

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on wavy lines representing water. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with large antlers facing left. The bottom-left quadrant contains a beaver facing left. The bottom-right quadrant shows a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs, facing left. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

Agenda Item 3

Minute

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 12 September 2019 at 9.30 am.

Councillors: David Balfour
Lorna Binnie
Jim Blackwood
Niall Coleman
David Grant
John Patrick (Convener)

**Councillors
in attendance for
Service
Performance
Report:**

Robert Spears

Officers: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Colin Frame, Principal Surveyor (Strategic Projects)
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Stuart Irwin, Democratic Services Graduate
Jacquie Mcarthur, Economic Development Officer (Comm)
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Carron Smith, Principal Business Support Officer
Pamela Smith, Employment and Training Manager

S18. Appointment of Convener

Councillor Grant nominated Councillor Patrick.

Decision

The committee appointed Councillor Patrick as its convener.

S19. Apologies

An apology was intimated from Councillor Black.

S20. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

S21. Minute

Following a question, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement confirmed that work was being progressed to account for concerns raised by members in regard to the operation of the CRM system. She noted that previous attempts to engage with members on their use of the system had met with a disappointing response.

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 June 2019 was approved.

S22. Rolling Action Log

A rolling action log detailing the status of actions which had yet to be completed was presented for consideration.

The Democratic Services Manager explained, following a question, that it had been the intention of Children's Services to report on the Follow-up Inspection of Slammanan Primary and Nursery (action 439) to today's meeting. However the inspection process had not been completed as anticipated and consequently the report would be submitted to the next meeting.

Decision

The committee noted the Rolling Action Log.

S23. Development Services Performance Update – January to June 2019

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 1 January to 30 June 2019. The Director of Development Services provided an overview of the report.

The report provided information on:-

- significant challenges, risks and changes in service pressures since the last update;
- relevant performance reports, audits and inspections

The Director of Development Services provided an update on the following workstreams:-

- Revenue Budget
- Strategic Property Review
- Waste recycling and compliance with the Household Waste Recycling Charter
- Smart Working Smart Travel
- Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme
- Decriminalisation Parking Enforcement (DPE)
- Falkirk Tax Incremental Financial (TIF) /Investment Zone
- Welfare Reform/Fair Start
- Town Centres

She also gave an update on the following strategies:-

- Local Development Plan (LDP2), which was agreed by the Council in June 2019 following a period of consultation
- Dig in Falkirk, the local food growing strategy which has been the subject of consultation
- Revised Core Plans Path was finalised after a consultation was completed

Mrs Geisler also provided an update in regard to the following:-

- Development Services (Roads and Engineering Design) Quality Management System – ISO 9001 : 2015
- the Planning Performance Framework

In regard to performance, which was set out in the appendices to the report, Mrs Geisler highlighted:-

- the progress of the TIF in particular in regard to the crossing at Westfield
- a bid made by the Lottery Heritage Fund in regard to Zetland Park in Grangemouth
- Brexit preparations
- Impact of the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative
- the Strategic Property Review

Following a question on the suite of performance indicators which were reported to the committee, the Director explained that those included in the LGBF, or when an aspect of the service had been deemed as not to have been performing well by an external reviewer, by scrutiny reviews, or by internal assessment, would be reported to the Committee.

The committee discussed the cost of the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme. Different sums had been quoted in the report (£132m and £180m). The Director undertook to confirm the correct figure. In response to a

question in regard to the measures to protect Skinflats the Director explained that the area was subject to Coastal, Pluvial and Fluvial Flooding so the Grangemouth scheme would tie in with neighbouring flood prevention schemes to protect areas such as Skinflats. Where possible measures would include using natural measures such as tree planting; attenuation.

