

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 city skyline with a diagonal beam of light. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows a three-masted sailing ship on wavy water. The bottom-right quadrant features a grizzly bear standing on a rock. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

## **Agenda Item 3**

### **Minute**

Draft

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held within Grangemouth Education Unit on Thursday 9 November 2023 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Councillors:** David Aitchison  
Lorna Binnie  
Provost Robert Bissett (convener)  
Gordon Forrest  
Brian McCabe

**Councillors**  
**also attending:** Paul Garner (Items S5 and S6)  
Anne Hannah (Items S5 and S6)  
Laura Murtagh (Items S5 and S6)  
Alan Nimmo (Items S5 and S6)  
Robert Spears (Items S5 and S6)

**Officers:** Karen Algie, Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services  
Malcom Bennie, Director of Place Services  
Kenneth Lawrie, Chief Executive  
Rebecca McDonald, Change Manager  
Jim Millar, Democratic Services Graduate  
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager  
Kerry Raeburn, Programme Management Co-Ordinator

**S17. Apologies**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillors Anslow and Robertson.

**S18. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**S19. Minute**

**Decision**

**The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7 September 2023 was approved.**

## **S20. Rolling Action Log**

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

Item 642 was the subject of a report on the agenda at the 7 September 2023 meeting and accordingly fell from the action log.

The Committee requested an update on the Deposit Return Scheme Update (Item 629). The Director of Place Services advised that a report went to the 17 October Executive outlining the plans to mitigate the delay in the national Deposit Return Scheme.

The Committee requested an update on the Roads Maintenance Performance Report (Item 643) which was due to be submitted to Committee at this meeting. The Director of Place Services advised that recent storms had impacted on Service resource and that the report would be presented at the 14 December meeting.

### **Decision**

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

Councillor McCabe left the meeting prior to the completion of the following item.

## **S21. Mid-Year Council Plan Performance Report**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services which provided members with an update on the Mid-Year Public Performance Report (PPR) for 2023/24.

It also looked towards year two of the approved refresh of The Council Plan in September 2023, and detailed the additional performance results selected from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF), where more timely data was available.

This report charted the performance against each of the key success measures aligned to the Council's priorities and enablers in The Council Plan.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of the report and highlighted the improvements in performance reporting which had been outlined by Audit Scotland. However, he acknowledged there remained room for further improvement.

The Change Manager and Programme Management Co-Ordinator guided members through a demonstration of the Council Power BI software used for

performance tracking. The Committee asked whether this software could, moving forward, allow performance tracking to be measured against financial performance and staffing resource. The Change Manager confirmed that this data was held on the system, but on separate dashboards, and ultimately the goal would be for these dashboards to be integrated. The Committee asked how officers could ensure that the information uploaded to the dashboard was accurate and relevant. The Change Manager acknowledged that this remained a resource and technical challenge, highlighting that it had taken 4 organisations to accurately process data through the pupil absence and attendance dashboard. The Committee turned towards dashboards which were currently not open to the public (the example provided was roads and potholes) and suggested that this would aid in member engagement with the public. The Change Manager advised publicising performance dashboards was something they aimed to do moving forward. The Director of Place Services added that if members had specific examples of poor performance relating to roads, they should contact him with the locations.

The Committee returned to the Mid-Year Council Plan Performance Report and noted that overall performance showed an increase in 'targets not achieved' from 21% to 24%. It added that the priority 'supporting stronger and healthier communities' was significantly behind meeting targets when compared to other priority areas. The Committee asked what would be done to address this moving forward.

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Percentage of targets achieved</b>
Supporting stronger and healthier communities	38%
Promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities	67%
Supporting a thriving economy and green transition	64%

The Chief Executive acknowledged the overall performance statistics, but pointed members towards the individual indicators set out within the report that collectively form the overall percentages above. He added that within these indicators there may be a range of factors which led to reduced performance and invited members to explore these further.

The Committee turned to the individual indicators to compare the 'We Will' action statements, success measures and progress updates.

Referring to the 'We Will' – "Coordinate and develop the way we inform and engage with communities to make it easier for people to have an active role in decisions that shape Falkirk's future". The Committee requested further information on the progress update, which referenced the implementation of improvements in 'phase 4', by asking when phase 4 was, what these improvements were and the expected impact of these improvements. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and

Interim Director of Children's Services advised that phase 4 of the community choices program had started and that this would be the final phase. She added that improvements had already been made in the percentage of budget allocated to participatory budgeting and that an additional piece of work regarding ward-based budgeting, due to start upon completion of phase 4 would help improve this further.

