

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Performance Panel held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 14 February 2019 at 9.30 am.

Core Members: David Balfour
Niall Coleman
Lynn Munro (Convener)
Pat Reid

Members Attending: David Alexander
Paul Garner
Laura Murtagh
Robert Spears

Officers: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

PP24. Apologies

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Black.

PP25. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

PP26. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 13 December 2018 was approved.

PP27. Development Services Performance Update June – December 2018

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 30 June to 31 December 2018. The Director of Development Services provided an overview of the report.

The report provided information on:-

- significant challenges, risks and changes in service pressures since the last update;
- relevant performance reports, audits and inspections

The Director of Development Services provided an update on the following workstreams:-

- Revenue Budget
- Strategic Property Review
- Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme
- Decriminalisation Parking Enforcement (DPE)
- Falkirk Tax Incremental Financing/Investment Zone

She also gave an update on the following strategies;

- Dig in Falkirk, the local food growing strategy which would be considered by the Executive on 19 February 2018 ahead of consultation and the revised Core Paths Plan for the Falkirk Council area.

Mrs Geisler also provided an update in regard to the following:-

- Development Services (Roads and Engineering Design) Quality Management System – 150 9001: 2015
- The Planning Performance Framework

In regard to performance, set out in the appendices to the report, Mrs Geisler highlighted –

- the current position in regard to the Council's Investment Zone bid
- the Townscape Heritage Initiative and marketing of the Falkirk Gateway, highlighting that a report on the latter would be considered by the Executive on 19 February 2019
- Brexit preparations
- works in regard to bereavement services, in particular the provision of digital services.

Following a question Mrs Geisler explained the governance and reporting arrangements for the Strategic Property Review. In regard to the Town Centre Working Group Mrs Geisler explained that there was no formal reporting pathway but stressed that any matters which required a decision would be taken by the Executive.

The panel discussed the Grangemouth Flood Prevention Scheme and sought detail on the option appraisal scheme and the extent to which there would be consultation with the public and in particular representative groups such as the Community Council. Mrs Geisler stated that 3 options were under consideration. There had been consultation at the outset and there would be further consultation once work on the options had progressed to an appropriate stage. The panel sought information on the projected cost of the Scheme and the contribution from TIF. Mrs Geisler stated that the cost initially had been estimated at £106m, with £10m from TIF. The remainder would be funded by the Scottish Government. The anticipated cost was now £152m. However, Mrs Geisler stated, the TIF contribution was expected to remain £10m. There would be, at the point of option selection, be further discussion with the Scottish Government. The Director suggested that by then she would have hoped that the Investment Zone would have been approved in which case funding may be available from it.

The panel then discussed the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement and in particular sought information on the location of the 1604 Penalty Charge Notices which had been issued since 7 December 2018. The Director stated that each of the locations was known and could be provided to members by street. The focus had been in Falkirk Town Centre so the majority were within the town centre itself. The Scheme was Council area wide and would be extended in due course to other areas. A number of schools had been targeted. The Director highlighted a Scheme which had recently been introduced by Glasgow City Council which established 'no vehicle' zones around schools. This would be analysed by Development Services and assessed to determine if it was appropriate for Falkirk Council. A similar scheme had also been introduced by Perth and Kinross Council.

The panel discussed the role of Police Scotland in enforcing parking regulations. Members considered that Police Scotland did not treat parking issues around schools at peak times as a priority. Mrs Geisler stated in response that matters of parking in lines were a Council issue. The Police would become involved if parking was dangerous or inappropriate. Nonetheless members considered that parking was not given efficient priority by Police Scotland.

Following discussion on the location of FPNs the Director suggested that in addition to providing updates to members on a monthly basis she would prepare quarterly reports for inclusion in the Council Information Bulletin. In regard to the scheme established by Glasgow and Perth and Kinross members expressed support in principle but highlighted that they may potentially impact adversely on residents.

The panel then discussed the Strategic Property Review (SPR) and in particular sought clearly in the process for declaring properties maintained by Falkirk Community Trust as surplus. A number of these had been earmarked for closure by the Trust but despite being costly were still being operated. Mrs Geisler stated that the focus of the Strategic Property Review had, so far, been on Council office accommodation and the school estate.

Many of the latter were in good condition. Any review of Falkirk Council Trust properties would be to consider the available school facilities and be mindful of locality planning priorities. It was evident that it would not be possible or desirable to retain all of the Trust's properties. Although there had been investment in some of the properties, such as the Marnier Centre, a number were not in a good condition.

Councillor Murtagh joined the meeting at this point.

Members of the panel highlighted that the number of people engaged in employment training with Council support was well above target (1249 to date against a target for the year of 735) and provided the work of the Employment Training Unit.