The committee discussed the potential impact of Brexit, particularly in a no deal situation, on the Investment Zone aims and on Grangemouth in particular, given the recent reporting of the Government's Yellowhammer document which had suggested that oil refineries would close as a consequence of a no deal Brexit. The Director stated that the Council had been assessing the risks in conjunction with the Scottish Government and she was unaware of any risk of closure of Grangemouth Refinery. The Scottish Government's planning assumptions had not factored in the assumptions set out in Yellowhammer; if there were to be an impact it may be in regard to tariffs. This made investment from the Scottish Government more vital. It may be that the area would be affected indirectly for example if refineries closed then this could lead to industrial action at Grangemouth. It was important to analyse the detail of Yellowhammer. A briefing on Brexit and the impact of Yellowhammer on the council's preparations would be held for all members. Preparations were already underway, in areas such as the provision of care and in food supply. The Director was confident the Council's preparations were sound. Following a question in regard to the Smart Working Smart Travel project the Director advised that 60 new pool vehicles had been delivered, with 30 more to follow in 2019/20. The aim was to reduce travel costs and achieve budget savings. The project was capital investment with revenue benefits flowing from a reduction in staff mileage claims. There was a hierarchy for travel and if staff had to drive they were encouraged to use pool cars. The fleet was green, with a large proportion of vehicles being electric.

Following a question in regard to the Tax Incremental Financing and roadworks in Grangemouth the Director stated that the £10m gap, resulting from the £90m project receiving £50m from the Scottish Government, needed to be closed. Road improvements would be addressed through the Investment Zone growth deal, including access to Grangemouth town centre. Following a question as to whether this included preventing HGVs using the town centre to access industry the Director stated that the project included access to the town centre. In response to a question on the frequency of gully clearing in Grangemouth the Director undertook to provide detail following the meeting.

The committee returned to Yellowhammer and stated that there was an urgent need to ensure there were adequate food supplies in place ahead of Brexit and that plans were in place to deal with food shortages. If the worst case scenario as set out in Yellowhammer unfolded the Council would play a key role in supporting the local community. The Director stated that the Scottish Government planning assumptions had included food supplies and this was covered in the council's planning. In this respect Yellowhammer had contained no new information. The Director stated that the significant long

term issues would be around the impact on the economy. The Scottish Government's Chief Economist had predicted that the UK economy would see a short sharp shock and that the consequences could be significant. The Council was engaged with the Scottish Government as part of its readiness preparations. For example the Business Gateway team had been actively supporting local businesses to prepare. There was particular risk for small and medium businesses as they were unlikely to have spare resources to mitigate the impact.

The committee returned to the issue of HGVs using Grangemouth town centre to access industry. There was, it was stated, a lack of facilities in the town for HGV parking. This had, it was stated, been raised as a concern for a number of years. The Director repeated that roads infrastructure was part of the Investment Zone business case and that there would be a report to the Executive on 29 October 2019 on the Investment Zone. It was stated in reply that HGVs did impact on the town centre with car parks used as toilet facilities by drivers. In response to a statement that the Council had not been addressing the situation the Director disagreed and repeated that there was a project to look at this in the shorter term.

The committee turned to waste recycling and sought detail on the current saving projections. The Director stated that the overspend was previously in the order of £1.4m. The aim of the project was to deliver a service that was Charter Compliant. An approach to service delivery had been agreed by the Executive earlier in the year and funding had been secured from Zero Waste Scotland. The rollout of the "burgundy" bin would be complete soon. It was anticipated that the new collection and disposal service would produce efficiency savings which would contribute to budget reduction savings. For example the cost (£9) to sort material from bins was reduced from more effective recycling by the public. The Director stated her thanks to the local residents, to whom the service had been called out, for their support.

In regard to the Grangemouth Flood Prevention Scheme, the Director confirmed this was a 5-10 year project linked to a phased programme of works and to funding options.

Mrs Geisler stated, following a question, that the Decriminalized Parking Enforcement (DPE) scheme was self funded, based upon income generation, and was established to break even. She also confirmed in response to a question in regard to a TIF project with West Lothian Council on joint roundabout upgrade works, that the work was ongoing and that the bulk of the funding was from Transport Scotland. The service looked to align Transport Scotland, Falkirk Council and West Lothian Council funding to drive the project. Any works could not start until autumn of a given year. The project was ready to start when the funding was in place.

The Director stated that tests in the use of polymer bitumen road surface particles were going well. There had been a number of developments in the use of recycled plastics. The service was looking to develop a business case, following trials of the road surface at a local and national level.