Referring to the 'We Will' - "Support and safeguard children where protection concerns have been raised". The Committee asked what alternative success measure would be provided now that the report stated the speed of conducting inter-agency referral discussions (IRD) was no longer relevant. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that this success measure had been removed as an indicator, but that new success measures had been added since the refreshed Council Plan. She explained that, although these were not available at the time of the meeting, they could be provided via email. The Chief Executive assured members that several indicators were monitored by the Children, Families and Social Work team.

The Committee turned to the 'We Will' - "Push toward becoming Net-Zero by 2030" and asked what the target value of 3.61 referred to. The Director of Place Services explained that, although he did not have this information currently available, it could be provided later.

When considering the success measure for the 'We Will' - "Encourage the development of a strong and independent third sector - with an infrastructure that understands and supports the needs of communities", the report suggested that the establishment of an Anchor organisation would indicate success. However, the progress update advised that the term Anchor organisation was yet to be defined. The Committee asked if this remained a competent success measure. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Service advised that this success measure had been amended as part of the Council Plan refresh, but that members should be reassured that work was continuing with the third sector and this may still include the establishment of an Anchor organisation(s).

The Committee noted that the 'We Wills' outlined in the Falkirk Performs framework did not mirror that of the mid-year performance report and provided examples related to homelessness and housing stock. The Chief Executive explained that, as the Council Plan had been refreshed this year, the Falkirk Performs framework encapsulated this update, whereas the mid-year performance report referred to the previous year.

Following a question, the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Service confirmed that Council Tax and rent collections were resourced from within the same division. She added that, when referring to rent arrears and the cost-of-living crisis, it was important to ensure that households were pointed towards the support that was available.

The Committee asked why, having been provided with reduced updated figures at the meeting on 6 June 2023 for the cost per attendance of sport and leisure (£6.29) and library facilities (£6.49), the figures had returned back to the previously reported £7.93 and £8.08 respectively. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Service acknowledged that 'behind the scenes' sport and leisure figures were improved on those reported, but that they could not be reported until the LGBF national data was available. The Director of Places Services echoed this and added that he would not speculate on figures (referring to libraries), but stated he believed they were positive. The Committee asked why the progress update had been left blank as opposed to including this information. The Chief Executive acknowledged that it would have been helpful for this to be included.

The report showed that the quartile percentage for the priority "Supporting a Thriving Economy and Green Transition", was trending down when related to the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. As performance was not significantly off target, the Committee asked if this suggested that the Council was simply maintaining standards while other Council's improved. The Director of Place Services was confident that the Council performance in this priority would continue to improve.

## **Decision**

### **The Committee noted:-**

- (1) the report and scrutinised the Council's 2023/24 Mid-Year PPR;**
- (2) the updated Performance Management Framework – Falkirk Performs, and**
- (3) the additional information for the selected LGBF performance results, where more timely data was available, which would be reflected in the Council's Public Performance Reporting going forward.**

The Committee adjourned at 11:10 for a comfort break and reconvened at 11:25.

## **S22. Local Government in Scotland: Overview 2023**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services which set out the key messages identified by The Accounts Commission Local Government in Scotland Overview Report 2023 and provide a local context to these messages.

In August 2020, the Accounts Commission agreed a strategic medium-term approach to reporting on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach committed to producing a series of annual overview reports over a three-year period. This report:

- Was the third and final overview report in the series.
- Builds on the previous reports in the series and examines:
  - How has the pandemic affected councils and their performance?
  - What are the current and future challenges facing local government?
  - How well placed are councils to deal with the current and future challenges?
- Draws on findings from the financial bulletin, considering them in the context of the wider overview.

The report was non-council specific but looked across the Local Government sector and reported key messages and recommendations which councils should be assessing themselves against.

The Change Manager provided an overview of the report and outlined the key messages and recommendations under the headings below: -

- Finances and resources;
- Community needs and inequalities;
- Collaboration;
- Leadership, and
- Workforce.

