

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Stephen Bird
Cecil Meiklejohn (convener)
Rosie Murray
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost John Patrick

MEMBERS David Alexander
ATTENDING: Jim Blackwood
Colin Chalmers
Brian McCabe

OFFICERS: Steve Bentley, Strategy & Private Sector Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & IT Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Kenny Gillespie, Property & Asset Manager
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate & Housing Services
Steve Sankey, Revenues Project Manager

PP8. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 1 October 2015 was approved.

PP9. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – WAY FORWARD

The performance panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services outlining proposals to take forward the recommendations made in the Best Value Audit report on Falkirk Council's performance management. The report set out proposals for a workshop with members on performance reporting arrangements. Stuart Ritchie provided an overview of the report.

The panel discussed the proposals for a members' workshop and put forward the view that the event be held in January 2016 in order to maximise attendance.

Members asked how the service would ensure that actions are followed up and delivered on time. In relation to actions raised at the performance panel Stuart Ritchie advised that the Service either responds to the member raising the request directly or the information is included in the next report to the panel. There was then discussion on the use of an action tracker, with reference made to one used at the audit committee. Members were

mindful that such a tool would be useful and also considered a more comprehensive report section entitled 'Updates from last panel'.

The panel discussed performance reporting in relation to Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust) and a question was asked on whether such reports would be considered by the panel. Rose Mary Glackin advised that the Trust reported through the Following the Public Pound framework to scrutiny committee (external). Fiona Campbell stated that at the most recent meeting of scrutiny committee (external) changes to the report submitted by the Trust had been requested in order that the most pertinent information is provided. Previously the committee had received the same performance reports as the Trust submitted to its board.

Decision

The performance panel noted:-

- (i) the specific improvement actions in the Best Value Improvement Plan relating to Performance Management;**
- (ii) that a workshop for Councillors is being organised and is focussed on the areas outlined in section 4 of the report, and**
- (iii) the new style performance report format being prepared by Services.**

PP10. CORPORATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The performance panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services setting out a summary of performance for the period April to September 2015. The report provided information on key priorities, key areas for improvement, an update from the last meeting, important indicators and engagement with customers. Appended to the report was the Corporate & Housing Services – Performance Panel Statement – April to September 2015. Stuart Ritchie provided an overview of the report highlighting that it was in a remodelled format following discussions between officers and the convener. The format of the report would be subject to further review through the workshop for members on performance reporting.

An overview was also given of the four Improvement Groups that had been set up to look at Future Frontline Service Delivery to Customers, Services to Tenants, Rent Collection and Rent Arrears and the Building Maintenance Division.

The panel discussed the review of depot provision within Building Maintenance and asked for further information. Stuart Ritchie stated that the review was still at an early stage and that this was the first time a single depot solution had been considered. A significant amount of planning would be required to make it work but it would be aided by the move toward mobile and flexible working. He advised that some vehicles could be kept at home by staff overnight and assured members that all these vehicles would be fitted with appropriate tracking devices. Mobile and flexible working would also mean that many staff would not need to attend the depot before commencing work as they could have their lines delivered to their mobile devices rather than needing to physically collect them. Following a question seeking further information on the potential benefits

of this approach, Kenny Gillespie stated that the proposals would result in more effective deployment of staff and better management of appointments.

In response to a question on the cost of the lease of the Winchester depot, Stuart Ritchie advised that it was approximately £40,000 a year.

The panel welcomed the assessment of the Building Maintenance Division undertaken by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the workstreams established to take the outcomes from it forward and remarked positively on the benefit of reviewing services proactively from a position of strength rather than when in crisis.

The panel discussed the Service improvement groups in general and asked about member input. Stuart Ritchie stated that the Service would report back on improvements and achievements to the panel and noted that, if successful, members would see the impact of these groups in practice. In relation to the two most recently formed improvement groups he advised that terms of reference would be developed and then submitted to the panel so that members could comment on the direction taken.

Members asked for the anticipated percentage increase to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the next year as a result of new builds and buy backs. Stuart Ritchie stated that he would obtain the indicative information after the meeting and provide it to members.

The panel discussed the process of moving tenancy and raised concern that people could get into arrears at an early stage as their liability for rent commenced immediately which could involve them in double rent payments if their existing tenancy was still in place. Steve Bentley advised that Tenancy Sustainment Officers worked closely with tenants at risk of entering arrears.

There was then discussion on the consistency of approach, members highlighted that people accepting a tenancy for a property which was ready to be moved into immediately compared to those who accepted a property where work was first to be carried out were at a potential disadvantage. Steve Bentley stated that if a property met the void standard then it was ready for a tenancy to commence immediately and that the Service's satisfaction rates showed the process worked well. He stated that the Service was proactive in the allocation process and aimed to get vacant properties occupied again as quickly as possible, however he was happy to look at specific cases brought to this attention where the property was considered not to meet the required standard.

Members asked how the Service would evidence that it was meeting the objectives of Future Frontline Service Delivery to Customers. Fiona Campbell stated that services to customers had been looked at and that work was being undertaken to meet the needs of those customers not visiting one stop shops including hard to reach groups. Significant amounts of information had been gathered on why people were and were not using one stop shops as well as on how they were using services once there. This had provided the Service with a baseline from which it could track progress and measure if a better service was being provided after making changes.