The committee returned to the rollout of the “burgundy bins” and sought clarification of the breakdown of the percentage of card which could be recycled from the bins. The Director stated that there was a “picking line” at the Roughmote centre to take out products which could not be recycled. It was important that residents utilized the bins correctly and again she asked the public for its support following the introduction of the new bins. She undertook to provide information on the percentage of recycled material. The Director praised the response to the Dig in Falkirk local food growing strategy. She confirmed that there had been high demand for allotments and there was an intention to expand the scheme further. The focus had been on using Council owned property but it could be developed beyond this.

The committee then considered the service performance information set out in appendix 1 to the report. Members praised the performance of the service in the reported period, however the committee sought information on the Strategic Property Review Project, which was behind target. The Director set out the work which had been carried out to date on hubs and the review of sports and leisure facilities, which had been reported to Council in June. A consultation exercise had been called for by Council and this was underway. Work was ongoing in regard to other assets of the Council’s portfolio. The review looked at Council assets and applied the agreed SPR principles. A number of recommendations would come out. Those were, Mrs Geisler stated, unsurprising. A report would be submitted to the Executive on 29 October 2019. The Director also advised that work was continuing in regard to the HQ/Arts centre project. The committee sought detail on vacant premises in Denny Town Centre. Colin Frame confirmed two units were vacant and although there had been interest there had been no material interest. It was anticipated that as the development progressed on phases 2 and 3 they would generate interest in phase 1 vacant units. The Council had engaged a marketing consultant for phase 2 of the project. In regard to indicator Econ9 (town vacancy rates) members noted an improvement with a reduction in the rate from 14.86% to 11.94%. The Director agreed and stated that Falkirk Town Centre was one of the better performing town centres. While the rate was not good, it compared favourably to rates across the country where town centres faced significant challenges. She gave a summary of work with the Falkirk town centre partnership which aimed to address vacancies and restoring vibrancy to the town centre.

The committee highlighted the LGBF indicators on regard to the percentage of roads that should be considered for roads maintenance (Env b-d). The Director stated that the Council was 23rd for class A, 20th for class B and 22nd for class C roads. Nationally Councils had the same approach to roads maintenance. The performance was not related to the Council’s approach – it related directly to funding. The investment made by Falkirk Council would see roads continue to deteriorate. This was the case for other authorities across Scotland.

Members highlighted a decrease (86.5% in 2010-14 to 69% in 2015-18) in satisfaction with refuse collection. In 2015-18 the national average was 78.7%. The Director responded that this was based on a small sample.

Nonetheless she wanted to see an improvement and work was ongoing to engage with the public to understand their dissatisfaction in order to improve the service. Mrs Geisler agreed with a statement that contamination was an issue and there was a need to continue to engage with the public to promote and understand the need to separate materials correctly.

Following a statement criticising the condition of roads in Grangemouth the Director repeated she had not stated that roads would not be 'fixed'. There was a maintenance programme but the funding required to 'fix' all roads was significant. Council had considered a report setting out the issues and costs in 2018. In response to a statement that volunteers had collected significant amounts of litter in Grangemouth the Director praised the endeavor of the volunteers and stated that while the service was not responsible for creating the vast amount of litter alluded to, their team worked hard to clear it in conjunction with the community. In response to a statement that HGV drivers littered extensively, including human waste, the Director stated that such criminality was a matter for the Police.

Following a question in regard to contaminated bins not being collected the Director advised that there was a hierarchy of response. It was important that material in blue bins was not contaminated as it affected the Council's ability to sell the waste. Not collecting contaminated bins would drive change. There was plenty of information available and officers engaged with the community. Contamination costs the Council money.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the performance of Development Services over the period 1 January to 30 June 2019.

S24. Economic Strategy Update

The committee had previously considered the Economic Strategy on 1 February 2018 (ref S30) and had asked for an annual update to be submitted. The committee had received an update presentation on the strategy on 4 April 2019 (ref S8). Although detailed, the committee had considered that the format had not afforded suitable opportunity for scrutiny and requested that a report be submitted at a later date.

The Economic Strategy 2015-2025: Growth, Investment and Inclusion had been developed with the Falkirk Economic Partnership. The aim of the partnership was to support the Council and its partners to enable the growth of the area's economy, attract investment and ensure benefits for the wider community. Key to this work would be the establishment of an Investment Zone to help grow the areas economy. A business case for creating an Investment Zone had been submitted to the UK and Scottish Governments and the confirmation of the outcome of the bid for £200m funding was awaited.

