

**MINUTES of MEETING of the MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chambers, Midlothian House, Buccleuch Street, Dalkeith on Tuesday, 25 November 2014 at 11.00 am.

**Present:-** Councillors Baxter, Imrie, Muirhead, Pottinger, Russell, de Vink and Wallace.

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillors Bennett, Coventry, Milligan and Montgomery.

**1 Chair**

In the absence of Councillor Milligan, Councillor Muirhead was appointed to the Chair.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were intimated.

**3 Minutes**

The Minutes of Meeting of 21 October 2014 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

**4 Audit Scotland Risk Assessment Report 2014**

With reference to paragraph 6 of the Minutes of the Cabinet of 18 November 2014, there was submitted report, dated 18 November 2014, by the Director, Resources, incorporating a report, dated 13 October 2014, by the Joint Director, Health and Social Care, advising that following an audit of Housing Benefits in Revenues Services, an Improvement Plan had been developed in response to the Risk Assessment Report published by Audit Scotland in September, 2014. The Plan demonstrated the Council's commitment to address the recommendations contained within the Audit Report and how measurable improvements performance would be secured. The improvement plan had been incorporated into the report.

**Decision**

- (a) To note the comments of Audit Scotland, in relation to the Committee's scrutiny role in this matter and to therefore receive information from officers on the timeline of reports being presented both to the Committee and the Cabinet;
- (b) To note that officers had challenged the findings of Audit Scotland in relation to the implementation of Welfare reforms and whilst the mitigating factors had been acknowledged by Audit Scotland, these had not been deemed sufficient to alter their opinion;

- (c) To note that no staff had transferred to the Council from the Department of Work and Pensions to facilitate the additional work arising from Welfare reform;
- (d) To note that the Audit Committee would also be giving consideration to the Audit Scotland report; and
- (e) To note the improvement plan and that progress reports in relation thereto would be provided on a quarterly basis.

(Action: Head of Customer and Housing Services).

## **5 Housing Allocations Policy Outcomes**

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minutes of the Cabinet of 18 November 2014, there was submitted report, dated 18 November 2014, by the Director, Resources, incorporating a report, dated 13 October 2014, by the Joint Director, Health and Social Care, advising the Committee of the lettings outcomes from the revised Housing Allocation Policy agreed by the Council on 8 January, 2013 and which was implemented in April, 2013. The policy required that it be reviewed every two years, in consultation with tenant representatives and that it be monitored regularly to ensure that equality requirements were met in terms of access to and allocation of housing. The report showed that the targets set by the policy had been met across Midlothian as a whole.

In respect of the statistics, the Chair tabled a paper which showed that whilst the overall targets had been achieved, there were a number of communities which in respect of the categories (Choice: Homelessness: General Needs) were either in excess or substantially less than the target percentages.

### **Decision**

- (a) To note the lettings outcomes following the review of the Housing Allocations Policy;
- (b) That in the review of the policy scheduled for 2015, officials endeavour to apply the targets by community rather than across the whole of Midlothian;
- (c) To note the procedures which apply in respect of applications for housing from Service Personnel;
- (d) To note that approximately 40% of properties being constructed in phase 2 of the Council House Building Programme were either one or two bedroomed properties; and
- (e) To otherwise note the report.

(Action: (b) Head of Customer and Housing Services)

**6 First Statutory 'Biodiversity Report' on Pursuance of Statutory Duty to Further the Conservation of Biodiversity**

With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minutes of the Cabinet of 18 November 2014, there was submitted report, dated 18 November 2014, by the Director, Resources, incorporating a report, dated 16 October 2014, by the Head of Communities and Economy, which had sought approval of the Council's first statutory 'biodiversity report', setting out action taken by the Council since 1 January 2012 in pursuance of its statutory duty to further the conservation of biodiversity. The report had been approved by the Cabinet.

**Decision**

- (a) To recommend to the Cabinet that it review the staffing resources available to support bio-diversity with a view to ensuring that the Council fully met its statutory obligations;
- (b) Notwithstanding (a), to invite the Cabinet portfolio holder to the Committee's next meeting to discuss the matter further; and
- (c) To otherwise note the report.

(Action: Legal and Secretariat Manager)

**7 Scotland's Climate Change Declaration - 2013/14 Statement to Convention of Scottish Local Authorities**

With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minutes of the Cabinet of 18 November 2014, there was submitted report, dated 18 November 2014, by the Director, Resources, incorporating a report, dated 24 October 2014, by the Head of Communities and Economy, which had sought approval of a statement on its climate change actions during 2013/14. The statement had been approved by the Cabinet.

Elected Members thereafter questioned the Head of Communities and Economy, and expressed the view that the statement was deficient in a number of areas and in particular that it failed to (i) contain any plan to reduce emissions; and (ii) failed to address the climate change effects of the operation of the opencast coal mine at Cauldhall Moor.

**Decision**

- (a) To invite the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to its next meeting to discuss the matter further; and
- (b) To otherwise note the report meantime.

(Action: Legal and Secretariat Manager)

The meeting terminated at 12.20 pm.