

S5. Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicator: Cost Per Planning Application- Update Report

The committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services providing further detail on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicator ECON2 on the cost per planning application which had been requested by the committee at its meeting on 1 February 2018 (ref S29).

Having considered a report by the Director of Development Services on 1 February 2018, the committee had asked for a further report which set out:-

- (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 (AS) audit of major planning applications together with the AS report.

The Director of Development Services summarised the report, drawing particular attention to the draft Planning Bill which was currently being consulted on. One aim of the Bill would be to ensure consistency in how the cost of planning is calculated. The Bill makes provision for the appointment of a national co-ordinator who will make recommendations and provide advice to Planning Authorities. Additionally, Falkirk Council will take part in an exercise led by CIPFA and the Improvement Service, involving the Heads of Planning Scotland on the cost of planning. This will provide an evidence base for planning costs and the outcomes of the review will contribute to the development of new legislation and guidance. The Director of Development Services proposed that the outcome of this exercise would be reported to committee as part of its scrutiny of the cost of planning.

The members of the committee thanked the Director of Development Services for her report and summary. Members reiterated that the methodology for compiling the cost of planning data was inconsistent which led to unreliable comparisons. The committee was content to accept that the Local Government Benchmarking Framework data would be unreliable until such time as national guidance was developed and consistently applied. Members indicated that they would be content to await the outcome of the exercise described by the Director of Development Services and the publication of the relevant legislation and guidance.

Decision

The committee:-

- (1) noted the content of the report;**

- (2) noted the feedback from Scottish Government on the Council's Planning Performance Framework submission 2016-17;**
- (3) noted that the Council is participating in an exercise on the cost of planning being conducted by Scottish Government, and**
- (4) agreed that, on completion of this national exercise, a follow-up report be issued to the committee.**