The report set out work and outcome to date in processing the three themes of the Economic Strategy. These were:-

- Growth
- Investment
- Inclusion

In regard to growth the report provided updates in regard to

- Business growth
- Town centres

In regard to Investment the report focussed on:-

- Tax Incremental financial (TIF) initiative
- Falkirk Gateway
- Investment Zone
- Kelvin Valley Falkirk LEADER

In regard to inclusion the report provided an update on the principal strand of employability.

The committee congratulated Pam Smith on her secondment to the Improvement Service. Mrs Geisler explained that there were benefits to the Council in the secondment and congratulated Mrs Smith on her achievements and successes during her long service with Falkirk Council.

Following a question on the Council's work in regard to Grangemouth Town Centre, Jackie McArthur explained that as part of the action plan it was proposed to establish a youth hub. Members of the committee stated that the Council had promised to listen to the views of Grangemouth High School in regard to the Youth Hub over a year ago and it had not yet been established.

The committee highlighted that the LEADER project was an EU programme and sought assurance on the impact of BREXIT on this initiative. Pam Smith stated that the Treasury had agreed to underwrite any funding committed up to the point of BREXIT.

The Scottish Government and COSLA planned to discuss a shared prosperity fund which the UK government intended to establish to replace the EU structure funding. This would be devolved to Scotland (both revenue and capital funding). The cliff edge was, she said, 2024. Funding was guaranteed until 2023. Officers were in contact with the Scottish Government and COSLA to determine what Falkirk's share would be. There was a risk that it could be less than current funding levels. In response to a question, Mrs Smith stated that there had been political statements to the effect that the new UK fund would match current funding.

The committee noted the Townscape Heritage Initiative funding had been used to refurbish shop fronts. Now that the funding was no longer available

for such work, members asked if the planning requirement was now removed and consequently the High Street would see a return to cheaper frontages. Mrs Geisler confirmed that the standard of frontages remained a planning aspiration. In terms of the planning process, applicants could argue that in meeting the standard they were not liable.

The committee then sought clarification in the Denny Town Centre regeneration project, in particular the distinction between phase 2 and 3. The director gave a detailed response. Phase 3 was a small site. Phase 2 had been marketed but no success. Phase 3 had been marketed successfully. Colin Frame advised that phase 2 had been marketed 3 times. It had arguably been marketed for retail and there had been interest but this had not been successful, it was now being considered for social/mixed use.

The committee congratulated the service on attracting external funding and asked for details on the breakdown between capital and revenue funding. The director stated that the service had an enviable track record in successfully attracting funding. She highlighted the work to develop the Investment Zone business case and the funding this would attract. She undertook to provide the committee with a breakdown of external funding by project and funding type.

The committee praised the service's success in developing the tourism sector. Members noted that a number of attractions, such as the Wheel and Kelpies, were out of town and asked that work was done to attract visitors from these attractions into the town centre. The Director acknowledged the question but stated that there were attractions in the town centre such as the Steeple and the Churchyard. There was a need, she recognised, to attract out of town visitors to the town centre. There was a bus service for example from the Kelpies to the town. There was a need to encourage visitors to stay for a number of days. Falkirk was in an excellent location for visitors to see local sights and to travel to both Glasgow and Edinburgh. There was a need to establish better transport links to and from the town and to make the town centre more attractive. There was a Town Centre action plan, and also a Grangemouth town centre action plan.

The committee then discussed the Modern Apprentice programme. The number had reduced from 340 in 2018/19 to 179 at the first quarter of 2019/20. Pam Smith stated that the number was directly related to reduced budgets. Work had focused on those people who needed a more supported placement. The figures had been maintained by Children's Services through for example the expansion of Early Years and social care. The biggest hit had been in business administration, mainly due to the change in the arrangements for Business Support across the Council. The Director added that there had been a significant intake of graduates, with 9 placed in Development Services. The Committee asked about the work of the Individual Placement Support (IPS) Service. Pam Smith explained it worked in partnership with the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH). Falkirk was the only fair start provider to deliver this with 30 individuals having participated in the support to date. The service was for job seekers receiving

support from Community Mental Health Service.

