

The background of the slide is a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. It features a crown at the top with four maple leaves. The shield is divided into four quadrants: top-left shows a city skyline with a diagonal beam of light; top-right shows a stag's head with a cross on its antlers; bottom-left shows a three-masted sailing ship on wavy water; bottom-right shows an eagle with spread wings perched on a branch. A banner at the bottom contains the motto 'A NE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 1

Minute

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held within Grangemouth Education Unit on Thursday 5 October 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Councillors: David Aitchison
Lorna Binnie
Gordon Forrest
Alf Kelly (Chair)
Jack Redmond
Ann Ritchie

Officers: Laura Lowrie, Service Manager
Jim Millar, Democratic Services Graduate
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Joanna Stewart, Housing Support Co-Ordinator

Also
Attending: Chief Superintendent Barry Blair, Police Scotland
Chief Inspector Lynsey Kidd, Police Scotland
Area Commander William Pollard, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

The Democratic Services Manager advised that Councillor Brown had resigned as convener and that Council would be asked to appoint a new convener in December. In the meantime, the committee appointed Councillor Kelly as Chair for the meeting.

SE5. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillor Brown.

SE6. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

SE7. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 17 August 2023 was approved.

SE8. Police Scotland – Falkirk Area Performance

The Committee considered the report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services which presented the Falkirk area performance by Police Scotland for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Section 45 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 set out the role of the local authority with regard to the governance of Police Scotland, as follows:-

A local authority may monitor and provide feedback to the local commander on the policing of its area, and (in particular) may provide to the local commander:-

- (a) its views on any matter concerning or connected to the policing of its area, and
- (b) any recommendations for the improvement of the policing of its area that it thinks fit.

A local authority may provide feedback by reference to any local police plan in force for the area. A local commander must provide to the local authority:-

- (a) reports on the carrying out of police functions in its area (including by reference to any local policing plan in force for the area);
- (b) statistical information on complaints made about the Police Service in, or the policing of, its area, and
- (c) other information about the policing of its area, as the local authority may reasonably require.

The local policing plan set out the local priorities and objectives for the Falkirk Council area and was a statutory requirement of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The plan took account of the following:

- The Scottish Government's overarching vision for public services;
- Strategic priorities set by Scottish Ministers;
- The Scottish Police Authority's Strategic Police Plan;
- The Chief Constable's Annual Police Plan, and
- Local context and need.

This report covered the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It highlighted the performance of local policing across the Falkirk Council area, in accordance with the local policing plan, and the following local priorities:

- Responsive to the concerns of our communities;
- Enhancing our collective resilience to emerging threats;
- Protecting people most at risk from harm;
- Promoting confidence through our actions, and

- Road Safety and Road Crime.

The Local Commander, Chief Superintendent Blair, advised that the report covered the year 2022/23 and would be the final report relating to the local policing plan for the period 2020 – 2023. The local policing plan for the period 2023 – 2026 had been approved by Council on 23 May 2023. Chief Superintendent Blair outlined some key strategic changes between the local policing plans in regard to staffing and financial challenges. He added that several measures, including a recruitment freeze and executive review, had been implemented to reduce costs across the organisation, and it was expected that staffing would reduce further.

The Area Commander, Chief Inspector Kidd, provided an overview of the report and highlighted the actions which had been taken to meet the above local priorities. She added an overview of performance figures which were split by the following groups:-

- Group 1 consisted of violent crime;
- Group 2 consisted of sexual offences;
- Group 3 included a wide range of dishonesty crimes;
- Group 4 included vandalism, fire-raising and malicious mischief, and
- Group 5 related to crimes identified as a of police pro-activity.

The Area Commander emphasised that, despite a fall in Hate Crime detection rates by 6.5%, Hate Crimes received additional scrutiny and were monitored daily. She sought to reassure that Hate Crimes remained an area of continuing importance.

The Committee requested more information on the collaborative work undertaken between Police Scotland and the Council. Chief Inspector Kidd described the collaborative work across the Community Safety Partnership which involved the local authority engaging with Police Scotland to assess emerging trends in the local area. Chief Superintendent Blair highlighted school-based officers as a resource that had only been made available through Council contributions.