The Provost led the Committee in outlining the financial issues that were facing all Councils before asking whether the Chief Executive was satisfied that the Council could make the difficult choices described in the report to bridge the near £65m funding gap. The Chief Executive advised that, while many important decisions were delayed and remained to be taken, he could not be entirely satisfied. He explained that members had, in September, considered the Financial Strategy which set out the 3 permanent options (savings, increased Council Tax, increased fees and charges) available to the Council to bridge the financial gap. The Chief Executive acknowledged that service concessions remained an option to delay difficult decisions, but once these were used, the Council would find itself in a lesser position to invest and the difficult decisions would still need to be made. He concluded that robust leadership was required, by both members and officers, to ensure that these decisions were taken. The Committee probed as to whether the actions and plans already in place would cover the recommendations set out in the Overview. The Chief Executive explained that the strategic approach from the Council would deal with the issues raised within the report, however, he reiterated that it was decisions from members which would ultimately resolve these challenges.

The Committee turned attention to the proposed Council Tax freeze announced by the Scottish Government and asked whether this fitted within the spirit of the Verity House Agreement and how it would impact on the Council's budget. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services advised that the details of how the Council Tax would be implemented had not been shared with local authorities, but it was hoped this would be provided at time of the budget settlement and could be shared with members in the new year. The Committee suggested that the Council Tax freeze limit the flexibility of the Council. The Chief Executive added that, dependent on the details from the Scottish Government, there may be an option to disregard the freeze (forgoing compensation) but that this would remain a decision for Council. He concluded, and states this was an opinion shared by many partners across COSLA, that the Council Tax freeze was not in the spirit of the Verity House Agreement as (along with ringfencing) it reduced local authorities flexibility. The Committee asked for more information on the Council's position to the predicted ringfenced funding disparity between the Scottish Government (7%), COSLA (65%) and Audit Scotland (23%). The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services acknowledged that there was a disparity between the figures and suggested that Audit Scotland's figures of 23% were considered most accurate. She added that there was a push, by finance directors across local authorities, to see work progressing on the fiscal framework which would help to better understand the areas were ringfenced.

The Committee sought an update on timescales for a 'community wealth building event' and the implementation of the previously agreed Community Engagement Policy Development Panel (PDP). The Chief Executive advised that the plan had been for the community wealth building event to be across other Forth Valley councils, however, progress on this was slow and thus may need to be continued as a Falkirk Council event only. The Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services outlined that the Community Engagement PDP was the last of 3 groups to be set up, the 2 previous groups (Standing Orders Working Group and Sport and Leisure PDP) had begun, and, although a date had not been finalised, the Community Engagement PDP would begin shortly.

The Committee noted that the report highlighted the importance of focusing on community needs and equalities with a whole systems approach. It asked how issues around trauma could be embedded into this approach. The Chief Executive emphasised that the Council had been clear on the continuing importance of focusing on community needs and that a trauma informed approach played an important role. He added that a trauma officer had been appointed and that their role would help inform all areas of the council as to the work required moving forward.

To counteract the reduced workforce issue outlined in the report, the Committee asked whether there was a plan to encourage retiring workers to remain in employment longer. the Director of Transformation, Communities



and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services pointed towards the Council's flexible working patterns and flexible retirement plans. She added that it was important that the Council continued to look at how it best provides strong employee wellbeing and that it was hoped the employee experience survey would aid with this.

Following a question regarding ward-based budgeting, the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services and Interim Director of Children's Services advised that work was being undertaken to better understand how budgets were spent across different wards. She added that 3 pilot services had started to process this work, but that the aim was for this to be 'rolled out' further. The Committee asked what the pilot areas were. Ms Algie explained that Housing and Communities was leading on this work and the whole service would be included in the pilot. She added that she would gather the information on other 2 pilots areas and provide the Committee with an email update. The Committee asked whether this process would involve community engagement to take account of areas of deprivation, and Ms Algie confirmed that this would take place after budget allocations were better understood.

The Committee noted that, at paragraph 5.5 of the report, it was recommended that councils "work with the Scottish Government to rebuild an effective relationship" and asked if this suggested the relations were currently ineffective. The Chief Executive advised that this report had been finalised before the Verity House Agreement and that the Agreement was developed as a proposal to improve the relationship between government and local authorities. He added that, although issues would likely continue, the Verity House Agreement did provide the opportunity for an improved relationship.

## **Decision**

**The Committee noted:-**

- (1) the key messages set out in The Accounts Commission's Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023 Report; and**
- (2) that Falkirk Council already had a range of plans and actions in place which were working towards addressing the key messages identified in the report.**