The committee discussed the work being carried out in Falkirk Town Centre had highlighted the need for events, such as the Arts Festival, to draw footfall to the town centre. The Director concurred with an observation that it was important to encourage communities to take part in the activities which promote the town and make it a better place to be. She highlighted the Council of the Future theme of enabling communities which sought to do just this.

Following a question in regard to the indicator OP5 – percentage of immediately available employment and which had been 58.9% in 2017/18, the Director stated that there was a requirement in the Development plan to identify use for employment land. Part of the work of the TIF had been to make land available. The Investment Zone would do so also.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the progress on the Falkirk Economic Strategy.

S25. Complaints Annual Report 2018/19

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the Council's Complaints Annual Report for 2018/19.

The Complaints Annual Report set out the Council's performance against 8 indicators set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in 2016/17. They were:-

- Complaints received per 1,000 population
- Number of complaints closed
- Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
- Average response times
- Performance against timescales
- Number of cases where an extension is authorised
- Customer satisfaction
- Learning from complaints

Over the period, the Council had received 3670 complaints compared to 2832 in the previous year. Of these, 90% had been closed at stage 1 of the Complaints Handling Process.

In regard to performance against timescale, 87% of stage 1 complaints had been closed within the 5 day deadline and 58% of stage 2 complaints had been closed within the 20 day deadline (compared to 69% in 2017/18 and 79% in 2016/17).

51% of complaints had been upheld or partially upheld at stage 1 with 39% upheld or partially upheld at stage 2 (compared to 54% and 43% respectively in 2017/18)

In 2018/19 the areas of service which had received the most complaints had been:-

Stage 1 Complaints

	Totals
Housing repairs	717
Household waste collection	436
Staff conduct	391
Local schools	125
Council tax account enquiries	113
Road maintenance	102
Household waste assisted collection	98
Bulky household waste collections	78
Other	76
Tenant support	57

Stage 2 Complaints

	Totals
Housing repairs	42
Staff conduct	32
Local schools	29
Household waste collection	20
Development control	14
Road maintenance	14
Communal housing repairs	13
Housing nuisance	13
Housing Services	10
Children & young people, preventative	9 services

Following a question the Head of Performance Technology and Improvement advised that national benchmarking data had not been available at the time of publication. Normally the Council's performance was close to or better than the national benchmark. Should this not be the case then this would be reported to the committee.

Following a suggestion that visitors to the advice hubs had been advised to contact the Council by telephone when trying to make an enquiry, Fiona Campbell stated that the aim of the Hub model was to resolve issues at the point of contact. The staff should take the enquiry and advise of the best approach. It could be in some cases that this would be online. She did not expect however that the public would be turned away as suggested. Members responded that the caller had been advised that Hub staff could only deal with financial enquiries. Fiona Campbell stated that this should not be the case.

Members then asked for information on the process after stage 2, if a complaint remained unresolved. In such a case, Fiona Campbell advised, the matter could be taken to the SPSO. In 2019/20 22 such cases were investigated by the SPSO. The aim of the complaints process was she explained, to resolve, or explain why an issue couldn't be resolved.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's Complaints Annual Report 2018/19.

S26. Summary of Local Government in Scotland Challenges and Performance 2019

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an overview of the Accounts Commission's report on 'Local Government in Scotland – Challenges and Performance 2019' report.

The Challenges and Performance report was an annual report that focused on the wider challenges and issues facing local authorities in Scotland, their performance over the last year and also set out the impact of reduced financial resources. The report had been prepared by Audit Scotland and published by the Commission in March 2019. The report was about local government in general and not specifically about Falkirk Council.

The Challenges and Performance report was in three sections:

- the challenges for councils
- councils responses to the challenges; and
- councils performance and the impact on communities

The report set out the financial landscape within which Councils operate. It highlighted a number of financial and legislative changes that affected Local Government, these included:-

- Fairer Scotland Act
- Early learning and childcare
- Impact of welfare reform
- Local Outcome improvement plans
- National performance framework with a focus on delivering social housing, free nursery places for 2-3 year olds, Pupil Equity Funding
- Health and Social Care integration
- Child Poverty Act
- Community Empowerment including community asset transfer, community engagement and public participation in decision making including participatory budgeting
- City Region and Growth deals