Having received feedback from constituents that community police officers had not attended community meetings, the Committee asked whether resource was available to ensure there was attendance when requested. Chief Inspector Kidd acknowledged the importance of attending Community Council meetings, however, she added that there would be occasions where officers were required to attend an immediate call, rather than a meeting. Chief Superintendent Blair added that the continuing constraint on resource could, moving forward, limit attendance at Community Council meetings as community police officers would be required to attend more emergency calls.

The Committee turned to the performance figures provided at appendix 2 to the report. The Committee noted that on page 44, 95% of domestic violence bail checks were to be conducted within 24 hours, however, 83.9% were completed in the required timescale and this showed a 7% reduction on the

previous year. The Committee asked why this target had been missed. Chief Inspector Kidd acknowledged that the figures were below the target of 95% and outlined issues related to victim hostility and wider resource challenges. She added that 95% remained the target moving forward.

The Committee noted, on page 45, that housebreaking, shoplifting and robbery incidents were up, and that detection rates were down on the previous year.

	Apr 2021 – Mar 2022	Apr 2022 March 2023
Theft by housebreaking detection rate	28.0%	19.5%
Theft by housebreaking	189	231
Theft by shoplifting detection rate	59.7%	52.1%
Theft by shoplifting	578	779
Robbery detection rate	80.4%	75.0%
Robbery	51	52

Chief Inspector Kidd acknowledged the rise of the above incidents and explained that this had been a consequence of more cross-divisional and organised crime appearing in the Falkirk area. She added that, particularly in relation to ‘theft by shoplifting’, the cost-of-living crisis had increased household financial pressures and that this could have led to the increase in acquisitive crime. She explained that the Policing Plan was augmented to include a range of measures to counteract the above issues moving forward. These measures included:

- hotspot policing patrols;
- specialist resource teams;
- key information briefings, and
- safer communities department public information.

The Committee discussed to the decision to employ a specialist quad bike unit from another local authority to address the rise in illegal off-road bikes, and asked whether a Falkirk-based unit would be invested in. The Chief Superintendent advised that this had not been considered due to the financial pressures on the organisation, but added that, as part of a national organisation, a multitude of resources would be available without specific local investment.

The Committee continued to focus on the financial pressures faced by the organisation and asked whether this would only impact on areas of new investment, or whether a reduction in policing resource would be likely. The Chief Superintendent advised, that if budget allocations remained unchanged,

then both new investments would stop and a reduction in local policing numbers would be expected. He added, following early evaluations, that expectations were that the national fleet would need to reduce by a further 600 officers. Chief Superintendent Blair stated that moving forward the financial challenges would impact on the ability to engage with the community and meet targets. The Committee requested officer numbers for the Forth Valley area, however Chief Superintendent Blair advised these numbers were not published, but that all divisions could operate in any given area. The Committee sought reassurance that the financial pressures would not stop responses to road traffic accident 'hotspots', and Ch Supt Blair confirmed these responses would continue.

The Committee turned to the local policing priority 'enhancing our collective resilience to emerging threats' which set out areas of action related to:-

- Serious organised crime;
- Cybercrime;
- Drugs misuse;
- Counter terrorism, and
- Planning for emergencies

The Committee asked for an update on the work, at a local level, to implement counter terrorism measures, as this had not been included in the report. The Chief Superintendent advised that counter terrorism required a multifaceted approach from specialist officers in partnership with the 'Prevent Strategy'. He added that a further, more detailed update on counter-terrorism could be provided in the form of a presentation at a later meeting. This would be discussed with the Democratic Services Manager.

The Committee noted that 2 out of the 3 'risks and threats' to the Falkirk area were related to drug misuse. It asked for more information on how these risks could be reduced. The Area Commander described drug misuse as a national issue and added that it required a strong partnership between public health, local authorities and community work to assist those struggling with issues related to drugs to find appropriate help. The Committee requested figures on Naloxone administration by officers and the Area Commander advised that, although the figures were not to hand, this could be provided in an email update.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Police Scotland in meeting its priorities.