The panel asked what timescales were in place for the delivery of the APSE recommendations. Stuart Ritchie stated that he would provide a copy of the timescales to all members after the meeting.

A question was asked about the APSE recommendation to review of operating costs within Fleet Management to see if the cost per vehicle per annum could be reduced to closer to the average experienced by other authorities; in particular, what was the average cost? Kenny Gillespie stated that he would provide all members with this information.

The panel asked for information on the target time for completing works on void properties. Steve Bentley advised that the target was 35 days for the whole process and that he would get information on the percentage meeting the target after the meeting.

Members asked what issues could cause delays which make the turnaround take longer than the target timescale. Steve Bentley advised that one cause of delays was that some properties were more challenging to let than others with some going to second and third advertisement. He stated that many properties were turned around well within the 35 day target. Kenny Gillespie stated that some issues were associated with Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) work where tenants had refused upgrade works when in residence. The Service looked at each void property as it became accessible and carried out works to improve the standards where necessary.

Members discussed voluntary severance within the Building Maintenance Division and asked if some of those who had accepted offers were painters. Kenny Gillespie confirmed that there had been some uptake of voluntary severance from painters in the asset management team. In response to a question on the use of externally tendered painters for one third of the cyclical painterwork to the end of March 2016, Kenny Gillespie stated that a benefit from that approach was establishing an appropriate benchmark for the work as recommended by APSE. The Service would then look at how the work could be taken on within current resources. In relation to cyclical maintenance he advised that modern materials lasting longer than those used previously and other natural efficiencies would benefit the Service.

The panel asked about the format of performance reporting information provided to the public, such as that on the Council's website. Stuart Ritchie stated that the report currently under consideration by members would be published on the website. He advised that the workshop for members would include discussion of what the best style of public performance reporting was. The convener highlighted that public performance reporting had recently been considered at the Scrutiny committee including a presentation on the use of social media and plasma screens at one stop shops.

In response to a question on the availability of service self assessments to members, Stuart Ritchie stated that a report would be submitted to the performance panel by the end of March 2016 on the programme of self assessments and service reviews to be undertaken and thereafter the Panel would receive reports on implementation and progress..

Members asked which area was being considered as the pilot of a hub and spoke model of advice and support services. Fiona Campbell stated that a pilot was being proposed to ensure that the anticipated improvements were achieved before rolling out Council wide. The proposed location of the pilot would be reported to the panel. She advised that evidence gathered through the scrutiny panel on Citizens Advice Bureau services had identified that it was most effective to go to where people already were rather than expect them to attend offices to get services. This was, however, dependent on the services available in a particular area and how they were utilised by the local community.

Stuart Ritchie advised that 85 local shops had entered an agreement to use PayPoint facilities so that people could more conveniently pay their rent and Council tax.

Following a further question on which other authorities had been looked at, Fiona Campbell advised that the approach of a range of authorities had been considered. This had included examination of the services provided by North Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council, Dundee Council, West Lothian Council and Perth & Kinross Council, all of which had different ways of delivering services. She highlighted that West Lothian Council no longer took payments at their offices and hosted multi-agency facilities through their offices while Stirling and Dundee Councils operated centralised offices. The Service had considered many options to find the best approach for services and customers in Falkirk.

The panel sought information on how any impact on vulnerable groups would be mitigated and asked if equality and poverty impact assessments were being carried out. Fiona Campbell stated that assessments were being undertaken to understand the nature of the impact but that if the right model of service was implemented then access to services and payments would increase through the use of mobile and online methods. She emphasised the particular importance of ensuring that services were available to vulnerable groups and, if any diminution in service was identified for a particular group, the Service would identify what could be done to mitigate against this. She highlighted that 51% of visits to the Council's website were made using a smart phone.

Members discussed the membership of the housing management review group. Steve Bentley stated that tenant feedback was reflected and incorporated through the tenant representative who was supported by the community engagement team to participate fully. He stated that consultation was central to the review. Members then asked if consideration had been given to having two tenants representatives on the group, with one from a rural area and one from an urban area. Steve Bentley stated that the current arrangements were considered to allow for effective contribution from tenants.

Members suggested that a representative from Social Work Adult Services would be a valuable contributor to the group due to the pressures which would be faced from changing older people demographics.

A question was asked to establish how long the work scheduling team pilot would run before being evaluated. Kenny Gillespie stated that the evaluation had begun. A baseline position had been established to measure improvements against. He highlighted that all general maintenance jobs in the pilot area were by appointment with a date and an a.m. or p.m. timeslot provided. Further, staff were now ringing ahead to customers before attending appointments. In response to a subsequent question, Kenny Gillespie advised that the pilot had been carried out with operational staff and had been considered successful by those involved.

The panel asked for an update on the work being carried out in relation to refugees. Stuart Ritchie stated that detailed preparatory work was currently being carried out both within the Council and with community planning partners to ensure that a co-ordinated approach was in place. It was intended to report on this work to Council in December. Members sought clarification on when the Council would be ready to accept refugees to the area. Stuart Ritchie advised that the report to Council in December would seek approval to liaise with the Home Office in early 2016.

