

Customer and Housing Services

Performance Report Quarter Two 2019/20

Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

Customer Services

An upgrade of telephony systems has led to more comprehensive reporting and increased visibility of calls. Service redesign of the Scottish Welfare Fund is looking to provide an online service which will help drive efficiencies and lead to a better customer journey. Employees and Trade Unions engaged positively with Phase 3 of the Customer Service Review which has focussed on library opening hours. A total of 833 children joined with 485 completing this year's Summer Reading Challenge with over 1600 children attending library events during the summer. The ECALM (Every Child a Library Member) project works closely with Registrar services and has seen 53 new members. The Write Space Bibliotherapy project has launched working with vulnerable young people in Newbattle and Lasswade High Schools.

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. A large number of sites now have planning permission and are under construction as part of Midlothian Council's new build council housing programme. Areas with sites under construction or due to go under construction during 2019/20 include:

- Bilston
- Bonnyrigg
- Dalkeith
- Danderhall
- Gorebridge
- Loanhead
- Mayfield
- Newtongrange
- Penicuik
- Pathhead

Addressing Homelessness

As a result of the submission of Midlothian's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, the Scottish Government announced that Midlothian Council will receive a further £141,000 in funding to support the homeless projects which have been identified in the Plan. This will help support a reduction in the time it takes to provide permanent accommodation to homeless households.

The Housing Support Service is currently going through a tendering process in order that one single support provider contract is in place from 2020/21. This will provide an improved service to households who require housing support services.

02. Challenges and Risks

Digital Customer

The Online Payments and Services (OPAS) project solution has been approved with the procurement process governed by the Project Board and implementation by a Project Team with members from relevant services. Engagement with Scotland Excel has led to the project moving at pace but there is a risk that if the procurement exercise is not strongly governed and resourced then Midlothian may not get value for money or a solution that meets respective requirements and aspirations.

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.

Officers are increasing the provision of temporary accommodation in Midlothian to reduce the need for bed and breakfast accommodation. This includes:

- Increased use of properties within the housing stock for temporary accommodation

- Purchases of properties on the open market for temporary accommodation
- Refurbishment of two existing buildings for use as temporary accommodation.
- Conversion of a block of maisonettes for use as accommodation for homeless families.
- Developing an approach to housing first for homeless people with high support needs.
- Upgrading housing support in an HMO to meet support needs.

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. 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. 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 for crisis grants and community care grants.

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Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

6 7 0 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

4 8 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

7 2 0 11

Service Risks (latest)

5

Corporate PIs Off Target as at 31st October 2019

PIs 6

- Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence (cumulative)
- % of internal/external audit actions progressing on target
- % of service priorities on target / completed, of the total number
- 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

Service Plan Actions Off Target as at 31st October 2019

Actions 4

- Prevent homelessness through the delivery of an education programme
- Minimise re-let timescales for mainstream housing.
- Minimise re-let timescales for temporary accommodation.
- Access to homelessness advice & assistance

Service Plan PIs Off Target as at 31st October 2019

PIs 7

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

High Risks as at 31st October 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