

FC82. TOWARDS A FAIRER FALKIRK – TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES WITHIN THE FALKIRK COUNCIL AREA

There was submitted Report (circulated) dated 21 February 2011 by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services presenting a draft Poverty Strategy which sets out (a) the Council's commitment to addressing poverty; (b) areas which the Council will tackle; (c) an approach to undertaking a Poverty Impact Assessment, and (d) a review of the Council's approach to charging and concessions.

Councillor C Martin, seconded by Councillor C R Martin, moved the recommendations as set out in the Report.

By way of an Amendment, Councillor Alexander, seconded by Councillor Coleman, moved that Council:-

- (1) accepts that the following policies, amongst others, pursued by the current Labour/Tory and Independent Administration are in conflict with the principle of tackling poverty;
 - the introduction of punitive levels of charges for essential social services designed to protect the elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups within our communities
 - increasing school meal charges by 48% in the last three years thus hitting hardest families on low to moderate incomes
 - cutting the budgets of Voluntary Sector partner agencies by disproportionately higher levels than any cuts in council budgets or funding
 - redirecting £500,000 of the SNP Government's £2.2m fairer Scotland Fund to other areas of spend
 - unfairly targeting disabled drivers by becoming the first council in Scotland to charge for the renewal of Blue Badges
 - increasing the cost of leisure and sports facilities by 18% over two years as these services head towards privatisation
 - failure to replace senior Economic Development Officers resulting in a downturn of activity with unemployment in Falkirk rising while it falls nationally
 - failure to support the SNP £500,000 Jobs & Training Fund initiative at the budget
- (2) agrees that the best way to tackle poverty is to stop creating it and therefore calls for a full review of policy decisions taken by this Administration listed above, that have impacted in a negative manner on the spread of poverty, particularly with elderly and infirm groups;
- (3) approves the Towards a Fairer Falkirk document with the following amendments and policy direction;
 - (i) implement the Poverty Impact Assessment process in a retrospective manner to review the recently introduced Social Services charges to properly assess their impact on vulnerable groups within our community;
 - (ii) welcome the adoption of the SNP Group's proposals to introduce a free Pest Control Service, albeit in a restricted manner. Council also notes the abandonment of the Labour manifesto commitment to remove all

restrictions on the number of free special uplifts and welcomes this further u-turn, and

- (iii) approve the limited concessions policy changes and widen this report to look at all areas of council charging, including the equality of access issues around Graeme High and Bo'ness Academy.
- (4) notes with disappointment the decision of the ruling Administration to cut £500,000 from the £2,200,000 awarded to the council by the SNP Government for the Fairer Scotland Fund. This has resulted in significant cuts in local projects with the Voluntary Sector and Community Groups being disproportionately harder hit. Council seeks a more detailed report on where these cuts are to fall and the impact of such cuts. In the meantime council agrees to the continuation of funding for the existing employability projects for three months and that a report is presented to Economic Strategy and Development Committee;
- (5) notes that despite the Labour/Conservative and Independent Administration claiming to support the Living Wage campaign council notes that there is still no timetable for the implementation within Falkirk the local authority. Council further notes the fact that the SNP Government has included financial provision for the national implementation in areas such as the NHS therefore demonstrating real commitment to tackling the issue of poverty pay. Council therefore agrees to seeking a report back at the next council meeting with a specific timetable for the implementation of this policy and play catch up with the SNP Government;
- (6) also believes that a major concern in terms of tackling poverty is the policies of the Conservation/Liberal coalition government, particularly many of the changes to the benefits regime. Council therefore commits itself to opposing any UK government policy that further disadvantages those already at risk, and
- (7) requests that officers report back on the progress of the changes proposed above and therefore the ongoing development and implementation of a genuine anti poverty strategy.

Council then adjourned, at 11.45 am, for 15 minutes to allow Members to consider the terms of the Amendment and reconvened at 12 noon with Members present as per the sederunt.

Following further discussion, Councillor Kenna gave notice of a further Amendment.

In terms of Standing Order 21.4 (i), a vote was taken by roll call, there being 31 Members present with voting as undernoted:-

For the Motion (17) – Provost Reid; Depute Provost Black; Councillors Blackwood, Buchanan, Fry, Goldie, Gow, Lemetti, C MacDonald, Mahoney, C Martin, C R Martin, McLuckie, McNeill, Nicol, Nimmo and Waddell.

For the Amendment (14) – Councillors Alexander, Carleschi, Coleman, Constable, Hughes, Jackson, Kenna, A MacDonald, McNally, Meiklejohn, Oliver, Ritchie, Spears and Thomson.

Council then adjourned for 50 minutes for lunch and reconvened at 2.00 pm with Members present as per the sederunt.

Upon resumption, Councillor Kenna withdrew her proposed further Amendment.

Accordingly **AGREED**:-

- (1) the Poverty Strategy – ‘Towards a Fairer Falkirk’;
- (2) to approve the outline charging and concessions policy in principle and that officers bring back a further report on the implementation of the policy with a view to implementation being on 1 April 2012;
- (3) that officers prepare a further report on the introduction of the living wage as outlined in paras 2.11 – 2.15 of the Report;
- (4) the allocation of funding to support the outcomes in the Poverty Strategy in line with the proposals set out in appendix two of this Report;
- (5) the continuation of the funding for the existing employability projects for three months and that a report is presented to Economic Strategy and Development Committee in April with detailed proposals for funding of the projects included within this remit, and
- (6) that officers update Members on the actions and progress of the Poverty Strategy in the coming months and years as outlined in the Poverty Strategy.