The panel discussed Community Asset Transfer and sought information on the role of Development Services in the process. Mrs Geisler explained that all requests come to the Service first. There was an agreed process for dealing with requests which involved a number of services within the Council. It was a relatively complicated process and offices from within the service assist applicants through the process. To date there had been a significant number of transfers but there had been successful examples, such as Woodlands Games Hall. It was likely that the number of requests could increase as the Strategic Property Review kicks in. Members suggested that the condition of properties could be a deterrent, not with standing funding which could be available. The Head of Performance, Technology and Improvement stated that locality planning was also a key consideration. The principle of Strategic Property Review would apply to individual communities. It was important to establish what the community needs and consider what can be delivered through schools and thereafter consider what the community need is. The approach is not 'we have a property, does anyone want it.' In terms of transfer there would be full disclosure by the Council in regard to condition, costs etc and conversely the applicant has to demonstrate financial acumen. The aim of the Strategic Property Review was to rationalise with a view to investing. It could leave a community with fewer properties but improved services/resources. This was, she confirmed, a social as well as financial aspect to the Strategic Property Review and transfer and the Council would consider and this in any request.

The panel noted the improvement in the efficiency of the planning process and commended the role of the Planning Committee in this.

In regard to 150 9001:2015 members commented on an improvement in roads repairs caused by a reduction in 'patch' repairs.

The panel then considered the performance in regard to the performance statement set out as appendix 1 to the report.

In response to a question in regard to the number of small businesses, the Director stated that 40% of Scottish businesses were small or medium and undertook to provide the panel with the number in Falkirk.

Councillor Garner left the meeting at this point.

Following a question on the actions to 'promoting vibrant town centres' the Director gave an update on the current position in regard to Falkirk town centre. Mrs Geisler said that the working group would meet shortly to discuss how to take forward the town centre transformations. Scottish Futures Trust was a strong presence and was interested in promoting Falkirk as an exemplar. It was also possible that if approved, the Investment Zone could provide funding to the transformation.

The panel considered the proposals to market the Gateway site and asked if the proposals would draw retail and hotels away from the town centre. The Director stated that the proposals included retail and hotel elements. A retail impact assessment would have to be carried out regardless of the preferred option. However in her view there were businesses which would not come to a town location. The retail set out in the options was 'non town centre' retail businesses, such as large DIY stores.

Following a statement from the panel that the practice of Falkirk Community Trust of charging large inherent group activities on its land, such as Callendar House, was likely to impact on tourism the Convener stated that this was a matter for the Falkirk Community Trust but would ask for a response from the Falkirk Community Trust.

The panel sought an update on action 04.06.DS17 (Maintain standards of street cleansing, environmental health, food inspection, trading activities and safely across communities) in regard to the trading standards team. The Director confirmed the team was now back to full strength and was working well. She anticipated that the workload of the team would increase post Brexit for example in the port area in Grangemouth. Members praised a recent briefing on Brexit.

Following a question from the panel the Director confirmed that there had been consultation with the community as the food growing strategy had been developed. Although the focus was on allotments Mrs Geisler stated that she encouraged feedback on all elements during the current consultation phase.

The panel then discussed the issue of litter on motorway slipways, highlighting as an example Junction 5 at Earls Gate Roundabout, Grangemouth. Members sought clarity as to whose responsibility it was to tidy such areas. The Director stated that the responsibility to clean slipways lay with BEAR. Members expressed concerns that as motorways were the entry points to areas such as Grangemouth and Bo'ness they created a negative impression of the towns. The Director concurred and stated that she would raise the issue with Transport Scotland. She suggested that a remedy could be that the Council undertakes the cleaning under contract. Issues such as littering and inconsiderate parking, members suggested, were 'cultural'. Members highlighted the environmental damage caused by littering from cars and the health and safety concerns while praising the work

of the Council's town centre litter teams, citing as an example the Grangemouth team.

In regard to allotments the Director confirmed that these were part of the Food Growing Strategy which was due to be considered by the Executive in February ahead of a public consultation. The panel then discussed briefly the likely impact of Brexit on food supply highlighting examples where the public were growing food in anticipation of supply shortages in the future.

Following a question the Director explained the support in place of new business start ups. Enquiries would be directed to the Business Gateway team which had demonstrated success in securing funding for business support. Mrs Geisler stated that it was anticipated that the creation of the Investment Zone would attract new business. In terms of targets the number of new businesses had exceeded the target (578 compared to 562) already. While this was positive it had to be recognised that the targets had reduced over recent years.

Decision

The Performance Panel noted the performance of Development Services over the period June 2018 – December 2018.