 homes built by Miller Homes. These are the first council homes to be built as part of the plans for Shawfair in Midlothian.

Customer Services

An upgrade of telephony and the introduction of a Queuebuster call back solution will assist in periods of high demand. Libraries continue to see an increase in physical services especially in hub facilities at Loanhead and Newbattle coupled with an increase in usage of online services with the introduction of a new online newspaper and magazine service. A funding bid to the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) School Library Improvement Fund for a bibliotherapist to work in both Lasswade and Newbattle joint public and school libraries has been successful. The aim of the project is to work with vulnerable young people using words and creative expression to increase their confidence. The ECALM (Every Child a Library Member) project has launched working closely with Registrar services to join every new baby registered within the authority.

Challenges and Risks

Homelessness

Demand on Homelessness Services continues to present a significant challenge with regard to the strategic objective of moving away fully from the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. In part, this is related to the significant shortage in the supply of affordable housing in Midlothian and the result is a significant length of time for many households spent in temporary accommodation. To address this, additional investment in temporary accommodation is being made in addition to investment in new affordable housing.

In order to develop actions relating to the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan a Housing Options Development Officer is being recruited to develop further accommodation options and implement homeless prevention activities.

There is also the need to consider how best to accommodate homeless individuals who have complex needs. During 2019/20 the housing service will be developing its approach to providing 'housing first' to some individuals who need intensive housing support in order that they are able to sustain their tenancy.

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. The impact in Year 2 of Universal Credit Full Service in Midlothian, has demonstrated that although there continues to be an impact on rent arrears, the impact has been reduced which is likely to have been as a result of temporary accommodation reverting back to Housing Benefit and a reduction in the pace of new claimants applying to Universal Credit.

The Department for Work and Pensions have previously stated that up to 10,000 claimants would be moved to Universal Credit commencing with a pilot scheme to start in Harrogate on 24 July 2019. The process of moving

people from the old system to the new system is known as 'managed migration'. All those in Harrogate moving to Universal Credit will be personally supported by Jobcentre Plus staff to ensure they get the best possible service. The goal of the pilot is to learn as much as possible about how to help people to move onto Universal Credit. DWP have stated that they will increase numbers as slowly and gradually as necessary, expanding to further locations as required.

Whilst there is migration of housing costs entitlement to Universal Credit, the accurate and secure administration of Housing Benefit remains with Midlothian Council Revenues Services as required service provision for citizens across Midlothian. Audit Scotland published a Performance Audit report in May 2019 on the Council's Housing Benefit Service, which incorporated an agreed action plan to address the risks identified. Audit Scotland concluded that the proposed actions, including the increased automation of Local Council Tax Reductions notifications from DWP, will make a positive contribution to the continuous improvement of the service.

The number of applications received to the Scottish Welfare Fund for crisis grants and community care grants continues to increase with 1,400 applications received in quarter 1 (compared to 1,031 applications in quarter 1 last year). Demand and budget expenditure will continue to be monitored and priorities updated, if required.

Digital Customer

The Online Payments and Services (OPAS) project solution was approved and governed by a Project Team with members from relevant services however it has not been able to progress at this time. Online transactions are increasing across Council services with the recent Garden Waste project seeing an increase in online web forms and a successful library online assisted project. A new CRM is vital to give us the technology needed to make a shift to deliver more transactions online.

Suggested changes to priorities in Service Plan

Q1 19/20: No changes

Customer and Housing Services

Midlothian 

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 7 ● 6 ? 0 ? 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

▲ 3 ● 9 ? 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 8 ● 0 ? 0 ? 14

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 5

Corporate PIs Off Target as at 31st July 2019

PIs ● 7

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

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

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

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 working days

Percentage of complaints escalated and complete within 20 working days

Performance against revenue budget

% of internal/external audit actions progressing on target

Service Plan Actions Off Target as at 31st July 2019

Actions ▲ 3

Prevent homelessness through the delivery of an education programme

Minimise re-let timescales for mainstream housing.

Minimise re-let timescales for temporary accommodation.

Service Plan PIs Off Target as at 31st July 2019

PIs ● 8

Re-let time permanent properties (days)

Average processing time for new claims (internally calculated)

Average processing time for change of circumstances claim (internally calculated)

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

Number of school homeless prevention presentations undertaken

Re-let time temporary accommodation properties

In-year recovery of overpayments - % of all HB overpayments identified during the financial year

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

High Risks as at 31st July 2019

Risks ▲ 0

5 Risks at Medium and 0 Risks are high

Key PIs

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

Key Actions

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

Key PIs

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

Key Risks

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