- Barclay Review
- Local Governance review
- Brexit

Additionally, Councils must also respond to local pressures such as:-

- Increasing levels of poverty
- Increasing number of older people with multiple issues
- Changes in communities and more mobile populations
- An increased focus on sustainability
- Need to re invigorate partnership working
- The need to transform services to keep pace with the needs and aspirations of customers

Scottish Government funding had reduced in real terms since 2013/14 although it had increased slightly between 2018/19 and 2019/20. However, an increasing number of national policy objectives had impact on Council's abilities to make efficiency savings. Most Councils had responded to these challenges by undertaking transformational work. The report stressed that such work should not be internal focussed but should contribute to Council's strategic priorities and outcomes.

While Councils on the whole had understood the challenges facing their communities these needed to be better linked to their visions and priorities and the need to link budgets to strategic priorities and plans needed to be evidenced by councils.

The report reaffirmed the need for Councils to consider their approach to demonstrating best value including performance management and, self assessment. Despite reduction in funding Councils had improved, or maintained performance. Notably, Falkirk Council had recorded the largest improvement of any Council in regard to education and closing the attainment gap.

The report noted that despite reductions in funding, Councils had maintained or improved performance against national indicators – though performance did vary across Councils.

The report stressed that to continue to improve the outcomes for their communities, Councils needed to be open to transformational change and implement new ways of working. In this regard:

- Members need to assure themselves that they have adequate leadership and management capacity in place. This should include arrangements that prepare and support councillors and senior managers to respond to the challenging and changing local and national demands.

- Councils need to undertake long-term financial planning to set out how they will deliver national policy commitments, while continuing to sustain local services with reducing budgets and increasing demands.
- Services must continue to seek and implement innovative ways of working and collaborate with communities, partners and the third sector to drive transformational change.
- Councils must improve data to:
 - help inform the difficult decisions councils have to make
 - support benchmarking, learning and sharing of experience and effective practice with others that will contribute to improving service quality, efficiency and outcomes for communities
- Services must ensure they have workforce planning that was clear about the workforce needed now and in the future, where the gaps are and what training or other action is needed to fill them. This should be supported by better workforce data.
- Councils must be able to demonstrate how spending decisions and priorities have impacted on service delivery and the outcomes of residents, as well as how they are delivering against the national performance framework.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the key messages and recommendations set out in the Accounts Commission's report on 'Local Government in Scotland – Challenges and Performance 2019'.

S27. Scrutiny and Audit of the Council and its Services

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services advising of the revised arrangements for risk assessment by external auditors and inspectors and also advised of the Council's next best value audit.

A report by Audit Scotland on the Local Area Network (LAN) audit arrangements for Councils had concluded that while there was a value to be gained by the LAN meeting and engaging with Councils on their key challenges, performance and risk, the practice was not consistently embedded across the country. New proposals had been implemented which set out a clear structure for the work of LANs which would include a strategic scrutiny group, an operational group and then local networks. A lead auditor would bring together the networks and oversee their work.

In its audit plan for 2020 Audit Scotland had indicated that Falkirk Council would be subject to audit in 2010. The audit would focus on:

- Does the council have clear strategic direction?
- How well is the council performing?
- Is the council using its resources effectively?

- Is the council working well with its partners?
- Is the council demonstrating continuous improvement?

These issues had been identified in the Local Government in Scotland – challenges and performance 2019 report published by the Accounts Commissioner which had been considered earlier in the meeting as well as in the audit reports

The Committee sought further information on the previous Best Value audit of Falkirk Council. Fiona Campbell explained that this had been in 2014. It had highlighted significant issues in regard to:-

- Medium Term Financial Planning
- Scrutiny arrangements
- Performance reporting
- Transformation of services

The Council had responded with rigour to address the key points in the action plan. Audit Scotland had followed up its initial review with two 6 monthly follow up audits of progress in implementing the action plan.

Prior to the audit, officers would brief elected members on the Council's response to the most recent review and on Council performance. She stressed that while all relevant background will be made available to elected members as part of the briefing, answers would not be provided. How members responded was a matter for themselves.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted:-

- (1) the changing role of the local area network;**
- (2) that the Council will be subject to a Best Value Audit in 2020;**
- (3) Members are briefed on the audit process once timescales etc. are known.**