Members discussed digital self service and asked what measures were being put in place to ensure that people who wanted to engage with services in person could still do so. Fiona Campbell stated that a review was being undertaken to ensure that appropriate access to services was in place for all including the most vulnerable. She advised that a significant section of the community wanted flexible digital services which could be accessed at their convenience. She confirmed that there required to be a variety of means by which services could be accessed. She stated that currently there was limited flexibility in accessing services and that people had to use one stop shops or phone services and that doing so was at a higher cost to the Council and less convenient for most people.

The panel welcomed the aim of the rent collection & rent arrears improvement group to ensure that the Council's performance is within the top half of Scottish authorities by the end of 2017/18 and asked how this would be achieved. Stuart Ritchie stated that the group would develop an action plan and that this would be submitted to a future meeting of the panel. He advised that the Rent Improvement Plan had been submitted to the Housing Regulator.

Further information on the successes of the mobile and flexible working project in the Building Maintenance Division was sought by the panel. Kenny Gillespie advised that early indications from staff were positive. The project had been brought in to reduce paperwork and, among other things, the impact of lost job lines. Tenants now signed off the job on the mobile device which gave confidence that the work had been completed to a satisfactory standard. Staff time was more effectively utilised and trade unions had seen the introduction of mobile and flexible working solutions as positive.

Members asked how the Service could make low demand housing more attractive. Steve Bentley stated that properties were advertised in Home Spot on a weekly basis and that the new void standard had helped improve these properties. The Service held proactive discussions with potential tenants to encourage uptake of these properties and environmental works had been carried out to improve areas with lower demand.

The panel sought information on why the percentage of housing stock meeting the SHQS had reduced. Kenny Gillespie stated that the Scottish Government had changed how compliance was reported. Previously, in cases where a customer refused works, the property was included in the figures as a pass but that had now been changed to only those properties which fully complied with the standard.

Members asked for information on why the percentage of rent lost through voids was not meeting the target. Steve Bentley advised that there had been an increase in the number of days lost due to an increase in the number of empty properties, with a 10% uplift over the previous year. The panel then asked why there had been such an increase in the number of voids. Steve Bentley stated that this was due to the number of new build and buy back properties which increased the stock and created more voids. While the figure was slightly above average, he advised that this was not felt to be a worrying trend.

In response to a question on the percentage of freedom of information requests being dealt with in 20 working days, Fiona Campbell noted that the Scrutiny Committee had considered a report on the Council's approach to FOI. Rose Mary Glackin stated that the Scottish Information Commissioner produced an annual report giving an overview of performance across Scotland and that no concerns had been raised in relation to Falkirk Council. She advised that where the deadline of 20 working days was not complied with this was most often by only one or two days.

The panel sought further information on progress toward identifying a suitable electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) as this target was shown as being significantly behind target. Stuart Ritchie stated that in the service plan there had been the intention to look at a suitable corporate approach to EDRMS but there was a need to prioritise resources and staff time had required to be focussed on the mobile and flexible working project, as that was business critical. At the current time EDRMS was not business critical but he assured the panel that work would continue in this area.

Members asked how Falkirk compared against other authorities in relation to the performance indicator measuring gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a percentage of rent due for the reporting year. Steve Sankey stated that the benchmark was national and that, measured against other authorities, Falkirk performed well. He highlighted that there had been a 1.5% improvement in the figures from the previous year.

The panel asked what reasons were given by owner occupiers who had refused SHQS improvement works. Kenny Gillespie stated that a significant number of people refusing were elderly and that familiarity with, for example, their current heating system was one reason for refusal along with nervousness of using gas and the disruption caused by works. The Service was looking at how to best engage with people who had refused works to explain the benefits to them.

Members asked for further information on absence levels in the Service. Kenny Gillespie stated the Service was working hard to support craft areas to improve absence levels. Following a comment that the levels were quite a way off the benchmark Stuart Ritchie advised that comparing authorities against one another was not comparing like for like as all councils have different absence management policies which have a significant impact on absence levels. He stated that absence was tracked and monitored effectively. The issue was being looked at carefully and the Service was looking at best practice from other authorities.

The panel asked about the development of a housing strategy for older people to meet the needs of an increasingly ageing population and raised that the Service could work more effectively with social work on home adaptations. Kenny Gillespie stated that this area was currently under review. He highlighted that eight third sector organisations had been involved in development of the strategy and that wide consultation had been carried out.

Members sought more information on progress toward meeting the SHQS and asked about the percentage of exemptions and abeyances compared to the total housing stock. Kenny Gillespie advised that in the previous year exemptions were approximately 17% of the stock. He stated that there needed to be a sustained focus of capital spending in this area. In response to a comment that as properties become void the number should reduce, Kenny Gillespie stated that the Service was targeting 89% compliance and that by the end of the financial year performance should be close to that. The Service was being more proactive in promoting the benefits of SHQS work. Following a request from members, Stuart Ritchie confirmed that the new void standard would be circulated to all members.

Decision

The performance panel noted the report.