SE9. Performance Report: Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The Committee considered the report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services which presented the performance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Following the establishment of the SFRS on 1 April 2013, under the provisions of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, local senior officers were required to report on performance with regard to the local fire and rescue plan.

This report covered the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The most recent local fire and rescue plan had been approved by Council on 23 June 2021.

Section 115 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 set out the role of the local authority with regard to the governance of the SFRS:-

- A local authority may monitor and provide feedback to the SFRS on the manner in which the SFRS carries out its functions in the authority's area and (in particular) may provide to the SFRS:-
 - (a) its views on any matter concerning or connected to the manner in which SFRS carries out those functions in the authority's area,
 - (b) any recommendations for improvements in the manner in which the SFRS carries out those functions in the authority's area that it thinks fit.
- A local authority may provide feedback by reference to any local fire and rescue plan in force for its area.

The local fire and rescue plan set out the local priorities and objectives for the Falkirk Council area and was a statutory requirement of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The plan took account of the following:

- The Scottish Government's overarching vision for public services;
- Strategic priorities set by Scottish Ministers;
- National outcomes within the National Performance Framework, and
- The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013. This set out 4 strategic aims for the service and 7 national equalities outcomes.

The plan sets out 7 local priorities, which were:-

- Local Risk Management and Preparedness
- Domestic Fire Safety
- Deliberate Fire Setting
- Non-domestic Fire Safety

- Road Safety
- Unintentional Harm and Injury
- Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

The SFRS measured performance against the plan using 7 key indicators, which were:-

- All accidental dwelling fires
- All accidental dwelling fire casualties (fatal & non-fatal (incl. p/c's))
- All deliberate fires
- Non domestic fires
- Special Service – RTC casualties
- Special Service – Non RTC casualties
- False Alarm - UFAs

The Area Commander, William Pollard, provided an overview of the report and highlighted that the SFRS local plan had been due for renewal, however this was postponed to allow a strategic review of resource impacts in the financial climate – this included the temporary removal of 10 appliances nationally. He added that once this review had been completed, new the local plans would be developed.

The Committee asked whether the Strategic Review could be shared once completed. The Area Commander agreed and suggested that the councillors could be included in the consultation process of the review. The Committee noted that, as part of the financial impact review, 10 appliances had been temporarily removed nationally and sought assurances that this removal did not put residents at any further risk. The Area Commander explained that significant work had been undertaken to assess any potential impact and the organisation was satisfied that this decision was safe. He added, that as the SFRS was a national body, there was scope for appliances to be deployed across various divisions, thus mitigating any risk.

The Committee noted that the report stated that in 36% of accidental 'dwelling house fires' there was no working fire alarm. It asked whether there was capacity for the SFRS to fit more than the 677 detectors previously fitted. The Area Commander advised that there was more capacity, and explained that 677 detectors were fitted following home fire safety visits. He added that households would continue to be encouraged to fit detectors, as outlined by in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (Tolerable Standard) (Extension of Criteria) Amendment Order 2021, but if any buildings fell outwith this legislative framework the SFRS would continue to assist with fittings. The Committee asked whether the requirement for interlinked detectors had provided a significant improvement on the number of households with working detectors, and asked if statistics were available on the number of detectors fitted across all properties. The Area Commander advised that the only statistics held on detectors were those fitted by the SFRS.

The Committee turned to matters relating to the cause of fire. It asked whether the increase in the use of handheld electrical appliances had impacted on instances of household dwelling fires and could this be included in future reports to increase public awareness. The Area Commander explained that the organisation was aware of these issues and that they formed part of a national campaign which could be accessed via their website. He added that these awareness campaigns could be added to future reports. The Committee noted that 66% of household dwelling fires started in the kitchen and asked what caused this. The Area Commander explained that the cause of kitchen fire was often attributed to distraction while cooking, rather than by any specific appliance. He suggested that often distraction and forgetfulness was often attributed to older people and, over the last 5 years, 61% of accidental fire fatalities were those over the age 60. The Committee asked what relatives of older people could do to help prevent this. The Area Commander pointed to the 'Make the Call' campaign, outlined in the report, where relatives of older people were encouraged to contact the SFRS who could offer advice and a home fire safety visit. He added that Councillors were encouraged to share this campaign with their constituents.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in meeting its priorities.

