

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SCRUTINY PLAN
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 11 March 2015
Author: CHIEF GOVERNANCE OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to invite Council to agree areas for detailed scrutiny as part of the annual scrutiny plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 14 August 2014, the scrutiny committee considered the report attached at appendix 1 on issues considered at four meetings of the performance panel from November 2013 to May 2014. The report highlighted areas where there had been: in-depth discussion; discussion on more than one occasion, or where the issue raised followed on from a recent policy development or initiative.
- 2.2 The committee was invited to call for a report on any of these issues, or any other issue identified by the committee, which merited further discussion to determine suitability for inclusion in the scrutiny plan for 2015. The committee identified five areas for further consideration as potential subjects for the annual scrutiny plan, which were:
- the effectiveness of the business gateway service following its transfer in-house;
 - the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered lessons learned for the future;
 - the impact of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act and, in particular, the volume of requests to the Council and the cost arising therefrom in addition to the Council's effectiveness in dealing with requests;
 - the educational attainment of looked after children and other vulnerable groups, and
 - head teacher recruitment, the secondment of head teachers from schools and the use of acting positions in schools and Education Service management posts.
- 2.3 The committee considered reports which provided further information on the five areas at its meetings of 31 October and 1 December 2014, a summary of the discussion is presented below.

3. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

- 3.1 **The effectiveness of the business gateway service following its transfer in-house.** The committee heard from officers on the activity of business gateway following its transfer in-house. Members then asked questions regarding intervention work in redundancy situations and financial assistance provided to new businesses.
- 3.2 **The operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered lessons learned for the future.** The committee heard from officers regarding the Council's complaints handling procedure and its implementation. Members then asked questions regarding the number of complaints received compared to previous levels, the reporting of complaints information, national benchmarking and comparisons against other Councils.
- 3.3 **The impact of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act and, in particular, the volume of requests to the Council and the cost arising therefrom in addition to the Council's effectiveness in dealing with requests.** The committee heard from officers regarding the numbers of requests and the Council's compliance with timescales. Members then asked questions regarding which groups generated requests and what numbers of requests were attributable to each group.
- 3.4 **The educational attainment of looked after children and other vulnerable groups.** The committee heard from officers regarding the attainment of looked-after children, school leaver destinations for looked-after children and action within the authority. Members then asked questions regarding the discrepancy between looked-after children's attainment and that of non-looked after children, best practice in other Councils, and the use of non-academic awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh and John Muir award. The joint acting Director of Education advised that the attainment of looked after children was best measured by looking beyond purely academic measures. For example he stated that analysing positive outcomes achieved by looked after children in regard to housing and other areas should be considered.
- 3.5 **Head teacher recruitment, the secondment of head teachers from schools and the use of acting positions in schools and Education Service management posts.** The committee heard from officers regarding the recruitment process, appointment of senior managers in schools and Education Services' strategy for ensuring that schools are led and managed effectively. Members then asked questions about the national situation in terms of the number of applicants for school leadership posts, the use of assessment centres and the cost to the Council of not allowing supply to be provided by former teachers who had taken voluntary severance.

4. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The scrutiny committee considered a report on the annual scrutiny plan at its meeting on 19 February 2015 and agreed the topics it would refer to Council for inclusion in the annual scrutiny plan.
- 4.2 It was recommended by the scrutiny committee that Council approve that the following areas are included in the next annual scrutiny plan:

- the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered and lessons learned for the future. The scope of the scrutiny panel would include customer feedback as well as formal complaints, and
- outcomes for looked after children. Although the committee had considered educational attainment, it was satisfied that it was appropriate to look more widely at the outcomes for looked after children.

4.3 The committee agreed that a third 'slot' in the annual plan would be left vacant. The area for scrutiny would be agreed by the committee with preference given to a subject suggested by the opposition members on the committee should those members participate in the scrutiny process.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council agrees:

5.1 the following areas for scrutiny as part of the annual scrutiny plan:-

- (i) the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered and lessons learned for the future. The scope of the scrutiny panel would include customer feedback as well as formal complaints, and**
- (ii) outcomes for looked after children, and**

5.2 that the scrutiny committee should agree a third area for scrutiny with preference given to a subject suggested by the opposition members on the committee, in the event that they participate in the scrutiny process.

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CHIEF GOVERNANCE OFFICER

Date: 23 February 2015
 Contact Officer: Jack Frawley
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: ISSUES CONSIDERED AT PERFORMANCE PANEL
Meeting: SCRUTINY
Date: 14 AUGUST 2014
Author: CHIEF GOVERNANCE OFFICER

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its last meeting, the committee asked that a report be presented to this meeting summarising key issues identified and discussed at the Performance Panel. This was with a view to the committee considering whether the issues identified required further consideration as potential subjects for the next Scrutiny Plan.

2. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE PERFORMANCE PANEL

- 2.1 The minutes of the following meetings are appended:-

28th November 2013;
 23rd January 2014;
 20th March 2014; and
 29th May 2014.

These have been considered in an attempt to identify areas where there has been in-depth discussion or discussion on more than one occasion or where the issue raised followed on from a recent policy development or initiative which would make the issue apt for consideration by a Scrutiny Panel. The issues identified below are not intended to be an exhaustive list and it may well be that there will be others identified by members of the committee.

- 2.2 The following issues have been identified:-

(1)	The impact of welfare reform and the effectiveness of the arrangements put in place by the Council to mitigate its effects.
(2)	The physical quality of housing allocated to tenants and the impact of the impetus to reduce the length of void periods.
(3)	The effectiveness of the business gateway service following its transfer in-house.
(4)	The impact of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act and, in particular, the volume of requests to the Council and the cost arising therefrom in addition to the Council's effectiveness in dealing with requests.
(5)	Head Teacher recruitment, the secondment of head teachers from schools and the use of acting position in schools and Education Service management posts.
(6)	The educational attainment of looked after children and other vulnerable groups.
(7)	The effectiveness of the systems in place to assess community care needs, in particular, the prioritisation of assessments.
(8)	The provision of residential and nursing home places and the impact of delayed discharge from hospital.

(9)	The operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered and lessons learned for the future.
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- 2.3 It is open for the committee to call for a report on any of these issues (or any other issue identified by the committee) to allow it to consider whether this is a suitable subject for a Scrutiny Panel.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 **The committee is invited to consider the issues identified from earlier meetings of the Performance Panel.**

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Depute Chief Governance Officer

Date: 6 August 2014

Contact Officer: Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer ext. 6097

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil