

The background of the slide features the official coat of arms of the City of Vancouver. It is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on the water. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows a beaver. The bottom-right quadrant features a grizzly bear. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "CITY OF VANCOUVER" in a stylized font.

**Agenda Item**

**3**

**Minute**

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 1 February 2018 at 9.30 am.**

**Councillors:** David Balfour  
Allyson Black (Convener)  
Nigel Harris  
Lynn Munro  
Laura Murtagh  
Pat Reid  
Ann Ritchie

**Officers:** Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement  
Douglas Duff, Head of Planning and Economic Development  
Sara Lacey, Head of Social Work Children's Services  
Stuart Murray, Graduate Trainee, Committee Services  
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

**S25. Apologies**

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Binnie.

**S26. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

**S27. Minutes**

**Decision**

- (a) The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 30 November 2017 was approved;**
- (b) The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 14 December 2017 was noted.**

Following questions on item PP11 in regard to members' personal safety when undertaking duties, in particular home visits, the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that training would be organised in conjunction with Police Scotland. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement confirmed that the possibility of incorporating a 'flag' system to warn of potential risks associated with visiting particular individuals within the Customer First system had been raised by members and would be investigated.

## **S28. Rolling Action Log**

A rolling action log detailing the status of actions from the meeting held on 30 November 2017 which had yet to be completed was presented for consideration.

Following a question, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement gave an update on action 313 in regard to a proposal to hold a workshop for elected members on the Customer first system, confirming that a session would be held shortly with members. This session was called for by the committee as part of its consideration of potential scrutiny plan items and would include discussion on members' levels of access to the system. In regard to action 392 the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that a generic email address for enquiries would be operational by 23 February 2018.

### **Decision**

**The committee noted the Rolling Action Log.**

## **S29. Cost per planning application- Local Government Benchmarking Framework LGBF Indicator**

The committee had considered Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) performance information on 17 August 2017 (ref S6) and had asked for a further report on indicator ECON2, the cost per planning application. The LGBF data had shown that Falkirk Council's cost was the highest of the 32 local authorities in Scotland and the committee had sought clarification on whether the indicator was accurate.

The committee had determined, on 30 November 2017 (ref S21) that subject to consideration of the report (which had been asked for in August 2017) that it would recommend to Council that this item was a potential item for inclusion on the 2018 Scrutiny Plan. Council had noted the position on 6 December 2017 (ref FC57) when considering its Scrutiny Plan.

The committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services which provided analysis of the Services' ECON2 performance indicator.

Following assessment of the information provided to the Improvement Service for 2015/16 it had been found that there was an inconsistency on how the costs are compiled across local authorities. Falkirk Council's submission had included £1.912m of costs attributable to roads maintenance. Had these been stripped out the cost per application would have been £7543, not £11,421, which would have placed Falkirk Council 25 out of 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For 2016/17 the cost was £7618, placing Falkirk Council 28 out of 32.

The Head of Planning and Economic Development explained the elements of cost which comprised the overall cost – planning, environmental initiatives, countryside recreation and management and Parks and Open Spaces.

Nationally the methodology used by Local Authorities was not consistent and it could be argued that the costs which Falkirk include should be attributed to other LGBF indicators. On a like for like comparison with other authorities of a comparable size showed that Falkirk's costs were broadly in line.

Members discussed the report at length. In response to an assertion that in fact Falkirk Council's costs were significantly higher than comparable authorities, the Head of Planning and Economic Development agreed that on the figures presented it looked this way but stated that if the cost element associated with environmental issues was removed the costs would be in line. This, he argued, illustrated that the costs for 'planning' placed Falkirk Council mid-range across Scotland. The indicator was not a reliable guide given the inconsistent approach taken by Scottish Local Authorities to its calculation.

Members remained unclear as to the elements which should properly be included in the cost per planning application and requested a comparison, for each element, against all 32 Local Authorities. Similarly if costs associated with the indicator were stripped out and attributed elsewhere then there would be a consequential impact on other performance indicators. Given this the committee asked for further contextual information. In response to a statement that the planning process was streamlined, members asked for information setting out the Council's planning process.

During the discussion members acknowledged that statistics in themselves can be misleading and asked whether the indicator took cognisance of Falkirk's unique economic environment, citing major applications at, for example, the Grangemouth complex as unique in Scotland. The Head of Planning and Economic Development stated that the cost of major applications were not included in the ECON2 costs. The indicator reflected local and household applications. He referred to a recent review by Audit Scotland on how the Council dealt with major planning applications which had concluded that the Council has shown major improvement.

Having considered the report and having had regard to the discussion the Committee considered that further information was required to allow it to determine whether the issue should be subject to scrutiny as part of the scrutiny plan.

## **Decision**

**The committee requested a further, detailed report, to the next meeting.**

**The report to include:-**

- (1) detail on the component costs which make up the indicator;**
- (2) comparative information for all Scottish Local Authorities;**

- (3) contextual information and information to show recent costs and the trend;**
- (4) detailed explanation of the planning process (including timescales) and why the costs appear comparatively high; and**
- (5) overview of Audit Scotland audit of major planning applications together with the AS report.**

### **S30. Economic Strategy Update**

The Committee had requested an update report on the implementation of the Economic Strategy which had been agreed by the Executive on 1 December 2015 (ref EX73).

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services which provided an overview of the progress of the Economic Strategy 2015-2025 together with actions and developments relating to the Community Planning Partnership's Strategic Outcomes and Local Delivery Plan (SOLD). The report focused on projects such as:

- delivery of the Falkirk Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) initiative
- development of the new Forth Valley College campus
- development of the Grangemouth port and chemicals complex by Ineos, Forth Ports and other businesses
- progress of the area as an international tourism destination
- progress of town centre regeneration projects including the Falkirk THI
- delivery of employability programmes

The progress of projects which relate to two SOLD outcomes were set out as appendices. These relate to:-

- SOLD Outcome Two: We will grow our local economy to secure successful business, investment and employment; and
- SOLD Key Priority Two: Maximising Job Creation and Employability.

The Head of Planning and Economic Development provided a detailed summary of the report, highlighting key projects and milestones.

The Committee discussed the need for a joined up coherent approach between the Council, business (particularly in Grangemouth given the importance of industry to the area) and the community. It was suggested by members that there was insufficient dialogue with community groups and local residents to ensure that the local workforce, and future workforce, is sufficiently skilled and experienced to compete in the jobs market. The Head of Planning and Economic Development agreed that there was a need to engage with both businesses and the community. He cited the Investment Zone as an example when dealing with both businesses and the community, input would be vital, recognising that until recently the major players, in particular INEOS, had not been in a position to expand due to the economic climate. However the decision by INEOS to import ethane had changed the

landscape and there was now an opportunity to engage with the local community. In regard to the skills and experience Mr Duff highlighted the initiatives of Forth Valley College in particular to develop local skills, citing recent investment on STEM related topics. This would transform the approach to skills enhancement across the existing and future workforce. He also gave examples of ongoing work required to develop and improve the town centre in Grangemouth. While there had been improvements to Stenhoumuir and Denny Town Centres recently, work was ongoing to identify opportunities to support development in Grangemouth town centre, with the Council keen to consider any options which come forward.

Following a question on the LEADER project Mr Duff explained the eligibility criteria for projects to receive funding noting that urban initiatives were not eligible. In regard to investment in the area, Mr Duff stated that investment from Chinese concerns was significant, particularly in Grangemouth. The Council had, he explained, developed significant knowledge and experience in working with Chinese investors which would be beneficial in attracting and supporting future investment.

The committee discussed the development of Falkirk Town Centre, highlighting the disappointing vacancy rates in the centre and in the retail park as a concern. Mr Duff responded that while the vacancy rate in the retail park was low this was a higher rate in the town centre. Over the years the role of the traditional town centres had changed, with many shrinking and their focus changing from retail to leisure. He gave a summary of the Council Headquarters and town hall projects, noting that the council had a key role in the civic and cultural offer of the town centre.

Following a question Mr Duff gave an overview of the work of Falkirk BID and highlighted its role in attracting investment in the area and summarised a number of THI projects. He then provided responses to requests for information on the TIF programme, highlighting work at Beancross and Westfield which had been delayed but would be completed in 2018 and 2019 respectively. In regard to the Investment Zone Mr Duff explained the strategic and economic importance of Falkirk and stated that there was a need for city zones to work with the Falkirk Investment Zone in order to drive the local and national economy. He agreed with members that in developing investment opportunities it was vital that there is engagement with the local community highlighting local work with INEOS in the area.

## **Decision**

**The Committee requested an annual update on the progress of the Economic Strategy.**

### **S31. Scrutiny Panels**

The committee considered a report by the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement on the arrangements for delivering the 2018 scrutiny plan.

Council had agreed, on 6 December 2018 (ref 57) a scrutiny plan for 2018 comprising reviews of:-

- Fly tipping – potentially running from January to March
- Housing Allocations – how the process works and how it could improve – potentially running from April to June
- Anti-Social Behaviour - specifically looking at this from the point of view of residents. It is also proposed that this include looking at responses to incidents, communication and where does responsibility lie across partners for dealing with particular issues – potentially running from September to November

The reviews would be undertaken by scrutiny panels. It was recommended that the first review would be that on fly tipping. The panel for this review had been established (Councillors Bissett, Harris and Murtagh). It was proposed that all 3 panels are established now and meet to consider their respective scope and remit for each panel. These would be reported to the Scrutiny Committee and allow the workplan to be developed ahead of the panels starting their reviews (which would run consecutively). The order in which the reviews would be undertaken to be determined.

Following discussion members considered that the order of review would be fly tipping, antisocial behaviour and housing allocation. With reference to the earlier item (S29) members confirmed that the committee may seek Council approval to add the cost per planning application to the Scrutiny plan.

In regard to the composition of the Antisocial Behaviour and Housing Allocation panels, membership would be 5, with 3 members from opposition groups and 2 from the Administration.

### **Decision**

**The Committee agreed:-**

- (1) the schedule for the 3 scrutiny panels for the coming year will be Fly Tipping; Antisocial behaviour; and Housing Allocations.**
- (2) that each panel will comprise 5 members (with 2 from the Administration and 3 from Opposition Groups);**
- (3) to ask the clerk to seek nominations for the Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Allocations panels;**
- (4) that scoping documents for the Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Allocations Scrutiny Panel are brought back to Committee for approval;**

- (5) that the fly tipping panel has its scoping meeting in the coming weeks and that a report is brought back to the next Committee outlining progress; and**
- (6) to defer consideration on whether the cost of the cost of the planning process should be included in the scrutiny plan for this year until the next meeting when a detailed report will be provided.**