The Committee adjourned at 11.30am for a comfort break and reconvened at 11.40am.

Councillor Ritchie joined the meeting during the consideration of the next item.

SE10. Following the Public Pound: Public Protection

The Committee considered the report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services which provided information under the Following the Public Pound arrangements for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 for the Council's public protection outcome including alcohol, drugs and community justice.

External organisations which receive funding from Falkirk Council were subject to formal monitoring, scrutiny, and reporting. The organisations that receive funding were from the Third Sector (voluntary/charitable).

The organisations were funded on the basis that they provided services which could not readily be provided within the Council. Services were, however, provided in ways which complement those provided by the Council and other statutory partners. They were subject to routine monitoring in terms of their performance against agreed outcomes.

The Scrutiny (External) Committee role was to understand the contribution that various organisations were making to achieve the priorities and outcomes that were importance to the Council. This latter role was increasingly a focus for services given the need to reduce duplication, be consistent in service delivery across the Council area and to achieve a joined approach to service delivery.

Monitoring by officers took the form of regular reports and meetings. Each monitoring statement, attached as appendices, provided an overview of the service funded by the Council, the agreed objectives or outcomes, performance information during the period and a financial overview.

In public protection terms, the Council led the Community Planning Partnership's Public Protection and Community Justice Chief Officers Group. The focus of this group was to oversee the delivery of the Outcome - Our area will be a safer place to live, as outlined below:-

- Take a much more comprehensive and integrated approach to support vulnerable adults;
- Further develop the information we use to resource the tasking & co-ordination process;
- Review Child protection procedures to ensure that neglect is included;
- Further develop the information we use to target Community Justice resources in the areas we agree are a priority for Falkirk;
- Improve access to services for people with convictions;
- Increase effectiveness of partner agencies in tackling issues such as antisocial behaviour, alcohol and drugs issues, hate crime and other emerging threats, and
- Encouraging our communities to participate in preparations for emergency events through community resilience.

The organisations funded or monitored by the Council that supported the above outcome were:

Organisation	Monitoring Service	Annual Funding
SACRO – Youth Justice	Children's Services	£90,468
Committed to Ending Abuse	Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services	£216,553

The Service Manager provided an overview of the report, relating to the organisation SACRO – Youth Justice, and highlighted matters related to the aims, delivery and performance of the organisation.

The Committee requested a breakdown of the funding spend within the organisation. The Service Manager advised that, although she did not have this information currently available, this could be provided later via email.

The Committee noted that 17 cases were closed on an 'unplanned' basis and asked what this meant. The Services Manager confirmed that this referred to cases where SACRO had been unable to complete an intervention fully. She added that, in reference to the 17 cases from the reporting period, that this had been due to either parents not given consent or young people being unable to engage with the service following a change in their circumstances.

The Housing Support Co-ordinator provided an overview of the report related to the organisation Committed to Ending Abuse and outlined issues of increased waiting times due to staffing reduction. She added, that since the publication of the report, some additional funding had been secured for the 2023/24 financial year from Falkirk Council, Police Scotland and the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Following a question, the Housing Support Co-ordinator confirmed that the Council funding covered staffing costs and equated to approximately 2.5 FTE. The Committee asked how much additional funding had been secured and whether this would also cover staffing costs. The Housing Support Co-ordinator confirmed that the additional funding described above amounted to £15,000, however it was not currently known what costs this would cover. She added that although some additional funding had been secured for the 2023/24 financial year, the overall funding for the 2023/24 was less than the £216,553 in the previous year.

The Committee noted that the report stated, at page 87 of the agenda, that "clients were more likely to approach a service that was not aligned to statutory social work services to help them address their situation and were more likely to engage with independent services that can represent them on their behalf". It suggested that the above implied that the services this organisation provided were also provided, but utilised less, by Social Work Services. The Housing Support Co-ordinator advised that all statutory services that operated within the local authority referred on to the organisation.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by SACRO – Youth Justice and Committed to Ending Abuse in meeting Council priorities.